

# Baseball and the Cold War

RONALD F. BRILEY

Sandia Preparatory School

Following the vicissitudes of the Second World War, Organized Baseball, along with the rest of the United States, hoped to bask in the sunshine of peace and prosperity. Instead, the American century was challenged by the emergence of a Cold War and the search for scapegoats exemplified in the term McCarthyism. Baseball which has often served as a mirror of American values sought to cope with the stress and strain imposed by the Cold War by finding a place within the emerging postwar liberal consensus. This consensus believed American society was fundamentally sound, and any domestic problems could be solved through economic growth; while the second cornerstone of the consensus insisted communism was a direct threat to American values and interests.

Anticommunist ideologues such as Senator John Bricker of Ohio sought to enlist baseball in the Cold War, insisting that the sport should indoctrinate the youth of America in traditional values. Baseball responded to the exhortations of Senator Bricker in rhetoric and deeds. Branch Rickey of the Dodgers assailed American education for not confronting “false isms,” while major league players and executives traveled the globe attacking communism and preaching the virtues of democracy. In Venezuela, Ambassador Walter Donnelly used baseball bats to assault alleged communist demonstrators in front of the American embassy.

The Korean War further tested baseball’s commitment to the ideological struggle. Baseball executives insisted the sport should continued to provide the morale function which had helped America through World Wars I and II. While some critics accused the sport of placing profits before patriotism, baseball executives voiced their belief that baseball symbolized the values for which young men were fighting in Korea, and players made the trek to the front as both participants in the conflict and morale boosters. Thus, baseball assured its place in the anticommunist cornerstone of the consensus.

While baseball coped with the challenge of the Korean War, many internal problems plagued the sport in the post war period. Attendance declined in the late 1940s and early 1950s, while the game was confronted with the “blacklisting” of players who had jumped to the Mexican League, legal challenges to the reserve clause, the decision by the owners to “dump” Commissioner Chandler, investigations into the organizational structure of the game by an antagonistic Congressman Emmanuel Celler, and the difficulties of racial integration. Organized Baseball sought to cope with these problems, and prove its patriotism, by selecting General Douglas MacArthur as Commissioner. However, the General was unavailable, and organization man Ford Frick was elected. To assure baseball a place within the liberal consensus, Frick and other spokesmen for the sport emphasized the spirit of amity and loyalty to the organization. The Players Association and owners would negotiate without union interference. Morals clauses would be added to player contracts, while loyalty to the reserve clause was expected of the players and, eventually, upheld by the Supreme Court. Expansion would answer critics of baseball’s monopoly structure. Thus, but 1954, attendance was rebounding, the worst excesses of McCarthyism were receding, and baseball had gained a solid position in the postwar consensus of anticommunism with domestic amity and prosperity.