

For the Brothers of the Old School

(New York)

Gerald McManus is a homely-looking kid possessed of no visible qualifications to ride the rails with any bunch of big league players, much less the New York Yankees. Yet there was Gerald, sitting with Pipp, Peck, Pratt, Ruel and the Infant himself aboard the Lake Shore Limited as it pulled out of the September Toledo darkness for Chicago.

Fact is it was due to the Babe that Gerald was on board, him and the other 15 kids who comprised the band of the St. Marys Industrial School For Boys of Baltimore. Ever since he joined the Yanks and began to bash all the home run records, the Babe of course has been drawing huge crowds home and road. I guess Brother Matthias - he's the guy who first found out the Babe could play - figured Tarzan and the Yanks owed him one so he asked the Babe would it be possible for the kids in the band to make the last trip west with the club as a fund-raiser. They'd play before the games in the parks, generally show off and pass the hat.

The only thing I know about St. Marys is it's in Baltimore and it's part orphanage and part reform school. I don't suppose none of the kids ever been on an overnight train before, and probably

never out of Baltimore. But they were pleasant and polite enough, and since they were new faces we'd think nothing of taking time for a chat. A team makes three road trips west each year and they each last two weeks, and that's basically six weeks a season staring at the same mugs in the same Pullman, diner and coach car all night, so most any fresh chatter is welcome.

Not to say Gerald McManus or any of the other kids was much of a chatterer. You could tell they were all ordered to be on their best behavior because they'd mostly sit together, read their books or polish their instruments, and generally there'd be a Brother standing guard close by. Brother Matthias was smart; not only did he discover the Babe but when he sent the band on the road he and two of his biggest, meanest-looking Brothers went along to make sure prayers were properly said and none of the Yanks engaged in corruptive activities. He was a Xavieran, the Yankees of the priestly set. Brother Matthias is the Babe Ruth of said set. He stands 6-6 and weighs 250 and what he says goes.

This, you probably understand, posed something of a challenge to the Yanks, who were not used to traveling like Xavierans, much less like orphans under the care of Xavierans. Like most teams, Yankee train trips might become occasions for a variety of offenses against the public morals. Pipp, Pratt, Peck and Ward had a running dollar poker game - it was called "the infield game" for obvious reasons - to which others occasionally sat in.

The arrival of Prohibition forced the drinkers to resort to the hip flask, but they were full and plentiful as well as discernible to all but the most deferential eyes. The fine aroma of cigar smoke gave the coach an atmosphere reminiscent of a British salon. Sadly for Ruth and a couple of the other fellows, their favorite traveling accessory - a well-endowed female - would not fit into the luggage compartment, forcing upon them a life of celibacy within the confines of the train itself. Language was another matter entirely, and I am confident that the two weeks the St. Marys Industrial School band spent with the team contributed to the expansion of their vocabulary in ways they may find eventually - if not within the premises of the school itself - to be useful.

Having established all of that, we return to the subject of Gerald McManus, attendee at said school, tuba player and neophyte world traveler. For reasons probably having to do with sympathy, Truck Hannah and Bootnose Hofmann had taken a shine to the kid and decided to assist in his maturation. McManus, of course, delighted in the attentions of two ballplayers, even if one of them was Bootnose. From the band's arrival on the team train in Cleveland, and through Detroit, Truck and Hofmann had labored to school young McManus in the fine arts of adult entertainment. Their specific goal: to see him win a hand of seven-card stud from the Infield Game.

Given the presence of the Brothers, this required discretion, which is not something Hannah and Bootnose are usually strong at. At the hotels, the band members were confined to their rooms, the hotel dining room or lobbies, and of course the ballpark. The same, fortunately for young McManus' education, could not be said for the Yankees. This oversight in team regulation gave the two catchers plenty of free mornings they could utilize slipping up to the lad's room, bribing his roommates with a quarter and an autograph to go for a soda, and pulling out a surreptitious deck.

As an intellectual exercise, stud poker is somewhere to the south of chess, evidence for that being the ability of Truck and Hofmann to learn it. So they decided they had at least a Chinaman's chance of teaching Gerald well enough that - with a little luck - he could actually win a hand. Hannah considered it revenge, for he himself had donated to the cause of Pipp and Pratt on numerous previous occasions. He agreed to endow the kid with a stake of 50 big ones to be laid on the table against the Infield if only the kid would first take his instruction.

