

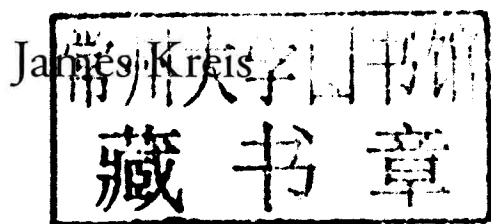
1954

a Baseball Season



**James
Kreis**

1954 -- a Baseball Season



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For Dad, who aggressively taught me the game of baseball — while subtly teaching me the game of life.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I owe a sincere debt of gratitude to the following for their invaluable contributions to this work:

The Sporting News { TSN }, often referred to as the Bible of Baseball, for the basic information and many other components comprising most of which this work is structured upon. This iconic publication was and continues to be the backbone upon which much relevant information for this wonderful game is preserved for our posterity, stretching back to the earlier 20th-Century.

[www. Baseball-reference.com](http://www.Baseball-reference.com) is a wonderful website for anyone who desires easy and complete access for many widely-varied, statistics accompanying the game of baseball both today and from the past. It features a play-by play of many games played by year and date as well as player records for virtually everyone who played the game at the major league level. I was able to effectively utilize this site to both double check data used from other sources and fill in the blanks in some instances where there may not have been absolute agreement on certain events.

"Day-by-Day in Baseball History" as noted, is the source of much of the information comprising the TWIBH portion of the individual chapters. There are far more entries in that treatise than could be accommodated in this book and is a terrific resource for the true fan of baseball history.

The Baseball Encyclopedia, 8th edition, also helped to ascertain and validate data on specific players and is also a most thorough, detailed and written publication highly recommended.

LEGEND

RHP -- righthanded pitcher

LHP -- lefthanded pitcher

PH -- pinch hitter

PR -- pinch runner

BA -- batting average

AB -- at bat

RBI -- runs batted in

ERA -- earned run average

K -- strike out

BOB -- base-on-balls, a walk

Free Pass -- a walk

Sac Fly--sacrifice fly; batter not charged with an official time at bat

{ 2 hits} -- player totaled two hits in the game

{ 3 runs} -- player scored three runs in the game

{ 4 RBI's} --- player batted in 4 runs in the game

{ 2 hits, runs and RBI's} -- player had 2 hits, 2 runs and 2 runs batted in for the game

Circuit Clout, Fourmaster, Four-Bagger, Boundary Belt, Blast, Shot -- a home run

Batted around-- all positions in batting order appeared at the plate in a single inning

Frame, Round, Chukker, Stanza -- inning

Knock, Safety -- a base hit

ML -- Major League

NL -- National League

AL -- American League

Horsehide -- a baseball

Keystone Sack -- second base

Hot corner -- third base

Texas Leaguer -- a lofted flyball, falling safely between outfielders and infielders; usually resulting in a double

Cipher, Whitewash, Calcimine -- a shutout

TWIBH -- this week in baseball history

Southpaw, Portsider -- lefthanded pitcher

TB -- Total Bases

TSN-- The Sporting News

RISP -- runners in scoring position

OPS -- batting average plus slugging average

INTRODUCTION

“ Hitting a ball and scoring a run are in a way what all of us try to do all our lives. Baseball becomes a symbol, win or lose, and the romance never really ends”.

Branch Rickey

The 1954 Major League baseball season is the scope of this book, a year in an era often called The Golden Age of Baseball by many observers. Whether one agrees with that assessment or not, the game as played then was much different than that which the current fan base enjoys today -- both on and off the field of play. Many of those major differences will be chronicled later in this narrative, some resulting due to changes in society itself.

As is the reality of any calendar year one can name, it was a year of many other happenings and serious life events, both nationally and internationally. To wit:

In June 1953, the United States completed a peace agreement with North Korea after a war lasting three years. The country was then going about the business of reacclimating to a non-wartime period under Republican President and former 5-Star General, Dwight D. Eisenhower. “Ike” was in his first political office of any kind and in his second year as chief executive after a 20-year Democratic hold on the nation’s highest office. Great Britain, the US’s staunchest ally, was once again being led by Prime Minister Winston Churchill, the man who had successfully steered his country through the tumultuous Second World War.

