

The Home Forum.



A century of heroes

ONE HUNDRED YEARS ago, the Pittsburgh Pirates (champions of the well-established National League) challenged the Boston Americans (also called the Pilgrims), champions of the upstart American League, to a showdown: a best-of-nine series to decide who was best. (See ticket at right.) Even then the modest event was billed as the “world’s championship games.”

Boston proved its worth, beating the Pirates 5 games to 3. No one bothered with a series the following year. But the tradition grew, and the idea of a “world championship” stuck. In 1905, the National League’s New York Giants defeated the Philadelphia Athletics. World Series play continued through world wars and economic depression. It took a players’ strike in 1994 to derail it. Today, the World Series – though still not exactly global – is a centerpiece of American sports culture.

Many teams and players have stepped into the World Series spotlight. Some have left a lasting impression. It’s nearly impossible, however, to compare players and teams across a century, given the many changes in the sport. In the so-called “dead ball” era, for example, a slugger was someone who hit a dozen home runs a year. The size of old ballparks and the height of pitcher’s mounds (bigger and higher, respectively) also complicate comparisons of teams and players then and now.

The N.Y. METS dropped 120 games in 1962. But by '69, they were truly amazin', beating the heavily favored Orioles.

OK, so it’s hard to compare, but we’ve made our selections anyhow. Here are our choices for the most heroic World Series performances in the past 100 years.



★ **BOB GIBSON** proved himself to be one of the best-ever big-game pitchers, with seven consecutive Series victories (1964, '67, and '68) for St. Louis. The Cardinals won titles in '64 and '67, but lost in '68 to the Detroit Tigers.

Yankee journeyman pitcher **DON LARSEN** (lower card) rocked the baseball world in 1956 when he hurled the only perfect game in Series history, against the Brooklyn Dodgers. It was manager **CASEY STENGEL'S** sixth championship in eight years.

★ **WILLIE MAYS'S** 1954 over-the-shoulder catch is the finest fielding gem in Series history. The 'Say Hey Kid' snagged Vic Wertz's drive to deep centerfield in the eighth inning of a tie game, then threw to the infield to hold two Cleveland Indians on base. The N.Y. Giants won.

★ **BILL MAZEROSKI** added an exclamation mark to the 1960 season with his bottom-of-the-ninth home run for the Pittsburgh Pirates in Game 7, felling the mighty Yankees.

★ **SPARKY ANDERSON** is the only manager to win championships in both leagues, first with the star-laden **BIG RED MACHINE** (Cincinnati) in 1975 and '76, then with Detroit in 1984.

★ **BROOKS ROBINSON** ('The Human Vacuum Cleaner') set the standard for infield play – and batted .429 – in 1970, when the Baltimore Orioles bested the Cincinnati Reds.

★ **ST. LOUIS CARDINALS** rookie Pepper Martin, one of the famous 'Gashouse Gang,' batted .500 on the way to a Series win over the Philadelphia A's in 1931. Brother hurlers Dizzy and Paul Dean accounted for all four wins in St. Louis's seven-game victory over Detroit in 1934.

★ In 1923, **BABE RUTH** ('The Sultan of Swat') led the pinstriped Yankees to the first of their many Series triumphs. But in 1916 and '18 he'd helped the Boston Red Sox to Series wins – as a pitcher!

★ **REGGIE JACKSON** hit three homers in the 1977 Series-clinching Game 6 against the L.A. Dodgers. It gave the Yanks their first championship since 1962 – and Jackson the nickname 'Mr. October.'



PHOTO BY REBECCA SWILLER; PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY ADAM WEISKIND - STAFF; 1903 WORLD SERIES TICKET AND 1969 WORLD SERIES PROGRAM COURTESY OF THE NATIONAL BASEBALL HALL OF FAME AND MUSEUM; JACKIE ROBINSON PHOTO FROM AP

★ The Series earned more of its 'world' designation in 1992, when the **TORONTO BLUE JAYS** won their first championship with four one-run victories over the Atlanta Braves. Catcher Pat Borders was the Series MVP, batting .450.

★ The **NEW YORK YANKEES** dominated the World Series' first century, winning the title 26 times (next closest team: St. Louis, with 9). Some say the 1927 Yankees were the best team ever to play.

★ **JACKIE ROBINSON** wasn't on the winning side in the 1947 Series; the Brooklyn Dodgers lost to the Yankees. But he was the first African-American to play in baseball's showcase event.

★ **CHRISTY MATHEWSON** was a model superstar long before the term was coined. He was handsome, clean-cut, college-educated, and a masterly pitcher. In the 1905 World Series, he pitched three shutouts in six days to lead the N.Y. Giants over the Philadelphia A's. (He dispatched the A's so quickly that the final game lasted only 95 minutes.)

Ross Atkin

