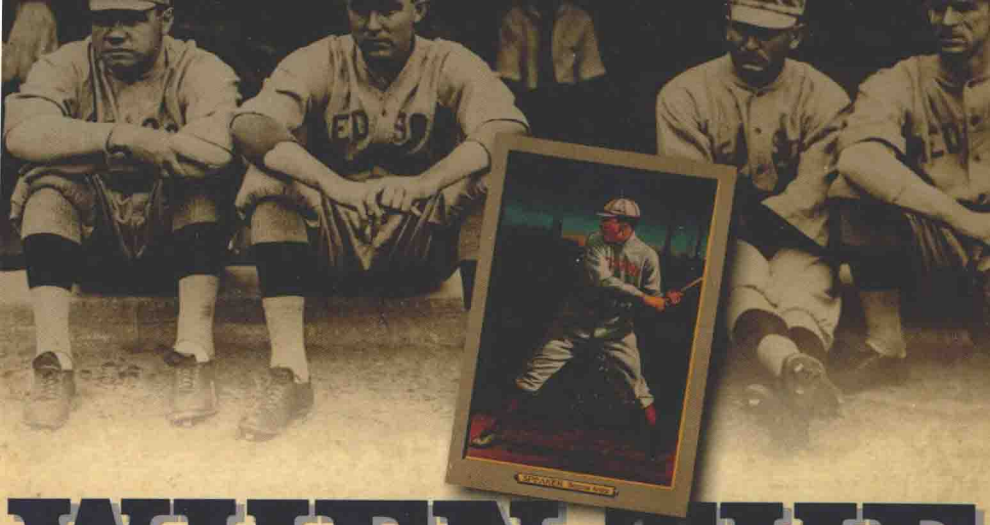

WHEN THE RED SOX RULED

BASEBALL'S FIRST DYNASTY 1912–1918

THOMAS J. WHALEN

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Baseball's First Dynasty, 1912–1918

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When the Red Sox Ruled

In loving memory of MaryAnne Whalen Spinale, 1928–2008

PREFACE

The sports equivalent to hell freezing over occurred on the night of October 26, 2004. The Boston Red Sox, long the bridesmaid of professional baseball, managed to put aside eighty-six years of heartbreaking loss and humiliation by completing a four-game sweep of the St. Louis Cardinals in the World Series, thereupon becoming champions for the first time since Woodrow Wilson occupied the Oval Office. In the delirious champagne-soaked Boston clubhouse afterward, twenty-one-game winner Curt Schilling proclaimed that the club was "the greatest Red Sox team in history."

Given the dramatic nature of his team's victory, Schilling's exuberance is understandable, if somewhat misplaced. The 2004 Red Sox were a good team, a very good team, but hardly in the same class as their Fenway forebears of 1912–1918. For this earlier Beantown edition bestrode the narrow world of major league baseball like a colossus, capturing four World Series titles in seven seasons.

Blessed with Hall of Fame performers like Babe Ruth, Tris Speaker, and Harry Hooper, and near greats like Smokey Joe Wood, Duffy Lewis, Larry Gardner, Jack Barry, and Carl Mays, the Sox were easily the most dominant club of the Deadball Era, a period that ran roughly from 1900 to 1919 and was so named due to the

softer composition of the ball used in competition. "Hitters couldn't drive the ball very far, and one run was often the difference between victory and defeat," noted the historian John M. Rosenburg. But this sobering reality did not seem to deter the Sox.

Outside of the lordly New York Yankees of 1936–1943, 1947–1953, 1956–1962, and 1996–2000, who won four or more championships apiece within a similar time frame, no other ball club in the twentieth century or beyond has surpassed Boston's run of sustained excellence.

"We won the American League pennant in 1912, '15, '16, and '18, and in between we finished second twice," said outfielder Harry Hooper, a major contributor to the team's success. "They never did beat us in the World Series. Never. We played four different National League teams in four different World Series and only one of them even came close. . . . The best team in baseball for close to a decade!"