Wisconsin Senator Joe McCarthy was still very much in the news with repeated innuendoes and downright lies in his relentless, bombastic “witch hunt” for suspected communist infiltration in US government, universities, the entertainment industry and such. He would accuse the U. S. Army of espionage in 1954, resulting in a series of televised, daytime hearings lasting approximately 60 days.

His Senate colleagues would formally censure him later in the year, effectively ending his career. He would suffer the consequences all demagogues ultimately do -- isolation, public disgrace, a quick fade into obscurity and lonely death. Few would lament his passing.

It was the year a new musical phenomenon was on the cusp – called Rock and Roll -- that would soon become a national rage. A band originally from Chester, Pennsylvania, recorded a song titled “Rock Around the Clock” that would vault to fame as the theme song for a movie released in 1955, named Blackboard Jungle. Thus, a spit-curlled Bill Haley and his Comets began the popular movement in mainstream

America, considerable fanfare created by an enterprising disc jockey named Alan Freed, he also zealously promoting other performers of this unique, new sound.

The mantle would soon be assumed by a young truck driver from Mississippi named Elvis Presley, he alternately exciting teenagers and angering their parents with his swivel-hipped, renditions of this new music craze. That craze turned out to be much more than a passing fad as this music exploded, flourishing like no other before it and spawning a wide range of diversity and sounds well into the 21st century. Rock and Roll was here to stay.

Prior to Haley's emergence, some of the 1954 chart-topping, #1 single records were Doris Day's "Secret Love", "Sh-Boom" by the Crew Cuts, Eddie Fisher's "I Need You Now", "Make Love to Me" by Jo Stafford, "Mr. Sandman" by the Chordettes and Rosemary Clooney's "Hey There". Others played often on jukeboxes were "Hearts of Stone" by the Fontaine Sisters, the Four Aces' "Three Coins in the Fountain", The Naughty Lady of Shady Lane by the Ames Brothers and the Maguire Sisters' "Sincerely". Presley would record his first record at Sun Records -- "That's All Right, Mama" -- with many more #1 hits to follow.

Television was gradually replacing the movies as the nation's main entertainment alternative as westerns, comedy shows and sitcoms came to dominate the video programming, the ABC, NBC and CBS networks recognizing they were in stiff competition for the viewing affections of the American family.

Many former movie comedians, such as Groucho Marx, Burns & Allen, Milton Berle, Red Skelton and Abbott & Costello, turned to this new media as their screen successes waned. Shows named I Love Lucy, Dragnet, Your Show of Shows, Father Knows Best, The Perry Como Show were the must-see, weekly fare. A late-night experiment named The Tonight Show, with host Steve Allen, had just begun; Johnny Carson would not take over this institution until the 60's.

A few of the more popular movies of the year were On the Waterfront, The Caine Mutiny, The Glenn Miller Story and White Christmas. Also, two Alfred Hitchcock thrillers -- Rear Window and Dial M for Murder -- both featuring a young actress, Grace Kelly. She would achieve movie success, then leave Hollywood to marry the monarch of a small European country later in the decade, forever to be known as Princess Grace of Monaco for the remainder of her all-too-brief life. She was one of her era's most beautiful women and recognizable faces.

Other newsworthy events included the marriage of actress Marilyn Monroe to baseball icon Joe DiMaggio; Britain's Roger Bannister running a sub-four minute mile for the first time in track history; the debut of the magazine Sports Illustrated { sans a swimsuit edition }; Hugh Hefner also published Playboy Magazine for the first time, thus ushering in a host of new censorship issues.

Automotive manufacturers Nash and Hudson merged to form the American

Motor Company and the Dow-Jones Industrial average reached an all-time high of 382.74. The Supreme Court of the US ruled against racial segregation in public schools in the Brown vs. the Topeka Board of Education case. The world population consisted of 2.7 billion people, compared to roughly 6 billion in the year 2000.

The average new home cost \$10,250, gas was \$. 22 a gallon, a movie ticket cost \$.70 and an average new car set one back \$1,750. One could buy cigarettes from vending machines charging a quarter per pack, the cellophane on the pack containing two or three pennies in change -- all cigarettes non-filtered.

