

First Base Among Equals
Baseball and Canada's Prime Ministers
By Stephen Dame

The most famous sentence ever written by a Canadian author is W.P. Kinsella's, "if you build it, he will come." That ghostly utterance grabs top spot by edging out McCall and Clarkson's equally phantomic line about Pierre Trudeau: "he haunts us still." These are irrefutable facts. Given the weighty importance of these two literate lyrics, it would seem I am forced, by some gravitational pull of personal interest and Canadian content, to combine the topic of baseball and prime ministers into a single research paper. The history of baseball and the history of Canadian politics are two peculiar interests of mine. I was so enamoured with the latter that I, young and without need of much money, pursued a career which was happy to pay me little and demand a lot: politics. I worked first as a legislative assistant to a man who was once a mayor, and then a Member of Parliament. Quite quickly, my favourite part of the job became taking visiting constituents on tours of Parliament Hill. "This is where John Diefenbaker's ghost has been seen, pacing the hallways" or "here, in this unassuming East Block closet, is where Pierre and Maggie would escape for 'private time' during the early days of their marriage." All you had to do was ask the security guards for their stories. The older looking ones, who'd been around awhile: they'd give you all the greatest info.

One of the pieces of information I garnered during my years of working on, and touring through, Parliament Hill was about the front lawn. The lawn in front of the Centre Block of Parliament Hill is massive. It hosts more than 100,000 tourists each Canada Day and is larger than the baseball field inside SkyDome. It is surrounded by statues of prime ministers and nation builders. The statue I visited most often was that of Lester Pearson. Unlike his contemporaries, Pearson is depicted seated. His statue is angled ever so slightly to stage left. There he sits, overlooking the vast lawns of Parliament Hill. His monument was constructed this way (according to security guard lore) so that he could sit watch over the softball and baseball games played on the grass before the House of Commons. Such a baseball nut was Pearson, those who honoured him thought it appropriate his statue be able to watch baseball forever. Sadly, baseball games are very rare on the lawns nowadays. Frisbee, the occasional game of catch, and soccer are more reliably seen there now. Even the annual softball game between Members of Parliament and the press, dating back more than a century, has passed into memory. Yet, Lester B remains patiently waiting for a game to break out, on the very spot where he himself, both as Leader of the Opposition and later as Prime Minister of Canada, played ball. This research paper will endeavour to uncover what other links exist between our Heads of Government and the game of baseball.



We should start at the beginning. The origins of baseball are, of course, disputed. So starting at the beginning of Canadian prime ministers is a wiser course. On July 1st, 1867, John Alexander Macdonald became prime minister in a capital city he'd chosen, vested with powers by a Constitution he'd largely written and governed over a nation which he and George Brown had willed into existence. Macdonald grew up in Kingston, Ontario. The Ottawa Journal once looked down its nose at the colonial capital and remarked, "baseball is not played in centres of civilisation and art," but in Kingston and other unCapital, "remote Ontario towns, it is still played. But with the opening up of colonization roads, it is supposed the people of those parts will become more civilized and gradually be divorced from their rude pastimes."¹ Cricket, fox hunting and horse racing, were also popular in the Kingston of the 1850's and 60's.² Despite critics of the sport, by the early 1890's, the Globe was referring to baseball as Canada's "national game."³ Macdonald was in the last year of his life when the very first press gallery vs. Members of Parliament game was played. Except, in 1891, they played lawn tennis, not baseball.⁴ No record exists of Macdonald playing or attending a baseball game. The only tangential links we have to our first PM and our original "national game," is the nickname given to Toronto Blue Jays infielder John McDonald (sp), who was dubbed The Prime Minister of Defence.⁵ McDonald was also namesake to a now defunct baseball blog calling itself "John McDonald's Cabinet." In 1885, the year in which Macdonald allowed Louis Riel to hang "though every dog in Quebec shall bark," the Bain Wagon Company produced promotional trading cards featuring prominent people. On one of the cards, John A. is in the process of being hit by the swinging bat of his Interior Minister Louis Rodrigue Masson. In a "pox on all your houses" creative choice by the artist, Masson is simultaneously in the process of being hit by a pitch.



¹ London Advertiser. *The Baseball Season*. May 3, 1887

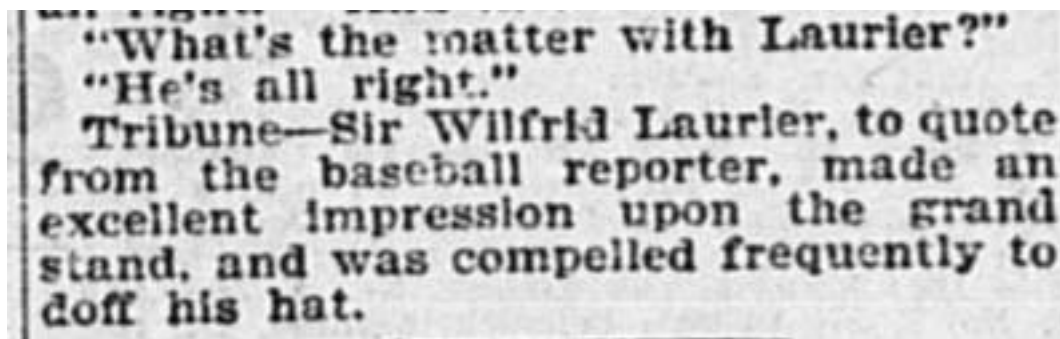
² Gwynn, Richard. *John A. Macdonald: the man who made us*. Page 25

³ The Globe. *Sport*. August 29, 1891

⁴ The Ottawa Daily Citizen. *Lawn Tennis*. September 17, 1891

⁵ Total Pro Sports. *AL East Preview*. March 12 2009

The first Prime Minister to witness a baseball game while in office was most likely Sir John Thompson. Thompson was most notable at the time of his government for being Catholic. This was a trait of some controversy in 1894, especially since he had converted to that ancient religion for the sake of his wife, Annie. Thompson is best known today for creating and shepherding through Parliament the Criminal Code of Canada. Well, to be honest, he's most famous for dropping dead (literally, of a massive heart attack) while Queen Victoria bestowed a knighthood upon him. Yet in his short time in office, Sir John made prime ministerial baseball history. During the summer of 1894, John and Lady Thompson made their way to the Muskoka region of Ontario for a month long vacation. They were greeted at the Gravenhurst train station by a band, the mayor and a large number of excited citizens.⁶ Ten days after his arrival, the prime minister attended the annual Bracebridge picnic. Thompson addressed a gathering, watched an entire lacrosse game played between teams from Barrie and Orillia and was present on the grounds as a baseball game was being played.⁷ It is unclear for how long he observed the baseballers. Lacrosse and baseball matches continued to be a feature of the picnic until at least the end of the century. During the 1896 Bracebridge event, "a baseball match between Emsdale and Bracebridge resulted in an easy victory for the home team."⁸



If John A. Macdonald was the founding prime minister, then Wilfrid Laurier; confident, competent, worldly and bilingual, was the prime minister who shaped the nation for the century to come. It was during the Laurier years (all 15 of them) that our direct and verifiable links between baseball and prime ministers began. While Laurier was still opposition leader in 1890, the Eastern Morning News ran a letter praising the "propagandism" of baseball. "I am joined by many leading cricketers," wrote a petitioner named Leduc, "that baseball will improve the character" of young players in the area more so than the more traditional British bat and ball game.⁹

⁶ Montreal Gazette. *Premier in Muskoka*. August 1, 1894

⁷ The Globe. *Picnic at Bracebridge*. August 10, 1894

⁸ The Globe. *Mr. Ethier's Victory*. August 14, 1896

⁹ Eastern Morning News. *Baseball in Hull*. April 11, 1890

As the nation was growing and changing, so too were her preferences for outdoor sport. During the 1896 election campaign, prime minister Charles Tupper visited Hamilton, Ontario. He was honoured with a parade through downtown. Yet, in this year of electoral change, a much larger crowd rallied to what the *Globe and Mail* called “an antidote to Tupperism” in Dundurn Park. The Laurier Liberals organized the event, timed to begin as the Tupper procession ended, which featured speakers and sporting events and the first use of baseball as a campaign tool. A baseball game was played before the Reformers began to speak at their open-air rally. Over 10,000 people attended.¹⁰ In a column inspired by election fever entitled “Things The Star Would Like To Know,” the venerable Toronto newspaper asked one political question, “when will Canada have its own Navy?” The answer would be 1911, when Wilfrid Laurier’s government made it so. The column however queried twice about baseball, asking “when will Toronto finally win a pennant” (the Maple Leafs won later that same season) and “when the Montreal baseball team expects to be in it?”¹¹ (we’re wondering the same thing 120 years later). Political picnics of the era commonly featured baseball games. An August, 1899 affair in Oshawa dubbed a “monster picnic” involved a baseball game preceding a speech by Laurier himself.¹²

One of the more interesting Laurier related baseball tidbits concerns a trip the prime minister took to Chicago in 1899. Conservatives in the House were asking Laurier about his trip, when it would occur and how much it would cost, months prior to his departure. Rumours were printed in the papers of a planned goodwill exhibition in Chicago during that city’s fall festival. The leaders of the America’s were to be invited to a pageant of progress in “this central metropolis of the continent.”¹³ Laurier told the House that he had not yet been invited, and so no plans for a Chicago sojourn existed. Yet, by October of 1899, Laurier was rail-bound to the windy city, one of U.S. President McKinley’s guests of honour. Laurier was feted in the streets during a city-wide parade which kicked off the celebration. The *Chicago Tribune* noted “the fact that Sir Wilfrid’s carriage, like that of President McKinley’s, was drawn by four horses, while each of the others had but two, was notice to the crowds that he was someone of special prominence.”¹⁴ Newspaper accounts then detailed how the parade concluded at the West Side Park grandstand, the baseball grounds at Polk and Lincoln Streets. The Chicago Orphans (one of the short-lived nicknames of the modern day Cubs) played a double header that fall day, winning one game against Cleveland and later downing Louisville. While no details are given as to whether any of the dignitaries stayed to watch either game, The *Globe* quotes a *Tribune* scribe who dropped this hint as to Sir Wilfrid’s possible activities, “Sir Wilfrid Laurier, to quote from the baseball reporter, made an excellent impression upon the grandstand, and was compelled frequently to doff his hat.”¹⁵