How the Red Sox were able to accomplish this unique feat is the subject of this book. Like all tales of heroic accomplishment, however, it is best to start at the very beginning.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In finishing this book, I am sadly reminded of two family members who will not get the opportunity to enjoy it: my late mother, MaryAnne Whalen Spinale, and my late uncle, James J. Fitzgerald.

My mom was my biggest booster and without a doubt exercised the greatest positive influence on my life. Her uproarious sense of humor and zest for living still bring warm memories. I can't thank her enough for all the unqualified love and support she provided. I'm sure she is up there in Paradise along with my late father, Herman T. Whalen, and late stepfather, Joseph D. Spinale, having a grand ole time singing among the celestial choir.

Uncle Jimmy was a member of "the Greatest Generation" who served his country faithfully and well during the Second World War. A quiet and dignified man, he moved through life with an effortless grace. He will be greatly missed.

As always, Dan Hammond and Christopher Callely bucked up my spirits when I needed it the most. They are the embodiment of what true friendship is all about. Ditto for Don Clemenzi and Steve Blumenkrantz, who provided welcomed encouragement and strength. Former Harvard Crimson star outfielder Elizabeth Crowley came through in the clutch, offering insightful comments and

invaluable advice on improving the manuscript. She has my deepest respect and admiration.

Brian Walsh did a superb job as my research assistant. I wish him well in his new academic career. Thanks also to Fred Hammond, my old high school coach and history mentor who continues to inspire.

A special debt of gratitude is owed to the staffs of the Baseball Hall of Fame, the Holy Cross Archives, and the Boston Public Library. Their assistance and professionalism are greatly valued. Fellow Bates grad and baseball fanatic Chris Fahy earns a special mention for his unflagging enthusiasm for the project. Jon Sisk, Darcy Evans, and Ivan R. Dee did a marvelous job of getting the book ready for publication. They are true pros.

Others to single out for strong praise are Mary Alston-Hammond, Scott Ferrara, Wayne Ferrari, Joseph and Kristin King, Bob Connors, Pat and Hillori Connors, Laureen Fitzgerald, Gayle Clemenzi, Jodi Blumenkrantz, Tom Testa, Joseph and Theresa Dever, Linda Wells, Jay Corrin, Jim Dutton, Barbara Storella, Ben Varat, Jean Dunlavy, Edward Rafferty, June Grasso, Maureen Foley-Reese, Michael Kort, Shelly Hawks, Mary Ducharme, Tracey Nickerson, Matt Dursin, Matt Hallgren, Naomi Lomba-Gomes, John Mackey, Bill Tilchin, and Robert Wexelblatt.

Finally, I would be remiss if I didn't mention Teddy, my feisty and mischievous Siamese cat who left this world all too soon. She never failed to put a smile on my face and I will never forget her.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE

THE CRADLE OF BASEBALL (1871–1911)

On a December day in 1912, an otherwise staid gathering of uppercrust concert-goers at Boston's famed Symphony Hall were aroused from their torpor by the sight of Isabella Stewart Gardner entering the building. The elderly yet flamboyant Gardner, widely acknowledged as the city's first "Patroness of the Arts," was sporting a white headband emblazoned with the legend "Oh you Red Sox" in red letters. According to one local wag, "It looked as if the woman had gone crazy . . . almost causing a panic among those in the audience who discovered the ornamentation, and even for a moment upsetting [the orchestra] so that their startled eyes wandered from their music stands."

The august assemblage need not have registered such shock and consternation. Since its shadowy origins in the early days of the nineteenth century, the game of baseball had always held a unique appeal to Bostonians, even those with the advanced social pedigree of Gardner. Pitching great Albert Goodwill Spalding later put it best when he said "[j]ust as Boston was the cradle of liberty for the Nation, so also was it the cradle in which the infant game was helped to a healthy maturity." Indeed, it was in Boston that the first full-fledged dynasty in baseball history was born: the Red Stockings of 1871–1875.

The ball club itself was a carryover from the old Cincinnati Red Stockings, baseball's first professional team. Under the leadership of legendary player-manager Harry Wright, "the father of professional ball playing," the team strung together eighty-seven consecutive victories between 1869 and 1870.