Bootnose agreed to throw in another ten. The lessons proceeded over three mornings in Cleveland and two in Detroit, usually with Hannah serving as instructor and Bootnose taking up the lookout's station outside the door. Two quick taps and Hannah was to ditch the cards and break out a couple of chocolate candies he carried for such emergencies. (I am happy to report he did not use the

deck of cards he had picked up at the Everleigh during the club's last trip into Chicago.)

If I was to tell you that in short order Gerald took to the facile ministrations of the Truck Hannah School of Poker, you would likely assume this to be the result of a combination of fortune, and the natural enthusiasm a youth reveals when shown attention by an adult, especially one of some fame such as a Yankee backstop. You would be overlooking two important facts, the first of which is that young Mr. McManus arrived at St. Marys from the streets of Baltimore, where he had for a time made his way running numbers. Within the ranks of such laborers, stud poker ranks behind only baseball as the national pastime. As it turned out, this was the focus of young Mr. McManus' expertise from age 9 until he entered the school five years later. In the intervening two years, the expert instruction of Brother Matthias and his henchmen inculcated a substantial measure of discipline and decorum that the lad had not previously required. This enabled him to sit quietly on an overnight train and give every appearance of being the kind of fine, upright, moral lad that would make St. Marys, all the Brothers and the city of Baltimore proud...even if he was secretly hankering to get into a game. It also improved his patience once in the game.

Perhaps out of understandable deference to his elders, Gerald did not, however, make these skills known to Hannah or Hofmann.

The second factor was even simpler. As with all the boys, young Gerald lived in utter dread of the Brothers. He didn't want to hold out, he didn't want to tell a lie, he didn't want to get found out, he didn't want to go to hell and he dangd sure didn't want to get whipped. So pretty much the first thing Gerald did, after Hannah made known the role he hoped the kid would play in his scheme, was to alert Brother Matthias. By the time we left Toledo for Chicago, word had gotten around to some of the players that the Brother was clued in, and they worried about the chance of divine intervention that might hurt the Yanks' pennant prospects. Shawkey asked me to intercede.

"The public wouldn't like it if word got out that some Yankees were trying to teach a kid how to play poker," I said. "Ruppert might have to suspend 'em. And if the Yanks have to finish the season with only one catcher, they'd just about be cooked."

'Well, the Colonel has been so wonderful to us," Brother Matthias said. "We wouldn't want to put either him or Mr. Huggins in that kind of spot, would we?" He rocked forward onto his tip-toes as he said so, elevating his frame more commandingly toward the stratosphere.

"How you going to break it up then?"

"Who says I'm going to break it up?"

"But...but," I stammered, "aren't you worried about ... I don't know, corrupting the kid's morals or something like ... you know, like you guys worry about?"

"I'm not worried about Gerald's morals," he said in the self-assured manner of one who communes regularly with the Deity. "We'll be able to take care of those just fine. No, Mr. Monitor, this trip is about raising funds for the school, and I see this as God's way of creating an opportunity to enhance that work." Then followed a 10-minute discourse on the many needs of the school: the fire damage, the leaky faucets, the unfinished wing, the worn bed-clothing and draperies, the vegetable garden that had grown a bit thin the past few summers. I was ready to toss in a buck myself. Then he explained the unassuming lad's background. I was ready to toss in two.

"No," he said, "I see no reason to get Mr. Hannah or Mr. Hofmann in trouble. There was only a couple of minutes before Brother Matthias had to round up his lads in order to get them to the park for their performance, but he seemed interested in talking further.

"Tell me something, Mr. Monitor," he said. "I know Mr. Ruth does quite well, uh, financially, correct?"

To judge from the way I'd seen him spend it, and the dames I'd seen him spend it on, I knew this to be true. But there being no reason to queer my relations with the Infant, I merely affirmed in a discrete and general way.

"And the other Yankees, are they all pretty well taken care of."

"Ruppert and Huston spare no expense," I said.

"That would include Pipp, Peck, Pratt, Ward, Hannah and Hofmann, right?"

"Maybe not Hofmann."

"Maybe not Hofmann? But the rest?"

"Quite well."

"Well that's very good to know," Brother Matthias observed as he bounced upstairs. "We would not want anyone to suffer undue hardship." He said it in a manner I might describe as saintly, except that my sense was that "saintly" didn't precisely capture the sentiments.