¹⁰ The *Globe*. *Fighting To Win*. June 22, 1896

¹¹ The *Toronto Daily Star*. *The Star Would Like To Know*. August 16, 1897

¹² The *Toronto Daily Star*. *A Liberal Picnic*. August 8, 1899

¹³ The *Globe*. *Sir Wilfrid in Chicago*. Oct 11, 1899

¹⁴ The *Chicago Tribune*. *Procession*. Oct 8, 1899

¹⁵ The *Globe*. *Sir Wilfrid in Chicago*. Oct 11, 1899

The following year, 1900, saw the first reported baseball game on the grounds of Parliament Hill. The Senate team defeated Members of the House of Commons by a score of 19-7 on the nation's soggy front lawn.¹⁶ In 1902, the Liberals again used baseball as a lure to one of their open-air picnic rallies. This time, Ontario Premier George William Ross spoke after the game, urging all 6,000 present to vote Liberal both federally and provincially.¹⁷ The 1905 inauguration of Alberta as a province brought with it a great celebration in its new capital. "Edmonton gay with bunting and crowded with people: a young giant of the west."¹⁸ Crowds watched the RCMP musical ride and a baseball game. Wilfrid Laurier and Governor General Albert Grey were among the spectators for what is the best documented presence of an early prime minister observing baseball.¹⁹ An annual report of the RCMP, addressed to Sir Wilfrid and tabled in the House of Commons in the spring of 1909, noted that the Inuit of Herschel Island "show the true spirit of sport in their games of baseball. They play on the hard snow, when the thermometer registers 25 degrees below zero."²⁰

The Globe noted baseball games being played in nine different towns in Ontario and Quebec as part of official 1910 Victoria Day celebrations. Laurier was in Ottawa on Sunday before departing for Toronto that evening ahead of the holiday Monday. Baseball games were played at public gatherings on both cities exhibition grounds that weekend.²¹ That same year, Laurier made history as the first prime minister to throw out a ceremonial first pitch at a baseball game. Travelling to Red Deer, Alberta as part of a pre-election tour of the west that summer, Sir Wilfrid was invited to toss the ball before a game between Red Deer and Alix on August 12, 1910. "I thank God that I am in perfect health," he said. "I don't know that I have ever felt better in my life."²² Yet, Laurier's best interaction with ball players was saved for the final campaign of his career. While touring Nova Scotia during the 1911 writ, Sir Wilfrid arrived in Stellarton, Nova Scotia. The Toronto Daily Star carried the tale back to its readers:

"Stellarton and Westville are engaged in a life and death struggle for the baseball championship of Pictou County and a Homeric struggle took place at the former place yesterday afternoon in which the fate of the nation hung. The Premier happened to be staying over in Stellarton for lunch and the chance was too good to lose. With a hearty laugh, the Premier consented to pitch the first ball, thereby rendering eighteen men supremely happy."²³

¹⁶ The Ottawa Citizen. *Senators Made Runs*. June 4, 1900

¹⁷ The Toronto Daily Star. *Ross Government Will Fight For Safe Majority*. Oct 6, 1902

¹⁸ The Globe. *The Great Inauguration of Alberta Province*. September 2, 1905

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ The Globe. *Stirring Tales Of The Wild North*. March 17, 1909

²¹ The Globe. *A Great Day For Outdoor Sports*. May 25, 1910

²² The Globe. *Keep Up Standard of Canadian Life*. August 11, 1910

²³ The Toronto Daily Star. *Tremendous Crowd at New Glasgow Gave Liberal Leader a Fine Reception*. September 1, 1911

The story goes on to detail how Laurier asked his Minister of Finance, former Nova Scotia Premier William Fielding, to be his catcher. “‘Come on Fielding,’ commanded Sir Wilfrid. He knew where to stand too, having pitched a ball at one of the games in the west on his trip out there.”²⁴ Unlike most first pitches of a ceremonial nature, Laurier seems to have been pitching to a live batter. The reporter on site recalled that Laurier didn’t wind up and that his pitch “looked curiously easy.” Even still, the batter “missed it by five feet.”²⁵

Batter Missed the Ball.
 “Come on Fielding commanded Sir Wilfrid, covering as much of the white plume as possible under his derby hat. He knew where to stand, too, having pitched a ball at one of the games in the West on his trip out there. The Finance Minister could do anything but cheer. His voice is a minus quantity these days. The present chronicler is not a sporting writer and does not know what sort of the ball the Premier delivered. He preserved none of the hoary traditions of the craft. He refused either to paw the ground or “wind up.” The ball looked curiously easy, it must be confessed, but, of course, it was too much for the loyal batter who naturally missed it by five feet. It puzzled Mr. Fielding.

By the time Robert Borden became prime minister, baseball was firmly established and referred to as Canada’s “national game.” In the era before indoor rinks made hockey a more viable sport for the masses in cities and townships alike, baseball reigned supreme. A baseball playing First World War soldier, fighting during Borden’s time in office, remarked to a military newspaper: “little did we dream when we left the Land of the Maple, that we’d be playing the National Game behind the firing line in France six months later.”²⁶ Members of Parliament played the national game against members of the press for the first time during this era. What came to be an (occasionally interrupted) annual tradition, played on the front lawn of Parliament Hill and known as the Press Gallery Game, began as a 1912 softball match-up:

“Senator Gratton O’Leary, who spent his long life covering the Hill, recalled a 1912 softball game, with Laurier and Borden as spectators. O’Leary, then a young writer for the Ottawa Journal played third base. After only three innings the journalists were losing 33 to 7 and ‘the game was called for cocktails.’”²⁷

²⁴ The Toronto Daily Star. *Tremendous Crowd at New Glasgow Gave Liberal Leader a Fine Reception*. September 1, 1911

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ The Iodine Chronicle. *Play Ball*. June 15, 1916. Page 37

²⁷ Levine, Allan. *Scrum Wars: The Prime Ministers and the Media*. 1996

The 1913 press vs. M.P.'s game was a baseball spectacle for the masses. "Thousands congregated on the terrace of Parliament Hill when the teams lined up, including Premier Borden, Sir Wilfrid Laurier and speaker Sproule."²⁸ The game ended in a 22-19 victory for the journalists, but apparently was not a tightly contested affair. "The casualties and errors supplied the fans with enough explosive material to blow up the Parliament buildings."²⁹ Legend has it that a year later, during a baseball version of the M.P.'s vs. press game in 1914, a messenger named W. A. F. Lalonde hit a home run clean across Wellington street and through a window of a neighbouring building.³⁰ George H Bolvin, Member for Shefford and serving as a bilingual umpire, called for Lalonde to round the bases in both official languages. The press was again victorious, this time by a score of 15-13, but the game was no better played. According to The Globe, "the score in runs had nothing on the score in errors."³¹

BASEBALL ON PARLIAMENT HILL—PRESS GALLERY TEAM DEFEATS MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT



Members (left to right) : Boyes (South Simcoe), r.f.; Turcotte, c.; Martin (Regina), 2nd b.; Edwards (Frontenac) r.f.; Rhodes (Cumberland), 1st b.; H. F. Gadsby, umpire; Dr. Beland, umpire; Morphy (North Perth), s.a.; Sevigny (St. Johns-Iberville), p. and 1st b.; McCurdy (Queens-Shelburne), l.f.; Sharpe (North Ontario), p. and c.f.



Press Gallery team : Lee (Ottawa Free Press), c.; Paisley (Regina Leader), 1st b.; Joy (Toronto Star), r.f.; Gadsby, umpire; Hannay (Montreal Herald), 2nd b.; Dr. Beland, umpire; Graham, l.f.; Anderson (The Globe), s.a.; Ford (Winnipeg Telegram), p.; Clarke (The Globe), r.f.; O'Leary (Ottawa Journal), 3b. Boys—Speelmaker and McGregor.

²⁸ The Globe. *Parliament at Play*. May 10, 1913

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ The Globe. *M.P.'s to Play Press at Softball*. May 19, 1936

³¹ The Globe. *Pencil Pushers Beat The Parliamentarians*. May 22, 1914

1915 marked the last time the press would play the Members of Parliament at baseball for years. The First World War got in the way. In this going-away affair, the press again defeated the M.P.'s, this time with a dinner on the line. While he no longer could view baseball on the Parliamentary lawns, Prime Minister Borden witnessed multiple games during the conflict while visiting Canadian troops overseas.³² The high point for Canadian baseball during the First World War occurred on July 1, 1918 in Tincques, France. There, the Canadian Corps organized a sports day. The Corps was in its glory, Vimy and Hill 70 had been won, and the Canadians would soon be in the midst of their fabled "Last 100 Days." Morale was high. The end of the war seemed near. A reported 70,000 people packed a specially constructed stadium to watch the championships of many track and field events. The baseball final was the main event. It was scheduled last, after tea, for 4:15pm in the large stadium. The soccer final, scheduled for the same time, was held in a small field without grandstands. The baseball game was reportedly a classic, as tight, low-scoring affairs, were considered the best type of baseball at the time. The 7th Engineer Battalion, consisting of Vimy veterans from various provinces, defeated the 1st Divisional Ammunition Column, an Ontario regiment which once included John McCrae, by a score of 3-2 in 11 innings. The Toronto Star reported that "baseball lasted too long."³³ Prime Minister Robert Borden, the Duke of Connaught and Lieutenant-General Arthur Currie watched the game in person. Famed Indigenous athlete and soldier Tom Longboat competed earlier in the day and may have watched the game. Borden, who earlier in the war became the first Prime Minister to be photographed at a baseball game, remarked that it was "the greatest day of his life."³⁴



³² Dame, Stephen. <http://baseballresearch.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Dame17.pdf>

³³ The Toronto Daily Star. *A Day of Sports an Antidote to Powder*. August 7, 1918

³⁴ The Globe. *Dominion Day At The Front*. July 6, 1918

After the war, during a marathon budget vote, Members of Parliament sought to use the greatest game as their great escape. M.P.'s debated for 15 straight hours, through the night, on June 2, 1920. Borden himself stayed late, and just before midnight a young William Lyon Mackenzie King took his seat. Many members fell asleep in their chairs as the hours went on:

“A lone bat was the most active member in the Chamber. It found its way into the House after midnight. Most of the time there were more Members outside of the Chamber than in it. As dawn streaked through the windows some of the Members slipped out and enjoyed a little game of baseball.”³⁵