As the story goes, wealthy Boston businessman Ivers Whitney Adams had become enamored of Wright's nine after they trounced several top local teams during a visit to the Hub in 1870. Looking to bring the same kind of unalloyed success to his hometown, Adams was able to financially induce Wright and a number of his teammates to relocate to Boston when Cincinnati disbanded at the end of the season. Adams even managed to commandeer the name "Red Stockings" for his new enterprise.

Playing in the National Association of Professional Base Ball Players (NAPBBP), a loose confederation of ten professional clubs that was founded in New York City in 1871, the Red Stockings dominated all competition. They finished a close second their first season, but breezed to the next four NAPBBP pennants.

Largely responsible for Boston's triumphal showing was ace hurler Albert Goodwill Spalding, an Illinois farmer's son who recorded a phenomenal 186–43 mark during the championship run. "In judgment, command of the ball, pluck, endurance, and nerve, in his position he has no superior," apprised early baseball chronicler Henry Chadwick. "His forte in delivery is the success with which he disguises a change of pace from swift to medium, a great essential in successful pitching."

Boston's perch atop the standings would come to an abrupt end after the 1875 season when Spalding and teammates Ross Barnes, Cal McVey, and Jim White bolted to the Chicago White Stockings. All Barnes had done was hit over .400 in 1872 and 1873, while McVey and White had proven their worth as steady run producers.

Aside from the lure of a higher salary, Spalding claimed he made the switch because Chicago owner William H. Hulbert had appealed to his sense of regional pride. "Spalding," Hulbert reportedly

told him, "you've no business playing in Boston; you're a Western boy, and you belong right here."

In reality, the Machiavellian Hulbert had something far craftier up his sleeve. Convinced that his provocative action would invite condemnation from the NAPBBP, Hulbert resolved, in the words of the historian Geoffrey C. Ward, "to render them irrelevant by establishing a new league, with himself at the helm." And this is exactly what happened.

In a stunning coup d'etat, Hulbert was able to convince the presidents of four other NAPBBP clubs to join him at the Grand Central Hotel in downtown Manhattan to launch the National League (NL) on February 2, 1876. "There have been other forceful men at the head of our national organizations, men of high purpose, good judgment and fine executive ability," Spalding recalled admiringly. "But in all the history of Base Ball no man has yet appeared who possessed in combination more of the essential attributes of a great leader and organizer of men than did William A. Hulbert."

As a result, the NAPBBP ceased to exist. Finding the prospect of being on the outside looking in competitively disadvantageous, if not financially ruinous, Boston shrewdly opted to become a charter member of Hulbert's new league. However, with the exit of Spalding and his fellow "Seceders," the Red Stockings fell short of the standard of excellence they had set in the NAPBBP.

"The transfer of the Seceders meant first place for Chicago in 1876, fourth place for Boston," the journalist and historian Harold Kaese wrote. "Loyal Boston rooters would gladly have seen Hulbert's scalp blowing like a pennant from the wigwam of one of Sitting Bull's braves." This grisly sentiment notwithstanding, the Red Stockings' debut season in the NL was not a total loss.

George Wright, Harry's fleet-footed younger brother, batted a solid .299 and cemented his reputation as the game's premier shortstop. He "never had any equal as a fielder . . . he was really in a class by himself," said teammate and Hall of Fame catcher Jim O'Rourke.

Wright remained an important fixture on the NL champion Red Stocking teams of 1877 and 1878, which featured the outstanding pitching of Tommy Bond. A pioneer curveball specialist, Bond bobbed and weaved his way to forty victories both seasons, en route to becoming the first pitcher in NL history to reach the century mark in wins. Bond "was just the pitcher [Harry] Wright needed to help Boston return to its pennant-winning ways," wrote historian Gary Caruso.

Equally vital to Boston's resurgence was the arrival of new team president Arthur H. Soden. The Civil War veteran had made a fortune in the roofing industry and was quick to tell anyone willing to listen that he considered baseball a business. Period. To this end, he successfully lobbied other owners around the league to adopt the reserve clause, a far-reaching measure that, according to the writers Donald Dewey and Nicholas Acocella, "kept players bound to their clubs through an indefinite option year at the lapse of a specified contract."