Most candy bars -- Milky Way, Powerhouse, Fifth Avenue, Baby Ruth to name some -- were a nickel. 12 ounces of Coca Cola or Pepsi in a glass bottle also cost a nickel, 16 ounces a mere 7 cents. One could also return the bottle and get 2 or 3 cents back, invariably used to purchase another bottle of the same thing.

The supermarkets as we know them now were virtually unknown. Most families shopped at the local grocery store -- usually a store-front with limited aisles of goods -- many with their own butcher shop inside. Often, the proprietor was a neighbor, either living above the store or close by, and on a first name basis with all regular customers.

Common 21st-century American society now include staples such as big screen HD TV's, cable television, radial tires, Viagra, multiplex movie venues, cell phones, Ipod's, digital cameras, electric/gas clothes dryers, microwave ovens, VCR/DVD video-recorders, fast-food restaurants, jet airliners, thong underwear, 7-Eleven's, the Internet information highway, E-bay, Walmart/Target all-in-one stores, play-station games, disposable diapers as well as many other utilitarian discoveries too numerous to mention..

Contrast these with 1954 America -- AM radio, whitewall tires, roof antennas, clotheslines, downtown movie theaters, reel-to-reel tape recorders, libraries, drive-in movies, Woolworths, drug stores with soda fountains, telephone party-lines, Burma Shave road signs, penny candy, banana splits, saddle shoes, flyswatters, rainy day snails and worms, lightning bugs, double blade razors, unlocked doors, 17/19 inch console B&W TV's, people dressing up for church, stick-model airplane kits, hopscotch, Sears & Roebuck catalogs, flattops and butch wax, Tinker Toys and Lincoln Logs, kids playing outdoors, formica tabletops, walking to school, milkmen, initials on a tree, to denote just some of the normal activities, environment and consumer choices prevalent at that time.

Internationally, a relatively unknown sector of Southeast Asia, then known as French Indochina, would successfully overthrow the local, imperial French government -- the final battle at an outpost named Dien Bien Phu. The newly independent colony would split into communist North Vietnam and non-communist South Vietnam.

The liberators were led by Ho Chi Minh, who along with a younger generation of followers, would ultimately lead his country to another war lasting through the next 20 years. That conflict would result in one of the United States' most divisive periods and to the political demise of U.S. President Lyndon Johnson. Johnson, at the time of the French defeat, served as Majority Leader in the U. S. Senate.

Both the United States and its main protagonist, the Soviet Union, were posturing the capabilities and future potential of their developing atomic weapons -- most unsettling to the rest of the world countries who had none. It was also much about the viability of these two world power's economic and political systems, i.e., Capitalism versus Communism.

That often contentious verbal battle and its' catastrophic implications, would rage on for another 40 years until the US finally outspent the USSR into virtual bankruptcy, translating into the eventual downfall of Communism in that nation. Or, another possible reason, the Communists finally realized their philosophy wasn't working.

Those 40 years, however, subconsciously dominated many aspects of life for each nation's citizens as they lived with the terrible, potential consequences of all-out atomic/nuclear war.

This book is being written in the 21st century -- well over 50 years in retrospect -- by one who has been a lifelong baseball fan, now pretty much to the exclusion of every other sporting game. While not the scope of this book but to set the record straight, I no longer watch or follow either pro basketball or football. I was never much into hockey.

That is not to say my affinity for baseball comes down to the lesser of evils, nothing is further from the truth; I have simply become disenchanted with the others and now prefer to concentrate my rooting interests to baseball. I have also discovered later in life, there are many other interesting things demanding my time and energies.

Baseball was the game I was introduced to at any early age and grew up with, my father a staunch fan. Then as now, adults could not intelligently discuss such worldly matters as sex, money, politics, life or death with young children, but baseball was another matter -- a common denominator.

It was the bridge permitting male children to interact daily and on an equal level with their larger, male role figures in a mutually-shared, rooting environment for their boyhood heroes. And make no mistake about it, they were our main heroes. Other sports have never have had that shared, unique connection and in my opinion, never will.

The annual timing of this enduring game is no accident; beginning each spring with renewed hope for every team's fans -- as it does for all peoples, fan and non-fan, who look forward to the new, welcomed warmer season with renewed vigor and hope. It is the start of the green days of Spring and Summer, signaling the end of gloomy weather, dying vegetation and being cooped up indoors.