After nearly a decade in office, shepherding the country through a world war, Robert Borden resigned the office of Prime Minister in 1920. His successor, Arthur Meighen, lasted only a few months before falling to defeat in the 1921 general election. He stayed on as party leader, and did again temporarily become Prime Minister after a scandal toppled Mackenzie King's government in 1925. In between his two unelected turns as PM, Meighen did cross the lines of a baseball field. During Victoria Day celebrations in Smith's Falls, Ontario, Meighen threw out a ceremonial first pitch in a game played against Merickville. “It had first been intended that Mr. Meighen should address the crowd,” yet organizers thought “that would impart a political flavour to the day and this they wanted to avoid.”³⁶ So, Meighen tossed his ball and went home. In 1924, Despite “unpropitious weather conditions,” a crowd turned out to hear Meighen speak in Island Grove, Ont., near Lake Simcoe. He railed against his political opponents and then made way for sporting events. “Baseball, lacrosse, swimming, boating, in addition to the attractions of a miniature midway, all helped furnish amusement for the large crowd present.”³⁷

William Lyon Mackenzie King, grandson of a rebel and very proud mama's boy, ascended to the highest office in the land in December of 1921. According to his latest biographer, Allan Levine, King saw prophetic visions in his shaving cream, sought political advice from his deceased mother and carried on conversations with Pat, his Irish Terrier.³⁸ Despite his private proclivities, King led a monumentally successful public life. Before taking the Liberal leadership, King worked in New York City for the Rockefeller Foundation. Hired by John D. himself, King was a pioneer in the emerging science of Industrial Relations. He became a trusted confidant to Rockefeller and assisted he and his Standard Oil Co. when a group of overzealous strike breakers opened fire on strikers during the Ludlow Massacre. Rockefeller was, of course, royalty in New York City. The Brooklyn Superbas held John D. Rockefeller Day's in 1915, once in Florida during the spring and again at Ebbets Field. Rockefeller himself was present at both with some “old pals,”³⁹ but the New York Tribune does not specify if King was among them. That same year the Tribune again notes the John D. and associates watched Ty Cobb at the Polo Grounds. Frustratingly, since we know King and Rockefeller were very close, the paper does not indicate who occupied those seats.

³⁵ The Globe. *Members Nod In Their Seats Awaiting Vote*. June 30, 1920

³⁶ The Globe. *Ex Premier Takes Part in Baseball Opening*. May 25, 1922

³⁷ The Globe. *Lennox is Acclaimed as Tory White Hope to Unseat Premier*. August 5, 1924

³⁸ Levine, Allan. *King: A Life Guided by the Hand of Destiny*. 2012

³⁹ New York Tribune. *John D. Sees Superbas Play Their First Game*. March 7, 1915

The Liberal Party under King held an “old fashioned basket picnic” inside Hanlan’s Point baseball stadium on August 15, 1920. 3,000 people attended. “The honourable Mr. King was tendered an ovation from the crowd when he arrived in the baseball grounds. His speech was a splendid effort.”⁴⁰ When the politicking finished, informal games of baseball and other games were played on the home field of the Toronto Maple Leafs. The next day, the Liberals again used a “good program of sports” as part of the draw to a Mackenzie King speaking event in Markham.⁴¹ Baseball as part of picnic style events continued well into King’s 22 year Premiership. In 1925, he spoke at a “mammoth picnic” in between games of baseball being played at Richmond Hill and even announced the date of the next federal election.⁴²

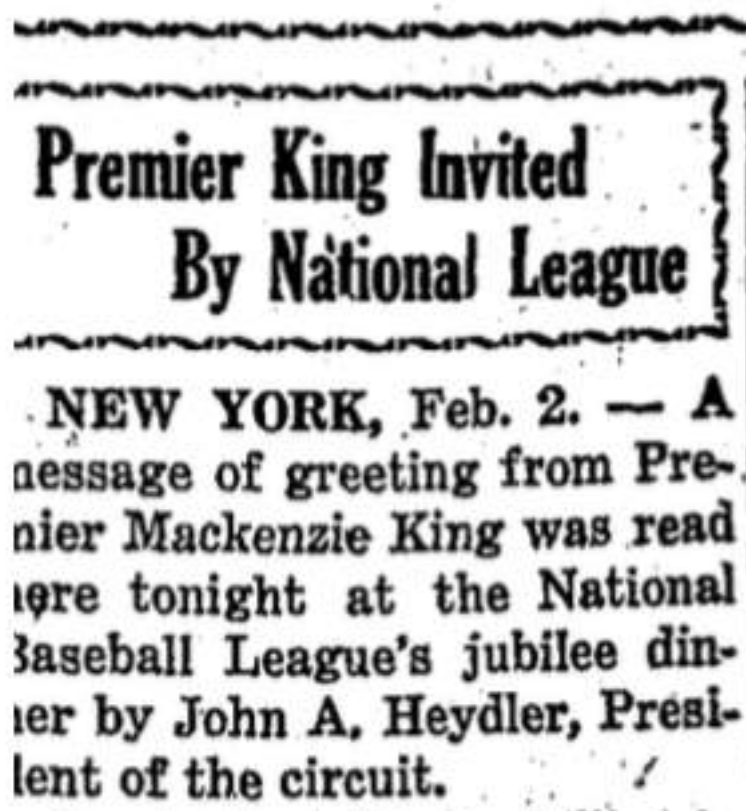


⁴⁰ The Globe. *Liberal Chiefs Draw Big Crowd at The Stadium*. August 16, 1920

⁴¹ The Globe. Advertisement: *Grand Liberal Demonstration*. August 9, 1924

⁴² The Globe. *Liberals To Meet At Richmond Hill*. August 22, 1925

Like everything involving this Prime Minister, it gets more interesting in 1926. In February, four months before his government fell and eventually brought about the consequential King-Byng election, a letter from the Prime Minister was read at the National League's jubilee dinner in New York. King had been invited to attend the winter meeting. Both he and U.S. President Coolidge sent "a message of greeting."⁴³ Discussions of a Canadian entry into the National League had been intermittent since 1885.⁴⁴ The Toronto International League club had just built a brand new, major league sized ballpark, so perhaps King's invite had something to do with interested parties hoping to see the Maple Leafs move up.



King, who was not an athlete, did not write of playing the game in his memoirs. But it was under his leadership that the annual press vs. M.P.'s softball game returned to Parliament Hill. The game was suspended during the years of the First World War and did not return until 1936. King tossed out the ceremonial first pitch, while R.B. Bennett, who himself would become Prime Minister 3 months later, served as the umpire. The 1948 version of the press vs. M.P. showdown was another victory for the scribes, this time by a score of 19-17.⁴⁵

⁴³ The Globe. *Premier King Invited by National League*. Feb 3, 1926

⁴⁴ Baseball Obscura Blog. *That Time Toronto Nearly Joined The National League*. June 28, 2017 accessed via: <https://medium.com/@BaseballObscura/that-time-toronto-almost-joined-the-national-league-in-1886-30c4fd46c306>

⁴⁵ The Globe. *Gallery Players Beat Commoners*. June 16, 1948

King also presided over a baseball related issue that would continue to entangle his successors for decades. The idea of a sports lottery was first proposed as a way to raise funds for the Second World War. "In exploring the measures by which Canada may finance the cost of war, estimated at \$500,000,000 for the first full year, the Department of Finance is examining every suggestion made - including sweepstakes."⁴⁶ The government's first caller on the subject was "the representative of a U.S. patent owner on a sweepstakes system operating on World Series baseball games and International minor league baseball games."⁴⁷ The proto ProLine was appealing to the government because the U.S. salesman promised it would bring in enough money to cover half the cost of one year's worth of warring.⁴⁸ The prospect of Canadian citizens betting on sporting events required serious political leg work. Such a venture would require the amendment of the Criminal Code, and would not in fact become an everyday reality until nearly fifty years later. King ran into a more tongue and check controversy when he and the baseball powers-that-be were criticized by the *Globe and Mail* for poor scheduling. "With strange lack of tact and co-operation, the World's Series baseball games are arranged to begin on October 5, date of the Parkdale by-election."⁴⁹



⁴⁶ The *Globe and Mail*. *Ottawa Studies Legal Sweeps For War Funds*. May 7, 1940

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ The *Globe and Mail*. *Notes and Comments*. October 4, 1938

When Mackenzie King stepped aside after becoming the longest serving prime minister anywhere on earth, it was Louis St. Laurent who had to fill his giant, occult loving, shoes. The Liberal party set about to brand the avuncular St. Laurent as "Uncle Louis." The Toronto Daily Star ran a glowing full page tribute to the new Prime Minister. It included the usual biographical details but added that, even at his age, he and his wife "enjoy playing baseball games." The story went on to note that "he reportedly hits a straight ball, but not a long one."⁵⁰ Just 86 days after welcoming Newfoundland and Labrador as a new Canadian province, Prime Minister St. Laurent travelled to St. John's to celebrate the island's Founder's Day holiday. On his first day in Newfoundland, "no formal observances were scheduled, apart from the opening of the baseball season."⁵¹ In 1950, the proceeds of the annual press vs. M.P. game on Parliament Hill were donated to the Manitoba Flood Relief Fund.⁵² Most significantly, the 1950's mark a massive change in the fortunes of the friendly game on Parliament Hill. On June 5, 1950, the M.P.'s defeated the press for their first documented victory since these games began in 1912. The 1951 version of the game was called "agonizing" by the Gazette,⁵³ and it was in fact a blowout. Making up for their previous decades of futility, the M.P.'s crushed the writers by a score of 18-1.⁵⁴ Lionel Conacher, eventually a tragic figure in the tale of Parliamentary softball, first made his mark in 1952. Conacher and his fellow Members of Parliament defeated the press by a score of 22-14, the elected Members third straight victory. "Conacher, who was chosen last year as Canada's top male athlete of the half century, looked good enough to stand for re-nomination. In addition to playing a creditable second base, he walloped two homers."⁵⁵ The next year, Conacher again played in the game. He watched as Governor General Vincent Massey throw out the first pitch. The 1954 press vs M.P. game is only remembered for the tragedy which took place on the lawns:

"Lionel Conacher, Canada's outstanding male athlete of the half century, died of a heart attack tonight shortly after making a three-base hit in a softball game on the Parliament Hill lawn. The 54-year-old member for Toronto Trinity collapsed on third base in the sixth inning of the annual game. He died en route to Ottawa General Hospital."⁵⁶

⁵⁰ Toronto Daily Star. *Close Knit Family in Joys and Worries*. June 18, 1949

⁵¹ The Globe and Mail. *Celebrate Founders Day*. June 24, 1949

⁵² The Evening Citizen. *Parliamentary Softball to Aid Flood Sufferers*. June 6, 1950

⁵³ The Gazette. *People on Parliament Hill*. June 30, 1951

⁵⁴ The Globe and Mail. *M.P.'s Beat Writers*. June 8, 1951

⁵⁵ The Globe and Mail. *M.P.s' Beat Press Gallery*. May 29, 1952

⁵⁶ The Globe and Mail. *Stricken Playing Ball, Lionel Conacher Dies*. May 27, 1954

MP's FAREWELL TO CONACHER

Leaders Join In Tributes

MP's Praise His Sportsmanship And Friendliness

A GUYTON BARNES SERVICE.
For 35 minutes this afternoon the House of Commons did honor to the memory of Lionel Conacher, the Liberal member for Toronto-Trinity and great Canadian athlete who died during the Commons-Press Gallery softball game yesterday.

