

“AN INFORMAL GAME”

William E. Benswanger, an insurance executive and patron of the arts, never wanted to be involved with the Pittsburgh baseball club, though he was an avid Pirate fan growing up. Pirate owner Barney Dreyfuss had trained his son Sammy to take over the ownership of the Pirates. But when Sammy died of pneumonia on February 19, 1931, at the age of thirty-six, a grief-stricken Dreyfuss turned to Benswanger, his son-in-law, for help. After Dreyfuss's death in 1932, his widow asked Benswanger to become president of the Pittsburgh Pirates. Despite his earlier reticence, Benswanger became a popular Pirate off-the-field leader and a repository for the history of baseball's earliest days.

The Dreyfuss family owned the Pirates for forty-six years, until, in 1946, it sold the club to a group of owners headed by Bing Crosby, Tom Johnson, Frank McKinney, and John Galbreath. Four months after the sale, Bill Benswanger talked about the early history of baseball in Pittsburgh with clarity and detail at a meeting of the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania. He is not correct, however, in one detail of how the Pirates got their team name. The Philadelphia Athletics of the American Association had not disbanded after the Brotherhood of Players revolted against the reserve clause and formed the Players League in 1890. They were still alive in 1891 when they fought Pittsburgh for the rights to Louis Bierbauer after the collapse of the Players League.

Professional Baseball in Pittsburgh

WILLIAM E. BENSWANGER

Baseball is an informal game and must be discussed in an informal manner—even in its history. The game originated in 1839 at Cooperstown, New York, and today a baseball shrine stands in that town. Following the Civil War, the leading clubs in Pittsburgh were the Enterprise, Olympic, and Xantha teams. They played at the old Union Park in what was then the city of Allegheny. For a time the city was represented in the International League but for the most part baseball was independent and amateur in those days. In addition to competing with other strong clubs of this region, such as the Nashannicks of New Castle, the Braddocks, the Sewickleys and others, they also met major league opposition from time to time in exhibition games.

The first genuine professional, or salaried, club here made its bow with the organization of the Alleghenys on February 22, 1876, as a member of

“Professional Baseball in Pittsburgh,” from *Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine* 30, nos. 1 and 2 (March–June 1947). Reprinted by permission of the Western Pennsylvania Historical Society.

the International Association; and the Alleghenys defeated the Xanthas 7 to 3 at Union Park on April 15, 1876. The following year, 1877, witnessed the debut of Jimmy Galvin with the Alleghenys. He was the most famous of Pittsburgh's early pitchers and his brilliant career embraced the International League, the American Association, the National League and the Players' League. A high spot of his first professional season, about which the fans of that era grew excited, was his famous eighth-inning home run on May 2, 1878, which defeated pitcher Tommy Bond and the Boston Nationals, 1 to 0.

In 1878 all the old players left and the Alleghenys were reorganized to join the International League, only to disband on June 8 after playing just twenty-six games. For three years thereafter there was little baseball activity in Pittsburgh, except for the East Liberty Stars at their big field on Collins Avenue; the East End Gyms; the colored Keystone club; and a County League team.

In 1882 Pittsburgh made its major league start, beginning a career in top-flight baseball that has continued uninterrupted through sixty-five consecutive seasons. That year the city became one of the charter members of the American Association then a major league. The league was organized here and the leading spirit was H. Denny McKnight, who was elected president of the league, in addition to being president of the Pittsburgh club. Al Pratt was the local manager in 1882 and for part of 1883, and when he resigned he was succeeded by Denny Mack, whose proper name was McGee. Later Mack was supplanted by Bob Ferguson, and on August 18, 1884, Ferguson gave way to Horace Phillips, who continued as manager until the city entered the National League.

In 1884 E. C. Converse, of the National Tube Company, succeeded McKnight as president of the club, which remained in the American Association for five years, from 1882 to 1886, inclusive, finishing fourth in 1882, seventh in 1883, tenth in 1884, third in 1885, and second in 1886. Prior to the season of 1885 the first big deal was consummated, when Pittsburgh purchased the star players of the Columbus club when that club withdrew from the American Association. The players brought here were pitcher Ed Morris, a mighty lefthander, who continued to reside here after his playing days, until the time of his death in 1937 at the age of seventy-eight; pitcher Frank Mountain; catchers Fred Carroll and Rudolph Kemmler; infielders Jocko Fields, Pop Smith, Billy Kuehne, and John Richmond; and outfielders Tom Brown and Fred Mann. (Incidentally, Morris helped the writer with Ralph Birkofer in training camp at San Bernardino, California, in 1935 and 1936.)

In addition, pitcher Jimmy Galvin came back from the Buffalo club.

Other acquisitions were Hank O'Day, then a pitcher and later a leading umpire, from Toledo; and Peter Meegan, also a pitcher, from the Reading and Richmond clubs.