We can all relate as our environment changes from the dormant to the renewed -- reinvigorating our very existence. No other sporting venue has this seasonal advantage and/or optimism inherent in its' timing as does baseball.

Competitively, there is also something positive to be said about the game of baseball having no time limit, i.e., an equal opportunity for both participants having the very same chance at coming out on top. Each team always has the potential to exhaust the identical number of failures { outs} before the contest is finally decided. There is no disadvantage in losing a coin toss, going against the wind or any other rule having the intent of shortening the contest, fairness be damned.

All other major sports are "clock" controlled; participants have correspondingly found ways over the years to use that determinant to their advantage by employing strategies accordingly. Not with baseball -- and commendably so.

A few brief opinions on other professional sports.....

The NBA game has deteriorated over the years from a contest stressing ball movement and teamwork to one of promoting individual skills, to the exclusion of fundamentals and strategic discipline. Who can "sky" the highest and/or make the fans gasp the loudest, seems to be the ultimate goal these days, a/k/a the Wow Factor. It' has become Shamu in Shorts, albeit very long shorts.

It also is now a time when the term "athletic" is continually used to disguise and even rationalize a given players inability to perform basic fundamentals, the age of highlight videos showing players in various degrees of jumping and twisting dexterity. Not my thing.

I have long since tired of the NFL game, every encounter seemingly decided by field goal kickers -- actually soccer players in a football uniform -- rather than those with true football skills who have beaten on and battered each other in the trenches for almost 60 minutes.

This game is now very formulaic, virtually every team using the same offensive and defensive formations, the "cookie-cutter" effect. The net result is far too often dull and unimaginative, notwithstanding the outstanding skills of the men who play the game. For my taste, the College version is far more wide-open, imaginative and exciting. The female fans are also better looking.

Fundamentally, in order to score, all other sports require the opponent achieve a specific objective, such as cross the plate successfully, put the puck in the net or the ball in the basket. There is no reward for close in those endeavors, no reward for failure to do so, as there is in football.

I will never understand why football does not require the opponent to cross the goal line to score, just get close enough. And close enough is too often defined by how good your soccer guy is, thus taking the result out of the hands of the real participants.

To those who feel pro football has taken over from baseball as America's favorite sport, ok; the numbers taken just factually may well support that proposition. However, any reasonable discussion on that proposition should entail a subjective question.

That is, if it were possible to physically play football every day as it is with the other sports, would the game enjoy the same degree of popularity and success? We'll never know the factual answer but that, at least, is a starting point for a vigorous argument for those who feel otherwise, including me.

I believe football's infrequency of games adds most significantly to its' popularity and ultimate revenue stream, the latter which we now know unequivocally is the real motivation for every professional contest. Also, the game's popularity ascended during the continued advent of TV's success during the 1960's. Many would agree this sport is much better attuned to TV than any other.

But I digress; the NFL has been supremely successful, with full stadia every Sunday, pre and game day media coverage bordering on frenzy and augmented with the numerous weekly, radio and TV programs dedicated to dissecting and detailing every conceivable moment in each contest. My admiration to anyone who has the time, stamina and motivation to take all that in. Even the current Governor of Pennsylvania can find the time to be an in-house analyst for the Philadelphia Eagles post-game shows.

My purpose is not to disparage the fans and followers who have come to relish and look forward to the weekly NFL exploits; ditto to those who follow the NBA. These are my opinions only and hopefully, will not dissuade the reader to stop at this point.

Notwithstanding the content of the prior paragraphs, since the 1950's, we have also seen society change dramatically, becoming a nation transformed and sustained by volumes of information as opposed to the industrial pursuits of our past histories. Sadly, we no longer produce much of what we or the world consumes, most of those goods now emanating from foreign jurisdictions.

The technological revolution helped make all this possible -- a limitless amount of data available on any topic for even the most rudimentary seekers. It is now the age of the Internet, e-mail, cell/camera phones, message machines, etc. A consumer can now purchase pretty much whatever they want without leaving home.