His leader, the Prime Minister, said sportsman of all the world would remember Mr. Conacher's exploits, and Opposition Leader Drew said the House was "saying farewell to a good friend and a good sport in the best meaning of that word."

CCF Leader Goldswell remembered that Mr. Conacher had looked forward to seeing one of his daughters receive a degree at the University of Toronto today, and Social Credit Leader Low remembered the affability and kindness of one who played games so aggressively.

David Croft, Liberal, Toronto-Spadina, said that "the Big Train" had died as he lived.

'Big Train' Dies Stretching Single Into a Triple

Lionel Conacher Collapses During MP-Press Gallery Softball Game on Hill

By RICHARD JACKMAN of The Journal.

Lionel Conacher died last night stretching a single into a triple.

Sport's "Big Train" and Politics' Liberal MP for Toronto-Trinity was shortcircuiting the Commons team in the annual softball game with the Press Gallery on the centre lawn of Parliament Hill.

The politicians were leading 13 to 9 at the top of the sixth. The greatest athlete Canada so far has produced lifted a fly into short left field, and on its tumble amid the crowd scampered to third.

There, bleeding heavily at the nose and mouth, he pitched over on his face.

Melvor Utters Prayer.

Rev. Dan McIvor, Liberal MP for Port William said a prayer for him. They told him, on a stretcher into an ambulance, but he was dead on arrival at 8:35 p.m., in Ottawa General Hospital, of a heart attack. It had happened in less than 30 minutes.

The players and their stand of some 200 spectators had watched the start of Canadian

'Not Asking Many More Favors'



THE 'BIG TRAIN' SHUNTS ONE.
Lionel Conacher lifts a three-bagger.

'Good-Will' Flight Over Nicaragua

Unprecedented Action by U.S. Warning to Guatemala

By LOUIS FERGUSON

Three 18-engine American bomber bombers roared out the Gatunes at Fort Worth, today on an unprecedented "good will" flight over Nicaragua, next-day neighbor Communist-influenced Guatemalan.

Brig. Gen. John D. Ryan, commander of the 18th Air Division, took off in the lead plane from Carswell Air Force base at 2:15 a.m. EDT and other two super-bombers followed at eight-minute intervals.

Will Not Land.

The non-stop trip was expected to last about 17½ hours giving the B-36's at least 10 minutes in Nicaragua sky. They will not land.

Defense Department spokesmen said officially the flight was a good will mission in observance of Nicaraguan Air Day, made at the request of the South American group.

Ironically, the 1954 game was not scheduled to take place, but Conacher himself rallied his fellow Members, including past organizer Dan McIvor, and the game went on. McIvor, a reverend before entering politics, prayed over Conacher as those gathered around his fallen body waited for an ambulance to arrive. "That ends the ball games," McIvor told the Ottawa Journal. Asked if he also thought the games were now at an end, Lester Pearson remarked, "It does for me."⁵⁷ Prime Minister Louis St. Laurent paid tribute to Conacher and then adjourned the House in honour of the Big Train. St. Laurent held Canada's top job for a decade before voters grew tired of he and his party. In 1957, John Diefenbaker, took the job. Diefenbaker was born near Guelph, Ontario. His family moved to the Todmorden neighbourhood of Toronto (today swallowed whole by the Don Valley Parkway), and then to northern Saskatchewan in 1903. Dief attended the Halcyon school and in his memoirs he wrote of playing ball games at recess there.⁵⁸ He went on to write that he was not much of a sportsman himself, "besides the three-legged race, I took little part in high school athletics."⁵⁹ When the First World War broke out, John Diefenbaker signed up. He ended up stationed at the Canadian military base at Shorncliffe, where thousands of games of baseball were played during the war.⁶⁰ It seems likely, given how all-encompassing the baseball culture at Shorncliffe became, that he would have witnessed, if not played, the game alongside his fellow soldiers there.

⁵⁷ The Ottawa Journal. *M.P.'s Farewell to Conacher*. May 27, 1954

⁵⁸ Diefenbaker, John. *One Canada: The Memoirs of John G. Diefenbaker*. 1975. Page 44

⁵⁹ Ibid. Page 70

⁶⁰ Dame, Stephen. <http://baseballresearch.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Dame17.pdf>

After sweeping to power in 1957 and then winning the largest majority in the history of Canadian politics just one year later, John Diefenbaker unintentionally inspired a unique squad of elected baseballers. In August of '58, the Dief government extended the House of Commons well into the summer and skipped the usual warm weather vacation. The government was using the unusual summer session to call and vote on an unprecedented number of bills. Because Diefenbaker had 208 M.P.'s, many did not feel the need to be in the House for every vote. Some even went home despite being ordered to stay by the PM. "Who would have thought that the largest majority in Canadian history would be an embarrassment for Mr. Diefenbaker?"⁶¹ The Vancouver Sun noted that, "as the session wore on, many Members absented themselves from the House. They organized a baseball team and played a game a week against anyone they could challenge."⁶² They beat an RCMP team 19-7 during a Wednesday night vote.⁶³ Spectators and players chipped in \$200 which was donated to the family of a local man who had recently been "broken up by a series of misfortunes."⁶⁴



1958 also saw the return of the Parliament Hill softball game, this time with an M.D. on hand to "check-up" on the players after the Conacher tragedy of four years earlier.⁶⁵ The Members of Parliament squared off with the Parliamentary protective staff. In terms of baseball and our prime ministers, this 1958 game was kicked off by a monumentally important ceremonial first pitch. The spectacle saw Governor General Roland Michener toss the opening ball to Prime Minister John Diefenbaker while future prime minister Lester Pearson swung the bat.

⁶¹ The Vancouver Sun. *Ottawa Report*. August 30, 1958

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ The Ottawa Citizen. *M.P.'s Score Softball Win, Add To Fund*. August 28, 1958

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ The Ottawa Citizen. *Ball On The Hill For Fit M.P.'s Only*. July 22, 1958

A film reel preserved by the CBC shows Pearson swinging and missing at the ceremonial pitch even though it was way outside. Diefenbaker howled with laughter from behind the plate while Lester B demanded the vice regal throw him another, more hittable, pitch. Michener obliged and Pearson smacked the ball well out into the Parliamentary lawn. The game itself, won 13-5 by the M.P.'s, was more of a farcical than hard fought affair. Down by a bunch, one out, the protective staff were sucking their last gasps:

"The staffers, most viewers agreed, had six men on the bases when M.P. Warner Jorgenson caught an infield fly while resting flat on his back. The six or so runners scampered in all directions, the M.P.'s peppered the ball from base to base to base and umpire M.P. Murdo Martin shut his eyes in horror. There were cries of 'Order, Mr. Speaker!' and several requests for a new federal election."⁶⁶



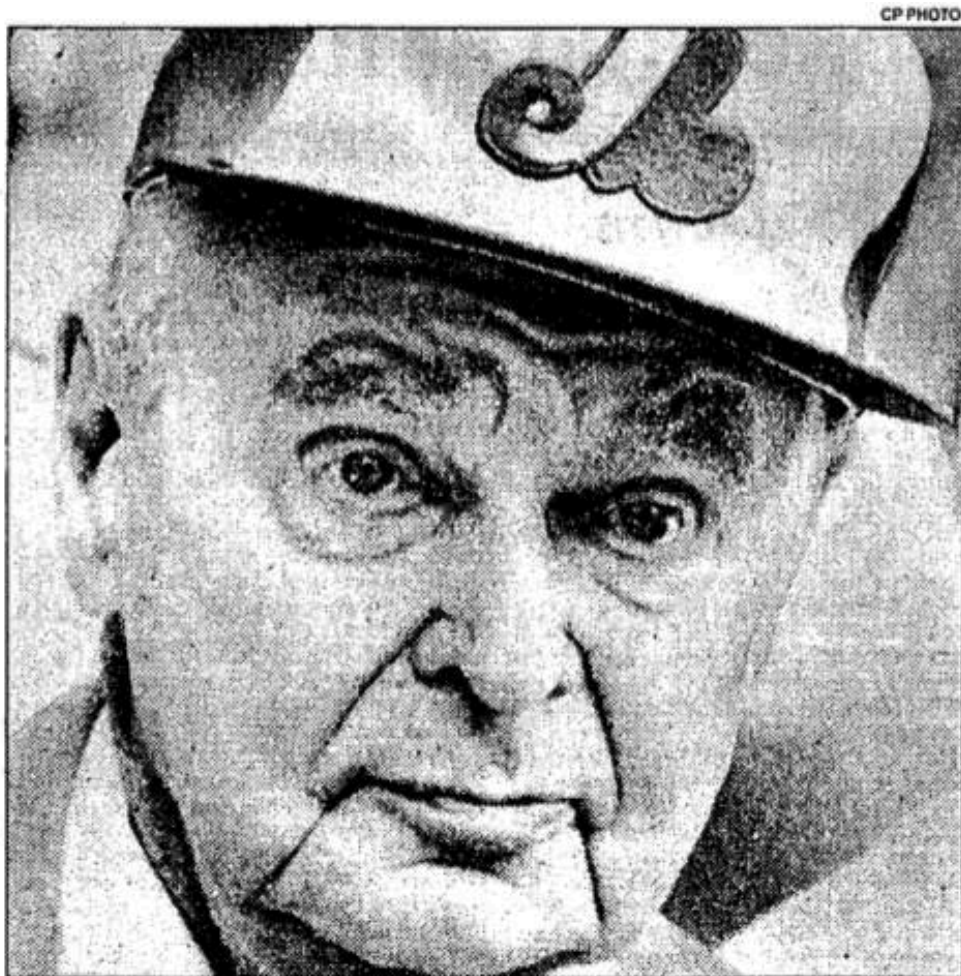
During the summer of 1960, the two prime ministers would clash again, this time as part of the revived press vs M.P. softball game. The ceremonial first pitch was this time taken by Diefenbaker, with Pearson playing behind the plate. Prime Minister Diefenbaker left after the opening ceremony, but Lester Pearson removed his jacket and played in the game. The M.P.'s again won the annual fiasco, this time by a score of 16-4. The Calgary Herald noted that Pearson's performance on the diamond was not much better than his performance at the ballot box two years previous. "Liberal leader Lester Pearson, once a semi-professional, struck out before a handful of spectators on the lawn in front of the Parliament Buildings."⁶⁷

