



# Baseball in Baltimore: The First Hundred Years

*James H. Bready*

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The teams were the Marylands and Terrapins, the Drydocks and Pastimes, the Black Sox, the Elite Giants, and, of course, the Orioles. Players had names like Mule Suttles, Pee Wee Butts, and "Twitchy Dick" Porter?but also Wee Willie Keeler and John McGraw, Babe Ruth and Lefty Grove, Roy Campanella, Satchell Paige, and Jack Dunn. In *Baseball in Baltimore: The First Hundred Years*, James H. Bready presents a vivid and compelling portrait of the players, the managers, the ballparks, and the games that shaped the history of the national pastime in one of America's oldest baseball towns.

It was 1859 when the game of baseball came to Baltimore, as George F. Beam's Excelsiors played their first games at Flat Rock in Druid Hill Park. In the century that followed, Baltimore had franchises in eight different professional leagues and games were played in nine city parks?from the Madison Avenue Grounds to Union Park, from old Oriole Park to Bugle Field.

Packed with rare illustrations, colorful anecdotes, and fascinating details?many of them skillfully brought to life from the original box scores on preserved newspaper pages and scorecards? *Baseball in Baltimore* tells a story that will captivate baseball fans everywhere. Among the highlights:

- The first-ever intercity baseball game outside the New York area took place on June 6, 1860, when the Baltimore Excelsiors defeated the Washington Potomacs 40-24 on an empty lot (now The Ellipse) behind James Buchanan's White House.
- On July 4, 1863, as climactic battle raged at Gettysburg, sixty miles away many Baltimoreans eased the tension by watching baseball?the Pastimes played an inter-squad game at the Madison Avenue Grounds.
- Early baseball seasons extended well into November (games on ice skates were attempted but soon abandoned).
- Baltimore Oriole Wee Willie Keeler's 44-game hitting streak in 1897 still stands as the National League record (though tied by Pete Rose).
- Game tickets in 1872, when the Lord Baltimores won a game 39-14, cost 50 cents (not cheap; the typical workingman earned a dollar a day).
- The National League champion 1894 Orioles near the ballpark, at the Oxford House on Greenmount Avenue, where team members harmonized on the porch while 21-year-old John McGraw read the sports news in the hammock, "breathing the pure air of Waverly." (The team would go on to win three straight pennants?only to drop to the minors in 1903.)

Here is young Babe Ruth, a pitcher for the minor-league Orioles for just three months in 1914, who never homered as an Oriole and who was sold to the Boston Red Sox in midseason. Here is pitcher Matt Kilroy, a 46-game winner in 1887. Here are Wee Willie Keeler and John McGraw, duking it out in the clubhouse in 1897?until team captain Wilbert Robinson threw them both into the oversized team bathtub (team showers came much later).

Bready also revisits the International League teams of the first half of the twentieth century?some of them of

storybook quality (the seven-time pennant winners, from 1919 onward?a record unmatched in the majors or high minors?were known as the "endless chain champs"). He also describes the teams Baltimore fielded in the old Negro leagues?the Black Sox and Elite Giants?whose patrons, in fairly intimate surroundings, saw some of the finest players the game has ever produced.

Throughout, *Baseball in Baltimore* is enriched by 150 rare illustrations. They show the Orioles of 1885, in pin-striped splendor; former players Ned Hanlon, Steve Brodie, and others, inspecting the new Municipal Stadium in 1922; Wee Willie Keeler laying down a bunt; the legendary Wilbert Robinson, mask and mitt in hand; the minor-league Orioles raising the flag on Opening Day, 1910; Lefty Grove on the mound; Roy Campanella, a teenaged regular; Babe Ruth tending bar with his father in 1915; and the big parade of 1954, when major league baseball at last returned to Baltimore.

From the future hall-of-famers of the 1890s Orioles to the 4F minor-leaguers of the World War II years, from the amateur teams of wealthy businessmen (complete with neckties) of the 1860s to the talented but underpaid Negro League stars of the twentieth century, from the city's humiliating loss of major league baseball in 1902 to its triumphant return in 1954, the story of *Baseball in Baltimore*, and of the players who contributed so much legend to it, make this book a joy to read.

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