Sports have followed the same path, real-time sports information being easily available -- as much as you want -- with the constant use of these ever-changing tools to the point newspapers are an endangered species now. Today's edition of the newspaper now contains "old" news, that which has been hashed and re-hashed numerous times by many other, more visual avenues by the time the paper lands in your driveway.

Television cable channels now have 24-hour programming for the NFL, NHL, NBA and ML baseball, the theme dominated by statistical information as media people strive to convey to fans every conceivable facet of a player's past and current performance. How that player has fared against a given opponent's pitcher, batting average on the road versus at home, day versus night games, are just a few examples of how these statistics are now sliced and diced.

Baseball has always lent itself to statistics, perhaps more so than other sporting disciplines. Batting averages, hit and runs allowed, etc. have always been a large determinant in a given player's value. However, I believe a consistent fan will also develop a certain "gut feeling" {either positive or negative} based on time and observation in determining a player's true abilities. I am not in tune with those who wish to take the subjectivity out of the game and somehow, reduce everything we see, hear and feel in watching this wonderful endeavor to mere numbers.

The reader may recall the 1980's movie, *Dead Poets' Society*, in which a poetry textbook instructs the student to graphically measure a given poem's value by plotting certain poem components on a linear scale, thus removing any feeling or thought in the process of evaluating what are works of emotion by their very nature. That process was appropriately dubbed as "excrement" in the film.

The data revolution has also spawned baseball historians whose thesis is to compare and rank players from different eras against each other. Excrement!! All due respect to Bill James and his disciples, their efforts have been interesting, thought-provoking and, of course, provide a reasoned source of debate in barrooms, TV studios, etc.

In my opinion, ballplayers can reasonably be compared only to their peers -- how did they do compared to others during their era -- the one fair way to evaluate their performance. I don't know if Hank Aaron was a more effective/better player than Babe Ruth -- nor does anyone else!! I saw Aaron play, but not Ruth. I also saw Barry Bonds play, the game much different than in either Aaron or Ruth's time.

Abraham Lincoln, Andrew Jackson, etc., cannot be compared to Richard Nixon or any other of today's Presidents; circumstances simply are not the same, period. Too many variables exist, and try as we might, they cannot be reduced to a common denominator. Was there a Middle East crisis in 1863, a Civil War in 1967? The fair test for Presidents can only be a retrospective, subjective analysis of their accomplishments given the factors in play during their time and cannot be an exact science, as some would like it to be.

Everything really is relative.

In the 21st-Century, virtually every professional player has an agent, whose duty it is to negotiate salary and perks on behalf of their client with the club owners and who also contrives to use publicity to put the player in the best possible light. In the latter sense, professional athletes, entertainers, personalities, politicians and the like now share a common ground.

With a preponderance of media outlets and reporters, athletic performers are far more in the spotlight than ever before. It seems every breathing movement is both reported and analyzed to depths unknown before, each observer looking for that morsel of information no one else has. Certainly, players in earlier eras would have been unable to enjoy the relative obscurity of their personal lives had there been a similar feeding frenzy as exists today.

Teams now have a limited time frame in which to control a given player -- usually no more than 6 years at the Major League level. The first 3 years on the ML roster entitles the player to no more financial reward than the minimum ML salary. Should the player not willingly sign a contract during years 4-6, a player may file for salary arbitration individually in each of these 3 years.

In that process, both entities submit a salary figure to an arbitrator. That person selects one of the numbers, that becoming the players remuneration for the year -- no compromise is permitted. In reality, most players and clubs agree to a mid-level figure before the arbitration hearing.

After that 6 year period, a player can become a free agent, now having the ability to negotiate with any club and earning a contract for whatever money and length as the new employer will accept. Any other player with 10 years of ML service and/or 5 years with a given team and no longer under contract, can opt for the same circumstance.

Almost all games of a given team are on TV today, if not on their own local network, then on a national venue. Entities such as ESPN and the MLB Network, insure a fan can watch their favorites almost any time they like. If you're a little more

fanatic and/or well-heeled, one can subscribe to a service providing every game, every day.

Some clubs, the Yankees to name one, have exorbitant, local media contracts that guarantee huge sums of monies for the rights to broadcast their games. These arrangements, combined with revenues from the national television contracts, enable certain clubs to attract the more eminent players, the better to compete and profit from.