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Hannah and Hofmann were in the dining room the morning of the final game in Detroit, minding their business, having coffee and swapping the kind of stories ballplayers swap. I saw Brother Matthias walk in and the thought occurred that a properly inquisitive reporter might occupy a seat at a nearby table. This turned out to be judicious foresight, for no sooner did Brother Matthias spy the two gentlemen than he invited himself into their conversation. There were the usual pleasantries concerning the weather and yesterday's game and Nallin's poor eyesight. But since Hannah and Bootnose were possessed of very little experience in conversation with a member of the clergy, and since Brother Matthias knew the precise direction he intended the discussion to take, in short order it proceeded to what amounted to the obsequies.

"Gentlemen, tell me about your visits with Mr. McManus," he said in a low, firm tone.

Hannah reacted in the way he reacts when he signals for the swift one and Thormahlen breaks off a shoot. He dodged and scrambled and looked for all the world like he wanted to call a conference on the mound. I got the sense he wished he could deny knowledge of the subject, testing whether Brother Matthias actually had the

goods. Presently, though, he decided that it is not good policy in the next world to lie to a minister of the Lord, and perhaps not a good idea in this one to try to slip one over on an oversized Xavieran. Besides, for all Hannah knew Brotherly training at St. Marys may have involved boxing.

So he surrendered.

"Aw, we was just tryin' to have some fun with the kid, Brother," he said. "We didn't mean no harm to him."

"I understand that you were teaching him to play poker."

"Well...only in a manner of speaking, sir," Hannah said. He didn't have to be told what would happen if Huggins, Ruppert or Huston found out about what would be perceived as an effort to corrupt a youth.

"Seven card stud," I believe the game is called," Brother Matthias said.

"It's just...well, sort of a thing you do to...you know, pass the time on the train," Hofmann interjected.

"But you do play for money," Brother Matthias pressed ahead.

"Hannah and Hofmann looked at each other like condemned men facing the foot of the gallows. "Well," Hannah said, shrugging his shoulders, "I...I suppose you could. If you wanted to."

"There'd be a way," Hofmann agreed nervously.

"You gentlemen apparently are under the impression that we never get out of the school," Brother Matthias said. "You may think our boys come from the finest homes, having been raised in good Christian settings, all with the best upbringings..."

"Yes...of course," Hannah agreed. At that moment Truck would have agreed to anything if it pacified his clerical acquaintance.

Brother Matthias's tone never rose above a firm, low monotone. "Truck," he said. "You and Hofmann are either liars or idiots. But don't worry, it's no business of mine which. Your concern quite simply is in not letting Huggins know what you've been doing. I'd like to help in that. I don't want to see the Yanks stripped down to one catcher any more than you do."

"Naw, we don't want that," Hofmann chimed.

"On the other hand," Brother Matthias continued, "I am responsible for the moral upbringing of young Mr. McManus, you understand..."

"Oh, we do," Hannah said in his most somber fashion.

"Which means," Brother Matthias said, "that in order for me not to take this business to Mr. Huggins, I must have some expression of security from each of you."

"You have our word," Hannah said, fumbling his coffee cup toward his lips.

"I'm afraid the Brothers of the Old School would not find your word, shall we say negotiable," Mr. Hannah. How much money are you prepared to stake to Mr. McManus in the poker game?"

Hannah's cup must have hit a blockage between his lips, because it simply sat there unmoving for several seconds. Then, imperceptibly at first, it began to waver between his fingers. Brother Matthias had tossed him a knuckle ball and Hannah was handling it in his usual fashion. He didn't say anything, but the cup tilted ever more gradually forward until its contents oozed out and down onto his lap.

"Well," said Brother Matthias, since we wouldn't want any scandal, perhaps we could agree on the sum of \$100 as Mr. McManus' bankroll."

"Brother Matthias," a suddenly modest Hannah stammered. "I don't think you understand. I ...ain't that good a poker teacher." He now weighed unappealing options: being exposed to Huggins vs. endowing the infield with an easy \$100 of his money.

The cleric was unmoved. "I never assumed you were, Truck," he said. "Anyway, Gerald won't play all \$100."

"Oh," Hannah said in evident relief. Bootnose, who the Brother had not hit up, chuckled nervously. "See, Truck, he's only gonna play some of it."

"Why of course," the Xavieran said. "Why a man would be a fool to wager that much on poker. No, Gerald will only use \$40 as a stake. We take \$60 right off the top as a donation to the school. I should think," he said to Hannah, "that it would be appropriate to look upon it as a penitential sacrifice."

"Well, what about the winnings?" Hannah asked.

