



Speaker, "Smoky" Joe Wood, Cy Young, and of course Babe Ruth. Ruth not only became baseball's greatest hitter, but while playing for the Red Sox he was one of his era's best pitchers as well. But in 1919 owner Harry Frazee, a New York theater producer, began selling off one player after another, including Ruth, to finance a series of Broadway plays. After he made the deal for Ruth, Frazee said of the Yankees, "I do not mind saying I think they are taking a gamble."

In the 1920s, furnished with Ruth and other former Red Sox stars, the Yankees reenergized and modernized the game, becoming the dominant sports team of the century. The Red Sox, conversely, slumped for years, finishing last in the league six years in a row and nine years out of 11 through 1932, when they lost 111 games and ended up 64 games out of first. They finally emerged in the mid-1930s under new owner Tom Yawkey, whose free spending attracted a solid group of stars, including Jimmie Foxx, Joe Cronin, and Ted Williams, a brilliant hitter who characterized the potential and the pain of the Red Sox for 23 years. Williams's relations with the press and fans were often stormy, but he remained the team's best player and a wonderfully gifted batter—still the last man to hit better than .400 for a season, in 1941.

Williams's Sox were among the game's best teams in the late 1940s—with Bobby Doerr, Dom DiMaggio, Johnny Pesky, and pitchers Mel Parnell and Ellis Kinder—but a series of cruel losses led to a decline that persisted through the 1950s and beyond. From 1951 through 1966 they finished far from first place, including the 1954 season when they were 42 games back; for the seven seasons beginning in 1960, the best they could manage was sixth in the league. Through the 1940s and 1950s, when baseball was integrating and hiring players from the Negro Leagues, the Red Sox held the color line; they were the last team to have an African American on the roster, and they were similarly slow to sign Hispanic players later.

Ted Williams retired in 1960, as the team struggled, but his position in left field was taken over by Carl Yastrzemski, and in 1967 the Sox broke through again when Yaz won the Triple Crown—a baseball feat that has not been achieved since—and led the Sox to the American League pennant. Their Impossible Dream season was capped with a trip to the World Series, but the hope was snuffed out in the end when the St. Louis Cardinals won it in seven games. Yaz was the team's captain through its succession of near misses in the 1970s, with a lineup that included stars like Fred Lynn and Jim Rice. The drama they provided, particularly in the 1975 series against the Cincinnati Reds, perhaps the greatest World Series ever,

spurred a resurgence of interest in baseball. The game-winning home run in the 12th inning of game six by the Vermont native Carlton Fisk remains perhaps the single greatest moment in Red Sox history, but then Cincinnati came back to win the deciding seventh game.

Such a rich history created a unique base of fans who are knowledgeable, skeptical, and intensely loyal. The Boston media, like the fans, have a reputation for being competitive, cynical, intelligent, and sometimes cruel. The Red Sox play on baseball's oldest field, Fenway Park, celebrated for its character and intimacy that make fans feel like participants. John Updike described Fenway as "a lyric little bandbox of a ballpark. Everything is painted green and seems in curiously sharp focus, like the inside of an old-fashioned peeping-type Easter egg. It was built in 1912 and rebuilt in 1934, and offers, as do most Boston artifacts, a compromise between Man's Euclidean determinations and Nature's beguiling irregularities."

There is little parking at Fenway. Its old wooden seats are cramped, and many are behind poles. "Comfort is not the index people use to measure a day at Fenway," writes columnist Mike Barnicle. From the street it looks like a brick warehouse; only inside does it reveal itself as a ballpark. What strikes a fan first upon emerging from the narrow, crowded tunnels beneath Fenway, out into the open expanse of grass and sky, is the looming presence of the Green Monster, the 37-foot-high wall in left field, only 310 feet from home plate—the shortest distance in the big leagues—daring right-handed hitters to try to poke one over. That tantalizing wall—with its promise of easy success running so counter to the New England temperament—proved Boston's downfall for decades. Year after year, the Sox built teams loaded with right-handed power hitters, expected to tattoo the wall, at the expense of the game's other fundamentals—pitching, speed, and defense. In recent years, to increase revenues from the smallest ballpark in the majors, seats have been added on the field, along the right-field grandstands, and most strikingly, atop the Green Monster.

In 2000 the Yawkey family trust announced that it would sell the club after 70 years of ownership, spurring more spending on star players and culminating in a huge contract for slugger Manny Ramirez. In January 2002 a group led by futures investor John Henry and television producer Tom Werner bought the Sox in a record-setting sale, which included New England's cable television sports network, ensuring that the team would remain among the richest in baseball. The Sox payroll became one of the game's highest—behind only the Yankees—and the team drew record numbers of fans, night after night, to sold-out

Fenway. Directed by Epstein, the youngest general manager in the history of baseball, and veteran executive Larry Lucchino, the Sox combined the benefits of an exorbitant payroll with a quantitative, statistics-based approach to player selection and a new emphasis on pitching and defense. The team has joined the trend of signing an increasing number of players from Latin America and Asia, and fans have embraced new stars like Garciparra, Martinez, and Ortiz as local heroes. When Epstein and Lucchino allowed the legendary Martinez, a former Cy Young award winner, to defect to the Mets following the World Series victory, it was a sign that the team had dropped its tradition of keeping aging stars, just as it had broken the habit of building teams around big, slow sluggers. With a new ownership and management style, the Red Sox began to write a new ending to a suddenly old story.

Bruce Chadwick and David M. Spindel, *The Boston Red Sox: Memories and Mementos of New England's Team* (1992); David Halberstam, "The Fan Divided," *Boston Globe*, October 6, 1986; Halberstam, *The Summer of '49* (1989); Donald Hall, *Fathers Playing Catch with Sons* (1985); Dan Shaughnessy, *At Fenway: Dispatches from Red Sox Nation* (1996); Shaughnessy, *Curse of the Bambino* (1990); Mike Sowell, *One Pitch Away: The Players' Stories of the 1986 League Championships and World Series* (1995); John Updike, "Hub Fans Bid Kid Adieu," in *Assorted Prose* (1965); Updike, "Rapt by the Radio," *Boston Globe*, October 6, 1986.

Louis Mazzari

Boxing Boxing, one of the world's oldest and most violent sports, has been a part of New England culture since the early 19th century. Introduced into New England in the late 1830s as bare-knuckle prizefighting, boxing's popularity expanded throughout the region during the 1840s, particularly in Boston, where scores of recently arrived Irish immigrants had settled. In 1849, Massachusetts passed legislation prohibiting bare-knuckle prizefighting, imposing severe prison sentences and steep fines on combatants, promoters, and other ring attendants. Despite these penalties, Boston permitted bare-knuckle prizefighting exhibitions in theaters, saloons, and show halls. Boston's Irish American males highly esteemed the manly prowess expressed by prizefighting. The sport, moreover, provided Irish American men, many of whom were denied access to legitimate avenues of economic and social opportunities, alternate means to material success. Later, in the 20th century, boxing would afford similar gains to other disadvantaged ethnic and racial groups in New England, including Italians and African Americans.

In 1890 New Orleans legalized boxing under the Queensberry rules, which limited