⁶⁶ The Ottawa Citizen. *Crazy Man, Crazy! What A Game!* July 24, 1958

⁶⁷ Calgary Herald. *M.P.'s Trounce Press Gallery in Softball Tilt.* July 7, 1960

John Diefenbaker was finally defeated by Lester Pearson in 1963. He was then the victim of a coup in his own political party, turfed from his leadership position by supporters of Robert Stanfield. When he passed away in 1979, the *Toronto Star* made note of his heretofore unheralded love of baseball:

“Two weeks before he died, he went to Montreal to watch the Expos play. Baseball was his favourite sport. He was watching an Expos game on television the night before he died.”⁶⁸



Baseball fan: Two weeks before he died, he went to Montreal to watch the Expos play. Baseball was his favorite sport. He was watching an Expos game on television the night before he died.

⁶⁸ *Toronto Star. Baseball Fan.* August 17, 1979

Which brings us to the section of this paper dealing with Canada's 14th Prime Minister, the guy for whom the airport is named, and undoubtedly the biggest baseball nerd to ever occupy 24 Sussex. The connections to Pearson and the greatest game are myriad. Just five pages into Pearson's three volume autobiography, the man himself details an early baseball memory. It is an anecdote in the vein of W.P. Kinsella whereby grown men link their love of baseball to the men they loved:

"Grandfather Pearson had a particular passion for baseball, a passion inherited by his son, my father, and his grandsons. My last outing with him was on Dominion Day in 1913. He had retired from the ministry; he was frail, aging, and his eyesight had almost gone. The Toronto baseball team, in the old International League, was to play two games, morning and afternoon, on that holiday at the Ball Park at Hanlan's Point, across Toronto Bay. Grandfather was determined to go, and his son, my uncle Harold, with whom he was then living, agreed. I was happy and excited to escort. I remember we had good seats. It was a good game and my grandfather, who could hardly see the players, let alone the ball, enjoyed it as much as I did."⁶⁹

The following year, Pearson was playing second base in Hamilton's City Baseball League while he was working for the municipality. Then, as he put it in his memoirs, his world ended when the world went to war. Pearson enlisted first as a medical orderly with the University of Toronto medical unit. While stationed in Salonika, Greece, he played baseball with his fellow soldiers there. "He was a natural leader, good at baseball," said his roommate William Dafoe.⁷⁰ As the war went on, and especially after the arrival of the American troops, baseball became a more and more prominent part of soldiers daily life. Teams were organized by battalions, military hospitals, groups of officers and even prisoners of war. Baseball was played regularly by Canadian soldiers at more than 90 known locations throughout Europe. Canadians played on their rest and reserve rotations, sometimes within metres of German shell landings. Games between Canadian and American troops took on a naturally more competitive nature. At soccer stadiums and cricket pitches, thousands of locals and service people paid money to watch military men play baseball.⁷¹ When asked during an interview for an External Affairs position what his greatest contribution to the war had been, Pearson deadpanned, "my home run at Bramshott (base)" which helped defeat a team of Americans.⁷²

⁶⁹ Pearson, Lester B. *Memoirs of the Right Honourable Lester Pearson. Vol 1.* 1972 Page 5

⁷⁰ Toronto Daily Star. *Pearson: A Good Man In a Wicked Time.* December 16, 1967

⁷¹ <http://baseballresearch.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Dame17.pdf>

⁷² Ibid.

While on leave in London, Pearson looked the wrong way crossing the street and was hit by a bus. He survived the double decker hit and run, and as a result may have survived the war. He was invalided home. Healed up by the summer of 1919, Pearson was at a loss in terms of direction. "What then, to do? I was restless, unsettled, and had no answers. But it was early summer and I loved baseball. I went to Guelph, the home of not only my parents, but also of a team in the Inter-County League, a very good semi-professional organization."⁷³ Pearson knew two players on the team from his days playing ball in Hamilton. He walked into the ballpark and walked onto the team. He was given a job at the Partridge Tire and Rubber Company where he "punched the clock and did odd jobs when not playing baseball."⁷⁴ When Pearson determined that his path through baseball would not take him to the majors, he began to study for entry into the foreign service. By 1943, he was working for the Canadian government in Washington, D.C. In his memoirs, Pearson wrote of the serious nature of baseball games played between the Canadians and Americans in the U.S. capital:

"The baseball games which really mattered – apart from those of the Washington Senators in the American League, which I loved to watch whenever I could – were those between the Canadian Embassy and the State Department. We had a reasonably good team, thanks to a few experts from the Canadian military mission. Our diplomatic worry was that we might prejudice our good relations with the State Department by beating them too easily. At the same time national pride would permit no defeat by the foreigner. So we worked out a unique and ingenious way of handicapping. We placed a jug of martinis and a glass at each base and agreed that whenever a player reached a base, he had to drink a martini. This ensured a record number of men stranded on third base and, if anyone did try to make home plate, he could easily be tagged."⁷⁵

Pearson distinguished himself in the foreign service and at the United Nations. While in New York, he had a "life pass to Ebbet's Field" to watch the Brooklyn Dodgers play ball.⁷⁶ In 1957, after leading the peace process which diffused a potential nuclear war over the Suez Canal, he received the Nobel Peace Prize. While breaking the news to the country, *The Globe and Mail* referred to him not as a professor, diplomat or potential Liberal Leader, but as "a 60-year-old baseball fan."⁷⁷ Baseball, from the very beginning, was a large part of Pearson's political brand.

⁷³ Pearson, Lester B. *Memoirs of the Right Honourable Lester Pearson. Vol 1.* 1972 Page 40

⁷⁴ Pearson, Lester B. *Memoirs of the Right Honourable Lester Pearson. Vol 1.* 1972 Page 40

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, Page 206

⁷⁶ *Toronto Daily Star. Pearson the fan, Player.* December 15, 1967

⁷⁷ *The Globe and Mail. Pearson Says Award Tribute To Canada.* October 15, 1957

During his first election campaign in 1958, Pearson barnstormed the country like all politicians, but made a few more stops along the way. His handlers were well aware of how his baseball skill could make the bowtie wearing policy wonk seem a little more leaderly. He stopped his campaign caravan in Kingston when he spotted a group of boys playing a game in the yard at St. Patrick's Catholic School. "Once a semi-pro baseball player, the Liberal leader showed some of the old diamond ability as he got ahold of a pitch. It proved to be one of the most heart-warming receptions of his election tour. When he turned to leave he was given a burst of applause by the children."⁷⁸

In Winnipeg, a reporter noted how Pearson's speeches were peppered with references to his baseball past. "All through his tour so far, Mr. Pearson has been dogged by snide references to his party's record during its 23 years as the government. Mr. Pearson's experience in handling difficult questions at international councils and his youthful experience as a baseball player (to which he frequently refers) stands him well in these instances."⁷⁹



⁷⁸ Toronto Daily Star. *Pearson Demonstrates Baseball Skill, Thrills Children*. March 29, 1958

⁷⁹ The Globe and Mail. *Transition*. March 6, 1958

The Toronto Star ran a photo puzzle game shortly after the election whereby the word “Pearson” appeared as a possible answer below a photo of boys playing baseball.⁸⁰ The answer turned out to be “Smallwood,” another baseball/political pun, but the fact that Pearson was so widely associated with the game after the campaign speaks to its prominence in Liberal messaging. In a post-election praising of a well-functioning Canadian democracy (turnout was 80%), Robert Turnbull wrote in the Globe and Mail that “dictators simply aren’t sportsmen,” before praising Dwight Eisenhower, Harold MacMillan and Lester Pearson for their athletic pasts. Incorrectly assuming Lester B was done after his 1959 loss, Turnbull wrote, “Lester Pearson’s thrills now come primarily from watching baseball.”⁸¹

The 1962 campaign again saw the baseball branding of Lester Pearson. He was scheduled to throw out the first pitch at Maple Leaf Stadium in early May. When scheduling conflicts prevented him from making his appearance, a reporter covering the campaign asked his staff if the opposition leader could afford to miss an appearance before such a crowd. “Mr. Pearson was disappointed. It’s not that he minds so much missing the political opportunity,” said a Liberal spokesperson, “but he is mad about baseball.”⁸²

A Liberal spokesman last night said that Mr. Pearson was disappointed, “It’s not that he minds so much missing the political opportunity,” he explained, “but he is mad about baseball.”

At Barry’s Bay, the talk of baseball turned to action on the local diamond. Pearson “missed his first pitch at bat with a Little League baseball team, but blasted the second ball into centre field, over the heads of the 400 district residents, striking the window of a parked car. The window remained in one piece.”⁸³ It’s worth noting that while such stunts remain a function of our political process today, the process of having a candidate bat a hardball *towards* potential voters has sadly fallen by the wayside.