Two of the pitchers of that year had won places in baseball's then mythical Hall of Fame by pitching no-hit major league games. Galvin was one of the few to do it twice. Pitching for Buffalo on August 20, 1880, he won from Worcester, 1 to 0, and on August 4, 1884, he shut Detroit out without a hit and won, 18 to 0, still the most lopsided no-hit game in big league history. Pitching for Columbus on May 29, 1884, Morris shut Pittsburgh out without a hit and won, 5 to 0. Galvin, like Morris, continued to live in Pittsburgh. He died here in 1899. The only old Pittsburgh players retained for 1885 were catcher Doggy Miller and outfielder Charley Ecen. O'Day remained only one season and joined Washington in 1886.

After five years in the American Association, Pittsburgh entered the National League in 1887, obtaining the franchise relinquished by Kansas City. The league was then ten years old. So the season of 1946 was Pittsburgh's sixtieth consecutive year in the National League. Horace Phillips remained in charge of the club as manager, with William A. Nimick as president. The earlier American Association club had removed to Recreation Park in 1884, and it was in that park that Pittsburgh's first National League game was played on April 30, 1887, the locals defeating Chicago, 6 to 2, with Galvin pitching against the great John Clarkson, who shared with King Kelly the distinction of being the first player sold for as much as \$10,000—an incredible figure in those days.

Nimick remained as president of the club until 1890. Phillips continued as manager until the 1889 season was under way, when he suffered a breakdown and was placed in a sanitarium, where he died a few years later. Edward Hanlon, then a Pittsburgh outfielder, later to win fame as manager of the three-time pennant winning Baltimore Orioles, Brooklyn Superbas and Cincinnati Reds, was appointed to succeed Phillips.

In 1890 the Brotherhood revolt led to the formation of the Players' League in a war against the National, with a club in Pittsburgh, playing at Exposition Park. The Pittsburgh Nationals were riddled by players jumping to the new league. Only two players remained loyal at the start, those being outfielder Billy Sunday, later a noted evangelist, and pitcher Bill Sowders, though catcher Miller and infielder Fred Dunlap changed their minds after jumping, and returned. Those who jumped were pitchers Galvin, Morris, Harry Staley, and Al Maul; catchers Carroll and Fields; infielders Jake Beckley, Kuehne, Deacon White, and Jack Rowe; and Hanlon.

It was a disastrous season for the riddled Nationals at Recreation Park, and J. Palmer O'Neil, who became president, was often hard pressed to

keep the club off the financial rocks. Players were changed so frequently that no fewer than fifty were used during the season. The club won only 23 games while losing 113, a record that stood until Cleveland lost 134 in 1899. On Labor Day, Pittsburgh lost three games—in one day. Guy Hecker, a former Louisville pitcher, was manager of the ill-fated Pittsburgh club that year.

Peace followed the disbandment of the Players' League after the 1890 season, and there was a return to stability in 1891. Hanlon, Maul, Galvin, Staley, Beckley and Carroll returned to the Nationals, the others going elsewhere. A notable addition from another source was Connie Mack, for forty-six years head of the Philadelphia Athletics, but then one of the smartest and trickiest catchers in baseball. He was obtained from Buffalo in the Players' League, to which club he had jumped from Washington. Hanlon was reappointed manager on his return, but was deposed in August, to be succeeded by William H. McGunnigle, who had previously managed Brooklyn.

It was in 1891 that the Pittsburgh club got the nickname that has become a trademark. It was agreed that all players who had jumped to the Players' League should return to their old clubs in the National or American Association. The Philadelphia Athletics, of the American Association, had disbanded in the meantime, but the American Association, as a league, claimed that club's players. Through an oversight, the names of infielder Louis Bierbauer and outfielder Harry Stovey were omitted from the list of players claimed, whereupon Pittsburgh took Bierbauer and Boston signed Stovey. When the Association protested, the matter was referred to a board of arbitration, which upheld the action of the Pittsburgh and Boston clubs as being within legal baseball rights, and ruled that Bierbauer and Stovey had been free agents. The Association refused to accept the ruling, declared war on the National League, and withdrew from the National Agreement. The signing of Bierbauer by Pittsburgh was denounced as "an act of piracy." That led to Pittsburgh's being called the Pirates, a name that has stuck to this day.

With W. C. Temple (famous Temple Cup donor), Al Buckenberger, W. H. Watkins and W. W. Kerr holding the office of president in turn, and with frequent managerial changes in a series of pilots that included Buckenberger, Tom Burns, Connie Mack, Watkins, and Patsy Donovan, the Pittsburgh club continued on its way in the National League with varying fortunes, but with little real success, barring a second-place finish in 1893, until the big uplift resulted from the coming of Barney Dreyfuss and his Louisville stars, to merge with the local club and give Pittsburgh winning baseball in 1900. After the season of 1899, the National League, which had

had twelve clubs, eliminated four and became an eight-club league. The same circuit as established in 1900 has existed to this day without change. Louisville was one of the clubs dropped and Mr. Dreyfuss merged his club with Pittsburgh, creating an unusually strong club, which won pennants in 1901, 1902, and 1903. Among the players who came from Louisville were Fred Clarke, Honus Wagner, Tommy Leach, Deacon Phillippe, Claude Ritchey, and Dummy Hoy. Among those already here were Sam Leever, Jack O'Connor, Fred Ely and Rube Waddell, whose home was at Butler.

