

The New York Yankees and the World Series, 1936–1939

Philip A. Grant Jr.

Pace College

Between 1936 and 1939 the New York Yankees not only won four consecutive American League pennants, but also accomplished the spectacular feat of prevailing over their National League opponents in four successive World Series confrontations. During the first half of the twentieth century no other team in either league captured as many as four world championships in a row.

The Yankees in 1936 and 1937 defeated their National League rivals, the New York Giants, in six and five games respectively. In the following two years the Yankees vanquished the Chicago Cubs and Cincinnati Reds each in four straight games. Thus, over a span of four seasons the Yankees emerged victorious in sixteen of nineteen World Series contests.

In purely statistical terms the Yankees overwhelmed their National League challengers in every meaningful category. Altogether the Yankees outscored their various adversaries 108 to 57 and surpassed their opponents in base hits 179 to 142. The principal reason why the Yankee offense proved so awesome was explained by their 23 home runs and 55 extra base hits recorded between 1936 and 1939. By contrast the National League pennant winners produced only 7 home runs and 31 extra base hits.

In every respect the Yankee pitching staff was decidedly superior to the collective group of pitchers wearing National League uniforms. From 1936 to 1939 Yankee pitchers completed 11 games and allowed a mere 44 earned runs. During the same period National League pitchers completed 8 games and yielded 99 earned runs. The other relevant figures were as follows: Strikeouts—Yankee Pitchers 100; Opposing Pitchers 92; Walks—Yankee Pitchers 44; Opposing Pitchers 67.

It was noteworthy that six of the Yankees active during the period between 1936 and 1939 were later elected to the Baseball Hall of Fame. These individuals were Manager Joe McCarthy, Catcher Bill Dickey, First Baseman Lou Gehrig, Center Fielder Joe DiMaggio, and Pitchers Lefty Gomez and Red Ruffing. McCarthy, who guided the Yankees to eight pennants and seven world championships,

compiled a winning percentage of .621 during his sixteen years at the team's helm. Dickey, who in 1946 succeeded McCarthy as Yankee Manager, was probably the most outstanding catcher in the history of professional baseball. The legendary Gehrig, the American League's "Most Valuable Player" in 1936, inspired his Yankee teammates throughout the nineteen twenties and nineteen thirties. An authentic superstar by every conceivable standard, DiMaggio in 1939 was designated the American League's "Most Valuable Player" and eventually was a key participant in ten pennant winning campaigns. Gomez and Ruffing, who won a combined total of 462 games, provided the Yankees with two of the most talented pitchers on the major league baseball scene between the two world wars.

Augmenting the six Yankees to be included in the Hall of Fame were Shortstop Frank Crosetti, Third Baseman Red Rolfe, Right Fielder George Selkirk, and Pitcher Johnny Murphy. Crosetti, Rolfe, Selkirk, and Murphy each had the distinction of being chosen for the American League squad in two of the four All-Star Games between 1936 and 1939. Crosetti, known primarily for the high quality of his defensive skills, scored 486 runs and stole 59 bases from 1936 to 1939. Maintaining a .308 batting average, Rolfe also accounted for 155 doubles and 43 triples over the four year period. Selkirk bolstered the Yankees by hitting over .300 in three of the four world championship seasons and driving in more than one hundred runs in two of these seasons. Acknowledged as the foremost relief pitcher in the major leagues, Murphy between 1936 and 1939 had a 33-15 won lost record and was credited with saving forty-five games.