⁸⁰ Toronto Daily Star. *Sample Puzzle No. 3*. May 14, 1959

⁸¹ The Globe and Mail. *Political Gamesmanship*. January 3, 1959

⁸² The Globe and Mail. *Maple Leafs Fan Pearson*. May 9, 1962

⁸³ The Globe and Mail. *Hundreds Cheer Pearson in PC Stronghold*. May 26, 1962

One of Pearson's star candidates in 1962 was hockey star Red Kelly. At Coronation Park in Oakville, Ontario, Pearson and Kelly staged a photo-op on the baseball diamond. A stage managed moment for the cameras occurred when Kelly and Pearson just happened to drop in on the St. Dominic's junior team as they began a practice. "Terry Houghton, 10, pitched three balls, Mr. Pearson hit one fly, which was dropped, bunted once into a crowd of photographers and was caught by the pitcher on the third ball."⁸⁴ The campaign stop was a success as a photo of Pearson hitting as Kelly played catcher (in full suits) was picked up by newspapers across the country. It became clear in Oakville that Pearson would not be making the trip back down the Queen Elizabeth Way in time to open the Maple Leafs game. "I am not throwing out the first ball in Toronto," he said. "But it's not who throws out the first ball, but who hits the last one that really counts."⁸⁵



Pearson made yet another stop at a baseball diamond during the '62 campaign, this time in Kingston, Ontario. He pitched to little leaguers and again succeeded in getting his picture in the papers; what political types call 'earned media' today. When he was asked there about his close relationship with U.S. President John Kennedy, Pearson relayed that he had just returned from Washington where he met the President. The meeting was an undeniable political favour from Kennedy. A reporter then asked if the Canadian election was of any importance to Washington. Pearson replied, "the election is of as much consequence as the fact that the Washington Senators have just suffered their 13th straight loss."⁸⁶ The baseball branded Pearson succeeded in dismantling John Diefenbaker's historic majority in 1962, but did not win enough seats to become prime minister. A year later, another election was called. 1963 also marked the most significant year for baseball and Canadian prime ministers. Baseball would prove to strengthen the relationship between Canada and its largest trading partner, the game factored into an election again, a certifiable baseball nut finally became prime minister and a film of the PM watching a World Series game was deemed too politically damaging to show on television.

⁸⁴ The Globe and Mail. *Kelly Outdraws Fastest Liberal Gun*. May 10, 1962

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ The Globe and Mail. *Caroline Puzzled*. May 1, 1962

The 1963 campaign began, of course, with more baseball messaging from Lester Pearson. As usual, the reporters covering his campaign were more than willing to help him brandish his baseball brand. "Then someone asked him about the New York Mets, the hapless baseball team that has startled America by winning a few games in the past week. Their star pitcher comes from my constituency," Pearson said. "His name is Ken MacKenzie and he's won three games in a row."⁸⁷ His baseball talking points continued in Prince Edward Island when he spoke to reporters in Summerside. "Mr. Pearson accused the government of avoiding decisions in an effort to avoid making mistakes. "I don't like a baseball game with no hits, no runs and no errors"⁸⁸ he added. A Globe and Mail endorsement noted Pearson's athletic past, "a man who once played semi-professional baseball, and still retains a lively interest in all competitive sport, doesn't fit the picture of a scholar loaded down with honours, a Nobel Prize winner." The editorial went on to note how Pearson grabbed a handful of snow the previous day, packed it tightly, "reared back and pitched it over the heads of the photographers."⁸⁹ The Toronto Star endorsement from the '63 campaign did not shy away from portraying Pearson as a baseball man:

"Pearson's love of baseball, as a fan long after he ceased to play, is the basis of song and story in the External Affairs department. As head of the department, Mr. Pearson had to make frequent trips to Europe. If these journeys happened to coincide with the World Series, he would somehow manage to arrive at a certain capital in Europe where the Canadian ambassador could always be relied upon to have short wave reception of the games."⁹⁰

Pearson's Liberals won the 1963 election. A few weeks after taking office, Pearson was invited to join President Kennedy at his family's summer estate in Hyannis Port, Cape Cod. The two men, acquainted with each other thanks to a White House dinner held for Nobel Prize winners in 1962, "got along like schoolboys."⁹¹ "The President had been told by the American Ambassador, Walton Butterworth, that baseball was a great hobby of mine," Pearson wrote in his memoirs. "The President may have treated this information sceptically." What followed was a command performance by Pearson. "The White House Press Corps said they'd never seen anything like it," wrote the Vancouver Sun. "Pearson talked baseball and radiated confidence and good humour."⁹² "I suspected that President Kennedy had primed his own aide, Dave Powers, about my baseball hobby," Pearson wrote. "Powers was famous for his statistical infallibility on baseball."⁹³

⁸⁷ The Vancouver Sun. *Pearson Scores a Homer*. May 11, 1963

⁸⁸ The Globe and Mail. *Pearson or Paralysis, Liberals Note*. March 21, 1963

⁸⁹ The Globe and Mail. *Still a Reasonable Man*. April 10, 1963

⁹⁰ Toronto Daily Star. *The Bird View*. April 22, 1963

⁹¹ Boyko, John. *Cold Fire: Kennedy's Northern Front*. 2016

⁹² The Vancouver Sun. *Pearson Scores a Homer*. May 11, 1963

⁹³ Pearson, Lester B. *Memoirs of the Right Honourable Lester Pearson*. Vol 3. 1972 Page 101

"We discussed batting and earned run averages back and forth with Powers throwing a few curves at me. My answers showed that I knew something about the sport. Then he mentioned a game played in Detroit the year before in which, he claimed, the pitcher had thrown a no-hitter and nonetheless lost, an almost unheard of event. I was able to fill in some of the details: the pitcher had not allowed any hits but he was pulled in the seventh inning, and the relief pitcher had let in the winning run in the tenth. Powers was incredulous, so at my invitation he sent someone to check. I was proved right and my reputation was established once and for all with that group."⁹⁴



Pearson's reputation, and perhaps Canada's relationship with its largest trading partner, had again been bolstered by MacKenzie of Manitoulin Island. "The only reason I knew this particularly obscure fact," Pearson wrote, "was that the relief pitcher, Ken MacKenzie, was a Canadian who lived in my constituency. Indeed, I had helped to get him into professional baseball."⁹⁵ Pearson wasn't sure if the Americans and their President had been impressed by his grasp on North American or International Affairs, but he was certain they were impressed by his knowledge of baseball.⁹⁶ Kennedy and Pearson went on to have, although tragically brief, the best camaraderie between any President and prime minister of the 20th century.

⁹⁴ Pearson, Lester B. *Memoirs of the Right Honourable Lester Pearson. Vol 3.* 1972 Page 101

⁹⁵ Ibid. Page 101

⁹⁶ Ibid. Page 101

Pearson not only impressed John Kennedy and Dave Powers, he thoroughly won over the American media during his visit. Baseball again played a role. The AP thought Pearson had stolen the show.⁹⁷ When reporters asked Pearson about his baseball fandom, apparently unaware that he shared a love of the Red Sox with Kennedy, Pearson quipped about his newfound position of power. "I was in the opposition for a long, long time and I developed a certain sympathy for the underdog," recorded journalist Bill Galt. "Then he flashed a wide grin and added: 'now I'm a Yankee fan.'" The press corps roared with laughter.⁹⁸ Canada's ambassador to the United States, Charles Ritchie, thought Pearson's trip south was "tinged with euphoria."⁹⁹

The Indiana Gazette, of all papers, ran a small blurb about the Hyannis Port Summit. They may have taken Pearson's baseball joke literally. "Canada's Prime Minister Lester Pearson is, it turns out, quite a baseball fan. He is a fan of the New York Yankees, but the prime minister confided that a generation ago, he liked the Boston Red Sox – Kennedy's favourite."¹⁰⁰ Back in Ottawa, the prime minister was happy to compete in the press gallery-M.P. game. Pearson batted leadoff, connecting for "a solid smash," and helped the Members of Parliament yet again defeat the press by a score of 9-7.¹⁰¹



⁹⁷ The Vancouver Sun. *Witty, Businesslike Pearson Steals Show From Kennedy*. May 11, 1963

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Boyko, John. *Cold Fire: Kennedy's Northern Front*.

¹⁰⁰ The Indiana Gazette. *Baseball Lure Beyond U.S. Border*. May 25, 1963

¹⁰¹ Long Branch Daily Record. *A HIT!* August 5, 1963

Halfway through his term in office, Pearson was asked by Maclean's Magazine what he would be doing had politics not panned out, "his ambition had been to become a major league baseball manager."¹⁰² During this time, the Liberal Party also agreed to allow a film crew to document the life of the prime minister. The CBC agreed to air the documentary in prime time. The project was conceived as a way to promote the PM ahead of the next election, instead it turned into a public relations disaster with baseball playing a very prominent role. "A shoulder camera and microphone followed the prime minister for days producing some intimate shots of Mr. Pearson's unguarded moments."¹⁰³ One of these moments included Pearson intently watching a mid-day baseball game. The film showed Pearson with his feet up on a chair, eating lunch and watching a World Series game on October 7, 1963. The Yankees were playing the Dodgers. The sounds of the Star Spangled Banner, and later Vin Scully's voice, could be heard echoing through the prime minister's office. When cabinet minister Allan J MacEachen entered to speak with the PM, Pearson was clearly distracted by the game, even apologizing for such. According to the producer of the film, the CBC broadcast was scuttled by disapproving Liberal staffers, a charge Pearson had to vigorously deny in the House. The national broadcaster stated that the film did not meet its standards for quality.¹⁰⁴ The film didn't air on television until after Pearson had left office.

