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Cleveland Indians, 1901-1946

Several writers of baseball history have been obsessed with records, and exploits of players who were "greatest" or "firsts" in major media markets. A study of the Cleveland Indians from 1901 to 1946 included the owners, general managers, managerial changes, media relationships, ethnic relationships, spectators and listeners. For many Clevelanders, the only standards that mattered were posted at the financial exchange or the ballpark. From the beginning of the American League in 1901 to the end of World War II, baseball was the preeminent national game. News of professional, semipro and amateur teams filled sports pages from spring to fall. Newspaper coverage and radio broadcasts blanketed the country. Beginning in 1947, television, the emergence of professional football and basketball, new marketing techniques, a move to the Municipal Stadium, the decline of racial discrimination, and the movement and expansion of franchises from the original eight team leagues created a "whole new ball game. "

Cleveland rose to prominence due to the railroads, oil, iron, steel, and automotive industries. It was also a destination for immigrants from Eastern Europe and rural areas in the Midwest. Through industrialization, immigration, financial depression and two world wars, the Indians were a regional symbol and a seasonal phenomenon in the development of an American sports culture. From 1901 to 1946, the baseball team was representative of the ritualized, seasonal game of professional baseball. The cycle of the "hot stove league," spring training, exhibition games, opening day, streaks and slumps, an All-Star break, a pennant race, a World Series and post-mortems was firmly established in the American League's first forty-six years. A parallel ritual accompanied the game on the field. The owners and the press generated favorable publicity from November to March to stimulate interest in the

coming season. When seven teams failed to pull away or folded, their fans tended to blame the manager or the players. Three periods provide a chronological framework. From the founding of the league in 1901 until 1916, Cleveland struggled to compete with established franchises in Philadelphia, Boston, Chicago and Detroit. From World War I to the economic "crash" of 1929, the Indians led the pack in pursuing the profitable and dominant New York team. In the era of the depression and World War II, they were locked in battles with Detroit for second place behind the Yankees. Despite their record as a consistent first division team, the Indians won their only pennant and world championship in 1920. They lost close races in 1908 and 1940 and were two years away from repeating the 1920 triumphs in 1946. Owners or investors, general managers, managers and players produced the competitive entertainment. Media publicity and revenue from spectators and advertisers paid the bills.