"Winnings, Mr. Hannah? I thought you said you weren't a good poker teacher. But no matter. On the off chance that Gerald does win some money, I should think a split would be in order. Gerald, of course, is too young to profit off the income of gambling, not to mention that it would be a poor lesson to teach him."

"Poor, yes," Hannah agreed.

"We don't want to teach him no bad habits," said Bootnose."

"So then if there are winnings, they must be split," the Brother stipulated. "Half goes to the school, and the other half to...oh, shall we say a suitable charity of your choice?"

To this point, Hannah had made the mistake of not setting down the coffee cup. Sadly, the wild pitch just thrown by Brother Matthias caused it to evade Truck's grip, and it met an untimely, not to mention clattering end on the wooden floorboards. Truck's cuffs now displayed a coffee stain to match the one on the crotch of his trousers.

None of this moved Brother Matthias, who by his temperament could have succeeded as a hired killer had he not chosen the cloth.

"Since it would not do well for you to be seen handing money to Gerald directly," he said, "you can just give it to me before we board the train. "I'll make sure he gets it."

Hannah had only one more card to play in his effort to save his hundred. "What about Hug?" he asked. "If the kid sits down at the table, Hug's sure to see it and raise what for." Given that, as Hannah knew, Hug made it a policy to look away from events on the

players car - he didn't have to crack down on what he didn't see - it was a weak bluff, and Brother Matthias quickly called it.

"Boys," he said, "I trust you to see to it that the wrong people don't find out. And by the way," he added, picking up his hat and rising from the table. "I want you to know that this is a wonderful thing you're doing for charity. I've no doubt the good Lord will remember you for it."

"Jesus," Truck muttered.

"Yes, him," Brother Matthias said, expressing full agreement.

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So the Yanks bumped off the Tigers twice, the Babe was at the precipice of 50, the exhibition in Toledo went off with no casualties, and New York was a game and a half safe in first pulling out of the station for Chicago. All of which made for a pleasant jaunt. Truck, lighter in the wallet by \$100 than he expected to be at that moment, has resorted to the comforts of his hip flask, where he is in the process of attaining a state of amiable incandescence. Even so, he takes up a position at one end of the car, from which he can sound the alarm should anything go amiss, such as Huggins wandering through. Hofmann is at the other end. Gerald's seat at the table is obtained at the personal

interposition of the Infant himself (acting, I presume as Brother Matthias's front man), a place which Ward, being junior member of the table, is required to relinquish. It is the only concession the boys will make to the youngster other than requiring him - in deference to his age - to play sober. For their parts, Pipp, Peck and Pratt each operates with the advantage, or not, of a handy hip flask. A bunch of the rest of the guys, yours truly included, spectate.

Pipp draws the deal and gives Peck the first jack, a diamond, which beats the kid's spade jack, so Peck tosses a quarter to see what guts the kid has. Right out the kid folds, showing no guts whatsoever. A mark, and a lame one..you can tell by their faces that's how the Infield sizes him up. Pratt cops the first hand with the other two jacks, as Peck draws dead on a straight and Pipp fails to flush. On the second hand, Peck flops the kid the club ace and he opens 50 cents. Pipp, holding two clubs down and seeing easy money, forces the issue four bits and everybody calls. No help anywhere on the second round so the kid's ace is still good. He goes another 50 cents, and this time Pipp, whose flush run has been broken by the heart 7, simply calls. Peck pairs a hole ace on the final up card and raises a buck, taking everybody out. Nods are exchanged across the table. "No guts," they say.

"Better luck next hand, kid" says the Infant. "Yeah, I says, "maybe this hand." But the game has the look of me trying to hit Mays' swift one. Peck picks up a light pocket on Pratt's deal, and when McManus gets his hands on the deck he deals garbage. With six cards out, he has the most showing and it is a mere pair of fours. Pratt joins Peck on the sideline, but Pipp hangs on. With a six-eight-ten of hearts showing, the latter appears poised to flush or straight. The kid opens his fours with a buck and Pipp throws in another half. The kid raises again and Pipp takes him up on it.

"Any limit," the kid asks.

"Nah," says Pipp. "As often as you like."

"Then I'll go another buck," the kid says. The pot is now up above a sawbuck, and for the first time you can see on Pipp's face the fine outlines of a question whether the kid is trying to pull a fast one. He is reading McManus for twitches, but the kid may as well be dead for all his face gives out. "You look too honest to lie," Pipp says, calling and turning them over. He has missed the straight and heart flush, but has landed jacks over eights a pair.