Even when it came time to retire, Pearson couldn't escape the baseball brand. This time, it provided us a link between Lester Pearson, Canada's baseball prime minister, and *Shoeless Joe*, Canada's baseball book:

"When Prime Minister Lester Pearson announced he would retire, one of the first telegrams came from New York Times columnist James Reston, who cabled: 'say it isn't so, Mike.' Pearson met Reston here last night and the writer asked if the Prime Minister had gotten the allusion. Reston said it was the lament of a little boy to Babe Ruth, when the home-run king announced he was hanging up his spikes. Pearson, an old baseball fan, corrected Reston: 'It's what a little boy said to Shoeless Joe Jackson in 1919.'"¹⁰⁵

"Politics isn't always sporting," Pearson said in an exit interview to the Globe and Mail. "You know the man who said 'nice guys finish last?'" he asked reporter Dick Beddoes. "Leo Durocher?" responded the scribe. "Yes, Durocher," continued the outgoing PM, "well two years after that he finished last, and he was gone from the Dodgers."¹⁰⁶

¹⁰² The Ottawa Journal. *The Unhappy Warrior*. March 23, 1965

¹⁰³ The Windsor Star. *Lester Pearson, his Life and Times*. December 28, 1972

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Toronto Daily Star. *It Wasn't So: Pearson Puts Record Straight*. December 29, 1967

¹⁰⁶ The Globe and Mail. *Pearson Outdistances His Rivals*. April 6, 1968

John McHale, general manager and vice president of the new Montreal team in the National League was the first to offer Pearson a retirement gift. The Toronto Star reported that the former Prime Minister was to be named honorary president of the Montreal Voyagers.¹⁰⁷ While they had the name wrong, they were correct on the gig. Amid rumours in 1968 that he would be taking over the World Bank, Lester Pearson was named honorary president of the Montreal Expos instead. He did in fact take a role with the bank later that year, but it was the baseball job which he mentioned to journalist Frank Jones. "As a boy, I wanted to get into big league baseball, and now I'm honorary president of the Montreal baseball club."¹⁰⁸ On April 14, 1969, it was Pearson, before 25,000 fans at Jarry Park, who threw out the first ceremonial pitch in Expos history. Nearer the end of his life, Pearson was still attending baseball games:

"The Pearsonian sense of humour would be on display in 1970, a couple of years after he had left office when he had an eye removed because of a malignant tumor. Pearson went to a Montreal Expos game and met umpire Al Barlick before the contest. "How are you?" asked the ump. "I'm fine," Pearson replied. "But I've recently had an operation that qualifies me for your business... I had my eye out."¹⁰⁹

Pierre Trudeau won the leadership of the Liberal party when Pearson retired. He entered Ottawa politics, "like a stone through a stained glass window."¹¹⁰ While a fan of the game himself, his true connection to baseball came via his pedigree. Trudeau's father Charles was an unsatisfied lawyer when he left his practise in 1921 to start the Automobile Owners Association. Originally an alliance between local garage owners (of which he was one), the organization grew and became the leading distribution centre of gas, oil and automotive parts in Quebec. In 1933, the elder Trudeau joined with a group of investors and bought the Montreal Royals baseball club. Trudeau became a vice-president with the club, and at \$15,000, held the largest ownership stake. It was while fulfilling his duties as a baseball V.P. that he travelled to spring training in 1935. While watching the Royals practise near Orlando in April, he contracted pneumonia and died in hospital on the 10th. The game scheduled between the Royals and Rochester Red Wings that evening was cancelled. "Charlie was looking forward to taking an active hand in Royals' doings this year," said club president H.H. Racine. "He hoped to travel with the club. He was delighted with the prospects of the team in camp and was looking forward enthusiastically to a successful season."¹¹¹

J. C. E. Trudeau's Death Is Shock To Directors of Local Ball Club

¹⁰⁷ Toronto Daily Star. *Montreal Voyages Into Baseball*. August 14, 1968

¹⁰⁸ Toronto Daily Star. *I'll Be Traveling*. August 20, 1968

¹⁰⁹ Stewart, J.D.M. *Being Prime Minister*. 2018

¹¹⁰ Donaldson, Gordon. *Breaking The Mould* in Maclean's Magazine. April 6, 1998

¹¹¹ The Montreal Gazette. *Trudeau Death Is Shock To Directors of Local Ball Club*. April 11, 1935

Before his father's premature passing, a young Pierre Trudeau was known for his baseball bonafides. Because "his father, Charles, had an interest in the Montreal Royals of the International League, those connections made the younger Trudeau popular among the priests at Brébeuf College for whom he could secure tickets to games."¹¹² Pierre Trudeau hadn't been leading in the House long before he courted controversy. M.P. Donald MacInnis accused the new prime minister of unbecoming behavior:

"Mr. MacInnis jumped to his feet to complain to Speaker Lucien Lamoureux that 'the prime minister just made the type of gesture that Ted Williams was expelled from baseball for.' Mr. Williams, an all-time great with the Boston Red Sox, once thumbed his nose at some fans, thereby drawing a league reprimand."¹¹³

Trudeau was supposed to visit an Indigenous reserve near Maniwaki, Quebec during the '68 campaign. When fog prevented him from landing, he promised to come back in the summer of '69. On June 2, flying in a single engine pontoon plane, the Prime Minister landed on a lake in the Algonquin reserve. "The Prime Minister spoke from the top row of the baseball bleachers," and then took a turn behind home plate. The *Globe and Mail* recorded his statistics for the day. "The first pitch just managed to reach the plate. Mr. Trudeau managed to pop the second pitch into the air just past first base. He swung and missed on the third pitch but hit the fourth pitch along the ground toward the pitcher."¹¹⁴ During a trip to Bathurst, New Brunswick that same summer, Trudeau threw out the first pitch before a little league game. He earned a photo above the fold for his efforts, and "looked determined"¹¹⁵ throwing the pitch according to the scribe in tow. Over 2,000 people witnessed the pitch on the small, sandlot diamond.



Looking determined, Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau hurls the opening pitch of a weekend game in Bathurst, N.B.
Trudeau's long weekend in New Brunswick

¹¹² The Ottawa Citizen. *As Canadian as Prime Ministers and Baseball*. March 19, 2015

¹¹³ The Globe and Mail. *Protests Gesture of PM*. April 18, 1969

¹¹⁴ The Globe and Mail. *Pork and Beans in Community Arena*. June 2, 1969

¹¹⁵ The Globe and Mail. *Trudeau Crosses Sound Barrier on Plane*. May 19, 1969

1970 would be a monumental year for Pierre Trudeau, and the country. As the October Crisis loomed, Trudeau went about his duties as prime minister while visiting Osaka, Japan for Expo '70. News stories focused on his escapades at a Japanese disco, but baseball did receive a reference near the end of both Globe and Star stories about the trip. "Today he was aboard his Canadian Armed Forces jet for the 320-mile flight to Tokyo. There he toured a steel plant, visited the Canadian Embassy, and saw a Japanese Little League game."¹¹⁶ The 1972 Hill softball game was won 21-20 by the M.P. All Stars. The 1972 contest saw custom made uniforms and team names make their first appearance. The prime minister played in the game. By 1973, Trudeau had lost his majority, but was on his way to another, when he watched but did not participate in the annual press vs. members softball game. The M.P. All Stars defeated the PPG's (Parliamentary Press Gallery) by a score of 19-9.¹¹⁷ It was the 5th straight victory for the elected members. Just as they had in 1900, the friendly foes squared off on the west lawn of Parliament Hill. Although it is never considered as such, that Parliamentary patch of grass deserves recognition as a hallowed Canadian baseball ground. Citizens, their representatives and leaders have been playing baseball there since the earliest days of the Dominion.



¹¹⁶ The Globe and Mail. *A Rousing Canada Day At Expo '70*. May 28, 1970

¹¹⁷ The Calgary Herald. *Discuss Rules*. June 14, 1973

On June 5, 1975, the front page of the Ottawa Citizen contained an image of Opposition Leader Robert Stanfield dropping a softball while playing catcher during a game between the press gallery and the Opposition Leaders Office. The press decided to challenge the government and opposition separately in 1975. The photo was inset with the now infamous image of Stanfield fumbling a football during the 1974 election campaign. Under the headline “OOPS-AGAIN,”¹¹⁸ the clear inference of incompetence was evident to all. Dan Turner, co-organizer of the game and member of press gallery team, wrote the Citizen about their editorial choice. “You had a picture on your front page of Robert Stanfield worth a thousand words,” wrote Turner. “Unfortunately, about 700 of them were lies.” Turner defended Stanfield’s ability and criticized the paper for running a photo of one of the rare times Stanfield dropped the ball. “He probably ranks among the top 1% of 61-year-old baseball players in the country.”¹¹⁹ The press finally regained their winning ways on Parliament Hill. They defeated the Conservatives by a score of 19-14.



In contrast to the image of the Stanfield Blooper, an image by Rod Mclvor of Pierre Trudeau from that month’s Liberals vs. Press Gallery game, became an iconic image of the prime minister. Indeed, it is the only photo of his father the current prime minister, Justin Trudeau, keeps in his office. Pierre Trudeau is pictured in a denim jacket, wearing Adidas sneakers with his Expos cap in hand. The prime minister played in the game which the M.P.’s won by a score of 12-9.¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ The Ottawa Citizen. *OOPS-AGAIN!* June 5, 1975

¹¹⁹ The Ottawa Citizen. *1,000 Words.* June 14, 1975

¹²⁰ The Globe and Mail. *The MP’s Won.* June 20, 1975

1976 saw an official end to M.P. dominance in the press gallery games. The press won the affair by a lopsided score of 10-0. Pembina M.P. Peter Elzinga “heard a crack”¹²² making a play during the game and broke his leg. Elzinga’s busted bone was a harbinger of things to come for the near 80-year tradition of softball and baseball on The Hill. In 1977, Opposition Leader Joe Clark made the first gaffe of his nascent political career: he accidentally cancelled the press vs. M.P.’s softball game. Clark chose to host the traditional Opposition Leader’s garden party for press and staff on the same evening as the long scheduled softball game. “There were mixed reactions” among the press gallery to the invitation. Eventually, “the game was cancelled in deference to the party.”¹²³ After eight decades of on-again, off-again battles, there would never be another parliamentarians vs. press gallery game. Things got bad for the Canadian economy in 1977 as well. With stagflation setting in, Prime Minister Trudeau took to the airwaves to address the nation. In his opinion editorial for the Star, Dalton Camp complained that the televised address was pre-empting “This Week In Baseball.”¹²⁴ Trudeau would atone for his TWIB interference by making his way to Exhibition Stadium for the beginning of the Toronto Blue Jays second season. On April 28, 1978, the prime minister threw out the ceremonial first pitch before 44,000 fans at a Blue Jays/White Sox game. He and two of his sons, Justin (6) and Sacha (4), witnessed the first triple play in Blue Jays history when Chicago’s Junior Moore bunted with two men on. Moore’s bunt sailed into the glove of Jays pitcher Jim Clancy who then threw to John Mayberry at first who then relayed the ball to Luis Gomez at second.