To help keep some of the less successful teams around, ML baseball now requires those with the highest player salary totals to subsidize their more needy brethren based on something called a payroll tax. Also, all teams now share equally in revenue for souvenirs, jerseys, caps, etc bearing an ML team emblem – regardless of how lopsided sales actually are for a given team's gear compared to another's. In 2009, the revenue-sharing monies were over \$400,000,000.

On the field, ballparks had been transformed in the 1960's from urban neighborhoods to multi-function, cylindrical, bigger capacity stadiums outside of the downtown areas, having now changed back to their original, smaller capacity, baseball-only environs. These newer "old" parks now include luxury boxes and seating, permitting the owners to charge more, despite the fact much of the construction costs were borne by the taxpayers of their respective cities. The field dimensions are mostly irregular again as they had been in the old days, the currently obsolete, multi-purpose fields virtually congruent with one another.

The use of grass surfaces for the playing area is now back in vogue, after having lost out to artificial turf for about 3 decades, those "carpeted" surfaces creating a much faster game, the art of base-stealing having also undergone a renaissance. A few of the newer, current parks have roofing that can be closed or open depending on weather and if closed, the temperature controlled by thermostat.

A major rule change involves the use of a Designated Hitter in the American League to replace the pitcher in the batting line up – the National League continues to have the pitcher bat. Typically, a DH is a player who can still hit effectively, but neither had had or now has little skill in the field, prolonging their careers.

More recently, teams now play a limited schedule of regular season games against teams of the other league, the identity of their opponents often determined by geographic proximity; for example, Cleveland versus Cincinnati or San Francisco and Oakland. While that practice perhaps dilutes the mystique of the World Series finale to the season, few would argue that it hasn't had a positive impact on the game.

Schedules now contemplate 162 games a year, with 6 separate divisions including three each in both the American and National Leagues. The playoffs involve each of the 3 division winners plus the remaining team with the best winning record in

both the AL and NL, playing 2 qualifying rounds, the winner of each league then meeting in the World Series. TV often dictates both the times and days each of these contests are played. The WS winner is usually not crowned until late October, well into the football season.

Players now are almost encouraged to associate on the field prior to the game. In 1954 and for a number of years later, umpires were placed in the seating sections before a game to watch that opposition players did not communicate before games. Those caught were either admonished severely or fined. It had to do with the integrity of the game, to facilitate the image these games are being waged between entities who do not like each other.

Strategically, the bullpen had been a haven for the lesser lights on a pitching staff, not true any longer. Bullpen pitchers now have a specific role, i.e., long-relief, set-up men { reserved for the 7th or 8th innings} and/or closers. Closers typically work just the 9th inning, their role to protect a slight lead by getting the last 3 outs of the game, good ones rewarded quite handsomely financially.

Some of the lesser changes include multi-colored and interchangeable uniforms, the same umpires work both leagues and baseballs are routinely thrown to the fans after the third out of an inning or when a foul ball ends up somewhere other than the seating area. TV instant-replay is now used to discern if a potential home run is either fair or foul. Many managers now have weekly TV shows and players are routinely interviewed just after the completion of a contest. Virtually all travel is by air, many players now utilizing that time to do other things than discuss baseball with their teammates.

Without question, today's athletes in all sports are bigger, stronger and faster than their peers of yesterday – and those are measurable quantities. However, I feel the respective games were better back in my youth and early adult years.

Is that thought due to all this available data, too much for the average fan to assimilate { paralysis by analysis}, overexposure, free agency, players too well-paid, long term contracts -- promoting less motivation and accountability? -- player indifference to fans, less player focus on the game itself or a combination of all of them?. Whatever the reason{s}, I don't sense the intensity of the play is as strong, focused or as life and death-like as it seemed to be in more simple times, like 1954.

When one watches a TV game now, the camera angle is always behind the pitcher's mound, giving the viewer a first-rate glimpse of where the pitched ball crosses the plate. It is rare to see many pitches severely off the inside part of the plate, even though many batters now crowd the plate -- perhaps that's the reason why. There are few hurlers today who will intentionally "brush back" a hitter as was so very common in the earlier decades.