"I am truly sorry, Mr. Pipp," says the kid, turning a third four.

"It was an excellent and well-played hand on all parts," he adds.

It is the compliment of the pitcher who has just fired his fastball past you and who admires the grace with which you submitted.

Gerald, of course, has all along been playing with house money - namely Hannah's - but from that hand forward even the Truck's loot is a mere donation and the Infield is bankrolling his exercise. This is not to say the game is without its drawbacks. On the next hand, Pipp deals the kid queens down, but deals himself aces the same. Happily for the kid, Pipp deals nobody any help on the up cards so that betting does not become predatory, and when Pipp wins with two pairs it only eats slightly into the kid's stake. The playout assumes this pattern: hands traded, bucks moving circuitously, the kid ahead a few dollars, the Babe drinking beer, belching now, farting then, talking up the old school, egging the kid on, and a general motion around the confines of that area of the car.

The second break comes 45 minutes in, and by this time it strikes me that the kid has a distinct sobriety advantage. The deal falls to Peck, who flops a club ace for Pipp and a diamond ace for himself, Pipp having primacy.

"A buck," he says.

"See ya," says Peck. The kid shows a three. He and Pratt also call.

Another round. A second three for the kid. Pipp and Peck are both acey-ducey. Everybody likes what they've got, and nobody's scared off by a fresh-faced kid off the streets of Baltimore showing threes.

"A buck," says the kid.

"Raise you fifty," says Pipp, reaching into his vest pocket for a cigar and lighting it. His first instinct is to be polite - "you want ...?" he motions toward the kid - but recovers his bearings soon enough, shrugs and adds, "never mind."

"And another," says Peck.

"And another," says Pratt.

That makes it another buck-fifty to the kid, but with threes showing he's going nowhere. Nor is he chasing anybody. So after they all call, Peck turns the next round. There is no help and the table calls the kid's half dollar. But Pipp pairs his queen on the sixth card and likes it, jacking the stakes a dollar. Pratt, who has paired a five, follows, and the kid raises another buck, even though he only has threes plus a very lonely king and

a four. Peck, nursing an evident pair of deuces and an infant hangover, decides the pot has become too fancy for him and resigns.

The kid's play is such that would make sense only if you assumed him to be either a very good player or a very foolish one. He had forced the pot up to nearly 30 beans on a pair of threes, and he has done so against Pipp's queens and Pratt's five. The final cards go down. With queens showing, it remains Pipp's bet. He is eager to claim the pot, and also grateful that the kid will not let him have it.

"A buck," he says. Pratt looks over his own layout: two fives showing with a jack and a ten. "Call," he says. Since he cannot beat Pipp's queens showing, any idiot can tell Pratt is holding some down power. A second pair? A third five?

Eyes turn to the kid, but he barely moves, except his lips enough to say, "raise you a buck." Unless he is bluffing, he, too, must be holding out. Two more rounds of raises ensue before the game is called out. Pipp turns a third queen. That finishes Pratt, who folds rather than display what must have been a second jack. The kid, however, does not flop. He turns a third three plus a pair for the four he'd been showing and rakes in a pot that exceeds \$40. Pipp reaches for his flask. The Infant displays his admiration in the most appreciative of his many ways, with a

loud, exuberant fart, a swig from his flask and a slap on the kid's back. Pratt makes excuses toward the bathroom, where he may wish to avail himself of the porcelain for a healthy retch.

All this time I am struck by the absence of Brother Matthias, and for that matter of any of the other kids in the band. The latter, presumably, are on strict orders to avoid the scene of the crime so as not to complicate things in the event of an untoward accident, such as Hug dropping by, which the Brother might later find awkward to explain. What I only later learn is that the Brother has assigned himself the role of occupying the skipper in philosophical conversation in the other car. I am still struck by the confidence he displays in this young gambler's talents. If it were me, I'd at least find an excuse to peek in now and again.

In short order, it is Peck, Pratt and Pipp who wish they were not present. The hands have played out past 11 p.m., we are now well into Indiana and approaching Chicago, and the Infield is even more closely approaching a state of full fleecing. Peck and Pratt are both down to their last three bucks on the table as Gerald deals. He gives himself the spade king and bets four bits on it. Pipp and Peck are as flush as you can be after three cards so they have no choice but to go on. For his part, Pratt holds only a pair of deuces, but wants out. He calls as well. By the fourth up card, Pratt and Peck are both all in and also desperate. The former clings to his deuces; the latter holds a pair of fours.