Spring training became popular and with one or two exceptions Pittsburgh has trained in only three places—Hot Springs, Arkansas, Paso Robles, and San Bernardino, California. Many exciting experiences have seen their lot on these trips, such as the closing of the banks in 1933, with fifty people and three thousand miles from home; the California earthquake in 1933; the tornado in Mississippi in 1936; the floods in California and Nevada in 1938; and numerous mishaps with players through the years.

Such players as Whitey Alperman, Phil Lewis, Lew Moren, Hans Lobert, Frank Smith, and Steve Swetonic have been developed here, to say nothing of the greatest player of all, Honus Wagner, who hails from Carnegie.

Pittsburgh won league pennants, as stated above, in 1901, 1902, and 1903. In the latter year Mr. Dreyfuss challenged the Boston Americans to a post-season series and this became the World Series, now such a popular exhibition. League pennants were won again in 1909, the year in which Forbes Field was opened, 1925, and 1927; and world championships in 1909 and 1925. Sunday baseball made its debut in 1935; ladies' and children's days in 1932. When Forbes Field was built, it was the first of the modern steel and concrete structures and was a wonder to the public. The answer has been given as to whether it was wanted.

In only seven of the past forty-seven years, has Pittsburgh finished in the second division, so it is plain that high-class, winning baseball has been provided. When we review some of the names of the players who have been here, it is evident that Pittsburgh has had better baseball than almost any other city. At random let us mention Clarence Beaumont, Fred Clarke, Honus Wagner, Tommy Leach, Lefty Leifield, Jack Chesbro, Jess Tannehill, Max Carey, Carson Bigbee, Lloyd and Paul Waner, Chief Wilson, Rabbit Maranville, Glenn Wright, Joe Cronin, Dick Bartell, Walter Schmidt, George Gibson, Remy Kremer, Johnny Gooch, Pie Traynor, Hazen Cuyler, Kitty Bransfield, Al Lopez, Earl Smith, Lee Meadows, Burleigh Grimes, Al Mamaux, Vic Aldridge, Babe Herman, Fred Lindstrom, Vic Willis, Billy Southworth, Deacon Phillippe, and Sam Leever, with a host of others.

Barney Dreyfuss died on February 5, 1932, and was succeeded as president by the writer, Mrs. Dreyfuss being the controlling stockholder until

the recent sale of the club. Fred Clarke was manager from 1900 to 1915, inclusive, and was succeeded by Jimmy Callahan for 1916 and part of 1917, Honus Wagner and Hugo Bezdek finishing that year. Bezdek also managed in 1918 and 1919; then George Gibson in 1920, 1921 and part of 1922. Bill McKechnie took the helm in June 1922, and remained until after the season of 1926, when Donie Bush followed for 1927, 1928, and part of 1929. Jewel Ens followed Bush in 1929 and remained through 1931. Gibson returned for 1932, 1933 and part of 1934. In June 1934, Pie Traynor succeeded Gibson and stayed until after the season of 1939. Frank Frisch was manager from 1940 to 1946, inclusive.

During the war the club bent all effort toward building morale and played games at Indiantown Gap and Deshon Hospital, as well as at camps and posts throughout the East—Army, Navy, Coast Guard and Marines. Amateur baseball in this vicinity has been encouraged and the club has worked closely with city authorities and amateur organizations. As the club enters its sixty-first year in the National League, under new ownership, the previous owners extend well wishes and Godspeed.



A NATIONAL LEAGUE TEAM

Pittsburgh began its National League tradition on April 30, 1887, at Recreation Park on the city's North Side, when they defeated Cap Anson's defending champion Chicago White Stockings by a score of 6-2. The game was a historic event for Pittsburgh, made even more so because the opposing pitchers, John Clarkson for Chicago and James "Pud" Galvin for Pittsburgh, were great nineteenth-century stars and future members of the Baseball Hall of Fame. Despite the excitement of Pittsburgh's debut in the National League, the team finished with a losing record in 1887 and, with the exception of a second-place finish in 1893, would finish no higher than fifth place for the rest of the century, including its disastrous last-place finish in 1890 with a record of 23-113. The Pirate winning tradition in the National League would have to wait for the beginning of the twentieth century and the arrival of Barney Dreyfuss and Honus Wagner.

A Brilliant Victory

STAFF REPORTER

**ALLIES DEFEAT THE CHICAGOS WITH EASE
BIG CROWD OF SPECTATORS**