For an entrepreneur like Soden it made perfect sense, given the high turnover rate that existed on team rosters during this period. "What man in his right mind will invest money in this business?" he asked. "Today he has some assets. Tomorrow he may have none."

Soden's reserve clause brought some much needed stability to the game, albeit at the expense of the players, who now found themselves reduced to "a state of high-salaried peonage." Save for the occasional challenge brought by a rival major league operator, this economic state of affairs remained in place until 1975, when an independent arbitrator named Peter Seitz overturned the reserve clause and ruled that owners had no right or power to retain a player's services "beyond the 'renewal year' in the contracts which these players had heretofore signed with their clubs."

When not focusing on the financial aspects of the game, Soden showed himself to be a fairly astute judge of talent. Under his regime, which ran from 1877 to 1906, Soden was able to bring in such future Hall of Famers as Charles "Kid" Nichols, Hugh Duffy, and Tommy McCarthy. The right-handed Nichols won 331 games

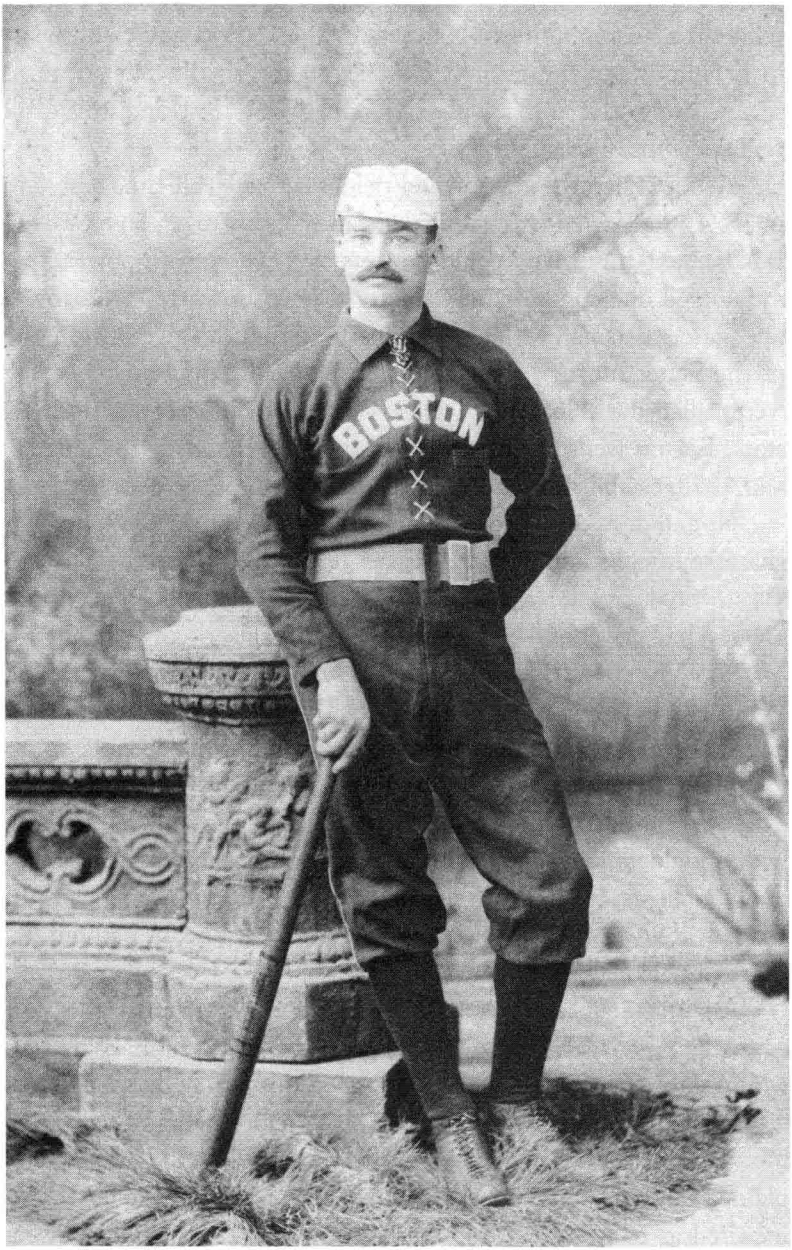
while in a Boston uniform between 1890 and 1901 and could boast of having one of the liveliest fastballs on the circuit. His streak of seven consecutive thirty-win seasons between 1891 and 1897 still remains a major league record.