The kid is showing garbage, but since Pipp is as well there is no reason for him to pull out. The fact is that with two hole hearts, Pipp's gamble is for the card that will fill his flush. He gets it, a heart three, and collects a small pot. It comes, however, at the expense of wiping out the middle of the Infield.

Poker among teammates is generally a light exercise played to few hard feelings. Gerald, however, was not a teammate. Beyond that, he had shown up Peck and Pratt, and beyond that, he sat in front of Pipp with a stack counting nicely into the hundreds of dollars. The lights of Chicago loomed as Pipp dealt what must be the game's final hand. From what we could see, there was little to pick between it. Yet as the hand played out, McManus warmed to it. He first showed a diamond seven, Pipp a spade six. "Fifty," said the kid. "Call," said Pipp.

Then a diamond five for the kid, a diamond nine for Pipp. "A buck," said the kid. "Call," said Pipp.

Then a heart six for McManus, a spade seven for Pipp. "Can I go two bucks?" the kid asked. Pratt took a second away from his deliberations with his cigar and his flask to nod in assent. "Shit, yeah," said the Babe. The kid went two bucks.

I looked across at Shawkey and he at me. It isn't polite to talk over a hand, but he could tell what I was thinking and vice

versa. Pipp was showing six-seven-nine-ten, so he had two chances down plus one more hole card to fill the inside straight. The kid had a five-six-seven plus an ace. That wouldn't stretch. So what was he so proud of?

"Another buck," said Pipp. Either he had it or he'd decided to try to scare the kid out of the hand.

"See you one and raise you one," the kid said.

Pipp called and dealt the last hole card. I swung behind the kid and looked at his hand. He had ace-high. That was all.

"Buck," says the kid, who knew how to deal from power. He was rolling in chips and could play Pipp out as long as he wanted to go. Only it turned out Pipp didn't have the stomach for it. He tossed in.

"Ain't it past your bedtime?" he asked the kid, who sealed handfuls of quarters and dollars into his sweater pockets to the point where he couldn't carry it all himself. Happily for the kid, Brother Matthias picked that moment to amble by.

"Almost to Chicago," he observed politely. "Have a good game, gentlemen?"

"Fuck you, Brother," Pipp said with as much deference as could be applied when so addressing a man of the cloth. Then he turned toward the car's doorway and shouted in a freer, more animated tone. "That goes for you too, Hannah."

The Infant laughed and pulled a fifty from his wallet, tossing it atop the stack. "Them's the Brothers I know," he laughed with that distinctive laugh that begins in his belly and rumbles its way up and out. "Best evening's entertainment I've had on a trip since those blonde sisters in Philadelphia...what was their names, anyway...?"

Gerald, too young to appreciate the entertainment value of blonde sisters in Philadelphia, got up and moved to his seat alone in the back of the car. I sat down next to him. "Nice game, kid," I said. He looks me square in the eye. "Hot as hell in here, ain't it? Say, buddy, you know where a guy can get a shot?"

I handed him my hip flask and he drained it. "Thanks, Mac," he said. "You're OK."

When we got to the hotel, I helped Brother Matthias with the tabulation. The table take amounted to just over \$400, more than they'd been taking in working the crowd at a game. Counting Truck's generosity and the Infant's tip, that meant more than \$500 above and beyond what the school expected to earn. Maybe the

best part was there wasn't anything Pipp or Hannah or any of them could say about it without hanging themselves to Huggins.

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Looking back, I'd say the Yanks' luck for the season pretty much dried up on that rolling poker table. That wouldn't have been the way I'd have doped it at the time. Even though the Indians beat Philly to move within a game while the Yanks were idle, New York was still one and a half up on the Sox and holding all the advantages. The Babe was sitting on 49, Mays had 24 wins and Shawkey 18 more. After these three, they only had St. Louis, Washington and Connie's kids left. The Sox and Indians still had to play each other three times, and since they couldn't both win the Yanks were sure to gain on one of them. But the key was that New York was coming in hot, with 10 copped out of the last 13. They'd picked up two and a half on the Sox and one and a half on the Indians. Cleveland was playing a busher at shortstop and had another taking a regular turn on the mound. As for Chi, all you had to do was read the rags to know the Sox were hardly a team any more. The front page was nothing but news about the grand jury doing this or that, and the sports writers egged it on. The pennant looked like a cinch.

Let me tell you something about sports writers, and it goes for the hard-boiled guys, too. Lots of people think reporters have it

in for this guy or that, so they don't give them a square deal. I hear it all the time on the street when some guy reads a story about Harding. "Whaddya expect from that guy, he hates the Republicans," they say. Or maybe in another town they think the fix is in for Cox. Or maybe it's the governor or the mayor. It's the same on the sports beat. The guy hates Dempsey, or he's got Cobb, or he never gives McGraw a square deal. The guy buys the paper and reads the story and decides the reporter's out to get whatever poor sap he's writing about. I heard it when I started out in the business and I'll probably hear it 10 years after I quit.

Well, you got it partly right, but only partly, and not even the most important part. Here's how it looks from the inside. Newspapers are businesses, and reporters are part of the business. Most of us get paid based on how many newspapers we can sell. It's neither simpler nor more complicated than that. Now let me ask you a question: What sells a newspaper better than a good scrap? Not much. People love a brawl, and reporters learn fast that people will pay to read about one. So if a reporter calls Harding a simpleton, he doesn't mean it personally. He's just trying to get Harding to pop something back at the paper so they can get a big headline out of it. Same goes with Ruth or Cobb. As far as a reporter's concerned, the worst thing that can happen isn't if the Republicans win or the Democrats, or if the Sox get caught or don't. As far as a reporter's concerned, the

worst thing that can happen is nothing, because then you have no headline. Right now the country's swinging to Harding, so the papers are swinging to Cox. If the country moves, the papers will move. And they'll sell more papers.

No, I understood the reporters. It was the Sox I couldn't figure. With everything going on down at the courthouse, they should have been stiff for the Series. Instead it turned out they were laying for us.

Hug wasn't sure who to put up against Kerr in the Thursday game, so he warmed up Quinn and Thormahlen both, then decided Quinn looked like the better choice, even though he had been knocked from the box in his last two starts. Inasmuch as he failed to last two innings, it is impossible to endorse Hug's selection. At the same time, fairness dictates that several Yanks spilled the beans in that game. The key moment occurred after Jackson opened with a double. Picus caught Felsch off balance, the result being a weak tap in the general direction of third. The only possible play was at that sack, but as Quinn moved over to field it, Ward also came in, and that left nobody to inhibit Jackson's advance. As unlikely as it appeared, this was not the first time Quinn and Ward had played on the same field together. In fact, they are said to be quite familiar with one another. As it developed, that failure set up an inning that lasted longer than Quinn himself. The Sox scored four times.

Kerr was superb in the pinches, or perhaps the Yanks were merely bad in them, but otherwise the Sox hurler was more than usually distressed. New York wasted a dozen baserunners in situations where a hit might have turned the game. In the sixth the Infant came up with two on, a home run tying the game. Instead, the Wee one slipped a third strike clean past him and all the Babe could do was admire it.

I'd have bet anything - if that is not the wrong phrasing in Chi - on the Yanks coming back Friday against Faber, and I'd have made it a parley on Ruth hitting 50. I'd have lost on both ends. The best the Infant could do was a couple of perpendicular homers that Felsch and Jackson made easy work of. The one to Felsch came in the eighth, and its capture prompted one of the great mass exodi of our time. There was more than 30,000 in the park, and just about all of them regarded the Babe's final appearance at the plate as the game's last word. When he was through, they were.

All I can say about the Comiskey is that the gamblers must've ordered up a special on triples. Facing Thormahlen in the first, Collins sent one out in the direction of Meusel, who played it in the leisurely fashion one might associate with a pleasant afternoon at the park, if one was not a player. Meusel's return throw somehow managed to elude Hannah, so Collins, who had pulled

up at third, seized the opportunity to score. Jackson followed with one in the same spot, and when Felsch put a third in the vicinity of the first two Meusel, feeling put upon, began to show annoyance.

In the second inning Risberg counted the fourth triple, this time to center, much to Meusel's relief. Feeling there was little future in staying with a pitcher who yielded triples so liberally, Hug came for Thormahlen, replacing him with Mays. This halted the run on triples, but when the Sox added three more runs in the sixth it ended any realistic chance of a New York comeback. The 6-4 final, combined with Cleveland's easy victory over Washington, formally relieved the visitors of any stake on the first rung, and closed the Sox within a half game of them for second.

The outcomes might have created melancholy among the New Yorkers, but this was not the case for the Infant, who does not take his defeats home with him. Not that he goes home. The Everleigh had been on his agenda Thursday night. The girls there are always glad to see him, and vice versa. On Friday night, the Babe fulfilled a pre-arranged deal to show up at the south side Edelweiss gardens, a locale that used to be famous for its German beer, before said commodity was declared to be *verboten*. These days of course The Edelweiss sells phosphates - that's its story,

anyway. The new inventory makes it even more imperative to bring in attractions such as the slugger.