As for Duffy, the lanky center fielder batted an all-time best .440 in 1894 and dazzled fans with his uncanny ability to get on base. "He was a choke hitter who could rap hits everywhere with power," remembered one contemporary. Duffy teamed up with McCarthy, a .292 career batsman with a shotgun arm in right, to give Boston one of the better hitting outfield duos in baseball. Appropriately, they were called the "Heavenly Twins." With the influx of such proven stars, Boston went on to win pennants in 1891, 1892, 1893, 1897, and 1898, establishing itself as the NL's "team of the decade."

Not all of Soden's moves panned out, however. In 1887, he purchased outfielder and catcher Michael "King" Kelly from the Chicago White Stockings for a then record sum of $10,000. Arguably the greatest ball player of the nineteenth century, Kelly could do it all: run, hit, hit with power, throw, and catch. During his seven years with the White Stockings, the "King of Baseball" won batting titles in 1884 (.354) and 1886 (.388) while leading his team to five pennants.

But statistics alone do not convey the kind of stylish élan he exhibited on the playing field. "Once he stood on the base lines, his wide shoulders back, and a look of studied innocence on his face, the crowd had eyes for nothing else," noted the historian Robert Smith. Indeed, Kelly possessed great charisma, but he was not without his share of personal foibles.

An inveterate spender and drinker, Kelly got under the skin of many a manager. "Time and again I have heard him say that he would never be broke, but money slipped through Mike's fingers as water slips through the meshes of a fisherman's net, and he was as fond of whiskey as any representative of the Emerald Isle," complained Chicago skipper Cap Anson. When a journalist once boldly inquired as to whether he imbibed on the job, Kelly didn't miss a beat. "It depends on the length of the game," he answered.



Michael "King" Kelly: The controversial Boston star's antics both on and off the field endeared him to fans but alienated his teammates and manager. (Courtesy of the Library of Congress.)

While this puckish attitude may have endeared him to fans and writers alike, it did not produce any immediate championships for Boston. In fact, his "extravagant personality" became a major disruptive influence inside the clubhouse as many of his teammates came to regard Kelly as a selfish prima donna. It didn't help matters that Kelly locked horns with his manager, the popular John Morrill.

The feud got so bad that Morrill was forced to step down by team ownership, further dividing the roster. "It came down to who should go," Soden explained afterward. "Morrill has many friends in this city and is a perfect gentleman. Kelly is a ballplayer. So it was for us to choose between the men, and we picked out Kelly as the one who could win the most games."

For Soden's public display of support, Kelly rewarded him by jumping to the Boston Reds of the Player's League (PL) in 1890. Organized by the Brotherhood of Professional Baseball Players, the sport's first union, the PL was a direct challenge to the senior circuit's increasingly monopolistic hold on the game.

"All players were guaranteed salaries at least equal to what they made in 1889, as well as equal representation with the financiers on the League's board of directors," notes historian Charles Alexander. However, poor attendance and a lack of investment capital drove the league out of business after only one season of operation.

Undaunted, Kelly briefly rejoined Soden's club late in 1891 as a part-timer before leaving for good the following year. In the interim, he had kept himself active playing for the Cincinnati Porkers of the American Association (AA), yet another big-league competitor that the NL absorbed in 1892.

But at this juncture, Kelly had become a mere shadow of his former self as his dissolute behavior both on and off the baseball diamond had finally caught up with him. He would die of pneumonia at Boston City Hospital in 1895. He was only thirty-six.

When the twentieth century began, the once mighty Red Stockings, who now went by the name Beaneaters, were reduced to being a mediocre outfit. In fact, over the span of the next five decades, they