At any rate, the management offered him \$250 to show up, be visible, shake hands as called upon and make brief remarks. I went with him and these were the remarks: "I haven't much to say and I hardly know how to say it, but I hope you all have a hell of a good time." If Harding shows up next week, he shall have to take a position on the League of Nations in order to draw a more positive response than was generated by this bit of eloquence.

Given the outcomes of the first two games, you could see the third one coming from a distance. The Sox put the crowd at 43,000, which is believed to be the world's record for attendance. They came to see two things; Ruth hit his 50th and the Yanks get buried, and they only went away half disappointed.

Why it should be that the Sox chose this particular home stand to begin playing good ball is the kind of mystery only somebody more inside than this reporter could address. Had Chi played with this seriousness all season the pennant would long have been theirs. Perhaps this was a ploy to satisfy the Grand Jury, which was said to be on the verge of a decision early in the following week.

Whatever the motivation, Gleason's boys looked upon Shawkey as their New York cousin, raining hits hither and thither. There

were 21 of them by the official count, good for 15 runs. That the Yanks managed nine runs themselves sounds anemic by comparison. They also played defense. In the first, Peck hit a liner over second that looked as good as a Liberty Bond, but Collins plucked it for the safe deposit box. Meusel put one toward the crowd that had spilled onto the ropes behind the field. Jackson jumped, made the catch and landed among the masses, holding on to the ball all the time. About the best one could say was that a crowd of 43,000 could raise nearly as much money for the St. Marys Industrial School boys band as could a poker game with Pipp playing against Hannah's money...maybe even more.

So the Yanks entrained for St. Louis, having made a thorough botch of their pennant hopes. Leading the Indians by a game when they hit town, they left two back and offering every appearance of being through. There is really little to add concerning the St. Louis portion of the trip. Another loss, offset by two wins, only sounds good until measured against the three games the Indians took from Boston or the Sox seized against Philadelphia. It left the Yanks three back and with only seven games remaining, and even if they won all seven either the Sox or Indians could clinch by playing just slightly better than even ball. So for most fans the chase resolved down to whether the Babe would in fact hit his 50th, and that issue turned out to be settled at the earliest possible moment upon his return. Facing Acosta in the first inning of the Friday double-header at the Grounds against

Washington, he rattled the facing of the upper deck, receiving the adulation and hurraing that has come to define such achievements. The 51st followed for an encore in the first inning of the second game, To the home team's chagrin, the 50th proved to be Acosta's only failing; he allowed no runs the remainder of the game and the Senators won 3-1. New York won the second game, but when the Senators beat the Yanks again on Saturday the mourning began in earnest, for the result left them three games behind with only four to play.

The only part of the season's tale remaining to be told devolved to the Swatigy, who made the most of his final three games in Philadelphia. He socked two off Rommel in Monday's game, running his tab up to 53, then hit the last on Wednesday. The Yanks were dead and buried by that point, but the blow sent the Philly fans away happy.

Fans here will wonder whether the performance of 1920 represents a crescendo for a franchise that has never won anything, or whether there are better times ahead. The sewage flowing freely now out of Chicago strongly suggests that the White Sox will not be factors again in 1921, and perhaps not for a while afterward. It is said that Frazee, having benefitted financially from the sale of Ruth, may be prepared to offer up additional helpings of talent. Bush, for one, would bring a price, as also would Pennock. Would the Yanks improve their chances by obtaining

either Bush or Pennock, or both, to supplant Thormahlen, Mogridge or Collins? Yes, indeed. Since neither the Tigers, Senators nor A's are likely to contend soon, this would reduce the challengers down to the Indians and Browns. And neither of them has the Babe.

During the off-season, I did what baseball writers do when there is no baseball: some cops, some obits, some desk work. A week following the season's conclusion, Cobb advised me that, given the great gains in circulation created by interest in the Yanks - - and attributed by management at least in part to your correspondent -- I would henceforward make an additional two bucks a week. I immediately purchased a small token of appreciation which I ordered to be delivered to Mays, another to the Wop and a third to Huggins.

I didn't send anything to the Babe. I couldn't send him a dame, and anything else he'd just toss in the trash. Why reward Blackie? He'd never done anything for me.