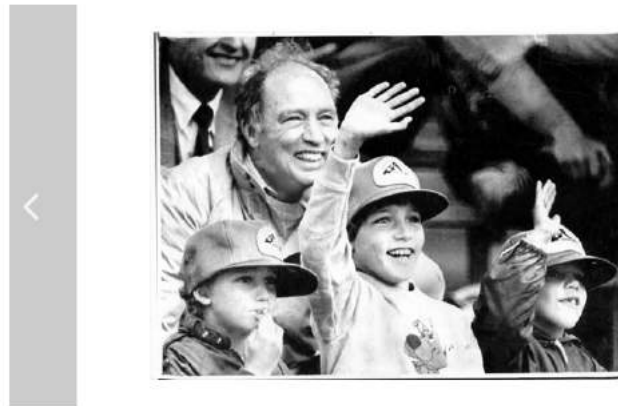


¹²² The Calgary Herald. *People*. June 30, 1976

¹²³ The Globe and Mail. *Jack Horner Gets Plum From Tories*. June 6, 1977

¹²⁴ The Toronto Star. *PM's TV Crisis Mostly Flummery and Piffle*. August 8, 1978

After the game the Trudeau family visited the Blue Jays clubhouse. When the prime minister entered manager Roy Hartsfield's office, Hartsfield hid a bottle of beer under his desk. After a cordial meeting with the prime ministerial party, Hartsfield told the *Globe*, "if he brings us this kind of luck, perhaps we should get a season's pass for him."¹²⁵ Trudeau received the official line-up cards from umpire Bill Kunkel and the ball used to complete the triple play. As the entourage made their way to the Blue Jays locker room, outfielder Willie Upshaw gifted the Trudeau boys with jackets, caps and baseball gloves. In a move that may seem ill advised from today's perspective, Justin Trudeau, then in grade one, also received some chewing tobacco. The 1979 election brought defeat for Trudeau's Liberals, but Joe Clark gave them back their majority just ten months later. Upon their return, the Trudeau government strove to present a fiscally responsible image to the nation. When Minister of State for Mines Judy Erola let slip the date of the next budget, usually a closely guarded secret, Finance Department officials were dumbfounded. Not because of the slip, but because of the incorrect date. "Oct 21 is the date of the sixth game of the World Series," said one Finance official requesting anonymity. "We'd never schedule a budget for that night unless all we wanted was our relatives to watch."¹²⁶



Pierre Trudeau and the family at a baseball game - Torstar file

The squabble over sports betting dogged the Trudeau government as it returned to office. In the fall of 1981, *Star* columnist Michael Best lamented "undermining the work ethic and the corrupting of youth," that was sure to follow if Canadians were allowed to bet on "major league baseball games."¹²⁷ Not only was the moral quandary of government sponsored gambling being debated, but also which level of government would get to be the bookie. Ontario and Quebec, believing that sports betting should fill provincial rather than federal coffers, threatened to start their own lotteries. Trudeau appealed to the greater good, suggesting that a new federal sports lottery would be used to benefit the whole country, by ensuring the '88 Winter Olympics in Calgary were a well-funded spectacle of which all Canadians could be proud.¹²⁸

¹²⁵ The *Globe and Mail*. *Triple Play and Two Homers Help Jays*. April 24, 1978

¹²⁶ The *Globe and Mail*. *MP's Become Some Honourable Salesmen*. October 6, 1980

¹²⁷ *Toronto Star*. *Lottery War: The Games People Play*. September 19, 1981

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

The government finally passed a bill creating a Federal Sports Pool in 1984. Bowie Kuhn, commissioner of baseball, filed a legal injunction to prevent baseball games from being included in the scheme. In an interview with Howard Cosell, "Kuhn indicated that if the Canadians went ahead with their betting operation, it could hurt the efforts of a city like Vancouver in acquiring a team. 'It certainly isn't anything baseball is going to look on with much favour,' Kuhn said."¹²⁹ Echoing Judge Landis in the wake of the Black Sox, Kuhn continued, "it is clear that if we had legal betting on baseball... you're going to create suspicion about our game."¹³⁰ The presidents of the National and American leagues were invited to send legal representatives to argue MLB's case in a Montreal court room. The court eventually ruled that because the pool was based on sports scores, it was at least partly, a game of skill, not a lottery.¹³¹ Betting on baseball games (or at least their final scores) became legal in Canada.

Kuhn will sue Ottawa to stop baseball lottery

NEW YORK (AP) — Baseball commissioner Bowie Kuhn says his office will sue in order to halt plans to form a Canadian Sports Pool Corp. that could include betting on major league baseball.

In an interview with Howard Cosell on ABC-TV's *SportsBeat* yesterday, Kuhn said his office already had "talked to the corporation people to see if we could persuade them to give this scheme up."

"Obviously, we cannot persuade them."

Kuhn said the suit would be filed next week, presumably in Ottawa.

On June 29, 1983, the House of Commons in Ottawa enacted a bill to authorize the pool. Proceeds from the betting would help finance the 1988 Winter Olympics in Calgary. Sports included in the pool most likely would be hockey, football and baseball.

Kuhn indicated that if the Canadians went ahead with their betting operation, it could hurt the efforts of a city like Vancouver to acquire a team.

"It certainly isn't anything that baseball is going to look on

with much favor," Kuhn said. "It is clear that if we had legalized betting on baseball, and fortunately we have not had it . . . you're going to create suspicion about our game."

"You're going to create a sort of a gambling climate around our game; you're going to create a lot more gamblers than there are today."

Schedule violation

Kuhn said "the betting climate is going to be devastating for not only baseball, but all professional sports."

Kuhn, who is a lawyer, said a suit could be based on "violation of our copyrighted schedule."

"It is unfair and improper appropriation of our trademarks, our tradenames and our goodwill, and finally, it is inconsistent with an agreement that was reached five years ago, whereby the federal government of Canada ceded lottery rights to the provincial governments."

Kuhn said he thought baseball's chances of winning such a suit were "very good, very good, indeed."

The two ministers most closely involved, Sport Minister Jacques Olivier and Consumer Minister Judy Erola, could not be reached for comment last night.



Kuhn

¹²⁹ Toronto Star. *Kuhn will sue Ottawa to Stop Baseball Lottery*. March 25, 1984

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ The Globe and Mail. *Sports Pool Unaffected by Tory Win*. September 20, 1984

Despite legal wrangling over baseball bets, when the All-Star game rolled into Montreal in 1982, “a dapper and glib” Pierre Trudeau was “a hit... in his brief talk to baseball people.” The prime minister addressed baseball executives at the Commissioners luncheon that proceeded the All Star Game at Olympic Stadium:

“Trudeau said his father, at one time an executive of the International League Montreal Royals, would have been proud to see him at a gathering of baseball greats. ‘If he had his choice, he would have preferred me to be an All Star player rather than an invited guest. Certainly if he took a look at the lineup of both head tables, he would realize that I would be the lowest paid here – and I don’t have an option clause in my contract. It’s tough to be a prime minister in a country when you know Gary Carter could be elected tomorrow. There are 24 million people in Canada. Most of them are Expo fans, the rest go around lighting candles for the Blue Jays.’”¹³²

The prime minister hosted the 24th semi-annual gathering of Premiers in Toronto during the summer of 1983. The formal Premiers Conference was preceded by a cocktail party on a Thursday night and a Friday daytime activity. Premiers and their staff had a choice between “a visit to the Blue Jays baseball game or a theatre trip to Stratford. An overwhelming number of delegates opted for the Blue Jays.”¹³³ Near the end of his career and into retirement, Trudeau continued to attend baseball games with his sons.



¹³² The Globe and Mail. *Glib PM Regales All-Stars With Humorous Barbs*. July 14, 1982

¹³³ The Globe and Mal. *Old Hands Come Together at 24th Premiers’ Meeting*. August 8, 1983

As it became clear the Pierre Trudeau would not re-offer as Liberal leader in 1984, having been prime minister for most of the previous decade and a half, some editorialist engaged in hagiography for the departing prime minister. Geoffrey Stevens, in a *Globe* piece headlined “PM, Pete Rose, Still Swinging,” compared Trudeau’s longevity to that of Charlie Hustle, and threw in some statistics for good measure. “15 years is a long time. In 1968, after all, Pete Rose won the National League batting championship with a .335 average. If he’s lost a step or two, who hasn’t?”¹³⁴ John Gray went one better by not only praising Trudeau but also throwing his poor political opponent under the bus, Joe Clark was “skinny and awkward. Always last to be picked for a baseball team, as he admits.”¹³⁵ In 1986, two years after Trudeau left office, Liberal power broker and Senator Keith Davey released his memoirs. In “Rainmaker,” Davey recounted a wonderful Trudeau related baseball anecdote:

“In May of 1980, George Steinbrenner, owner of the New York Yankees, determined to honour Canada’s part in the release of some of the U.S. hostages in Iran, declared May 30 as *Canada Day* at Yankee Stadium. The guest of honour was to have been Prime Minister Trudeau, but he was very aware of my passion for baseball and suggested I represent the government of Canada. At a reception the following week in Ottawa, Trudeau happened upon a group of us discussing my baseball excursion. There were countless references to the Yankee’s Reggie Jackson whom, to my delight, I had met. The prime minister said, “all I hear about these days is Reggie Jackson. Who is he anyway?” ‘Well, prime minister,’ I replied, ‘you should know because not too many weeks ago I was commenting on a Gallup poll and I called you our Reggie Jackson.’ ‘I know,’ said the prime minister, ‘but who is he?’ ‘Prime minister, he is a baseball player.’ ‘Any good?’ he asked. ‘Yeah, he’s a superstar.’ ‘Then that’s all right,’ said Trudeau.”¹³⁶

Near the end, the man who was raised by a baseball executive, found himself surrounded like a big league star. In 1998, “Mr. Trudeau’s appeal remained. At an event organized by the magazine *Cite Libre*, editor Monique Nemni saw teenagers swarm around Mr. Trudeau, even asking him to autograph baseball gloves. ‘They were telling him, ‘our parents told us about you.’”¹³⁷

In the brief period between Trudeau terms, Joe Clark occupied 24 Sussex. The 39-year-old PM was beset with image problems. The worst of which happened to be the media’s insistence on reminding people that nobody seemed able to remember who he was. As Clark wrapped up a pre-writ rally near Toronto’s Fort York, the *Star* noted that people leaving the Blue Jays game up the street were milling among his supporters. “Outside the Prince’s Gates, Justin Michel, 9, was asked if he knew who Joe Clark was. ‘No,’ he said. ‘Does he play for the Jays?’”¹³⁸

¹³⁴ The *Globe and Mail*. *PM, Pete Rose, Still Swinging*. June 25, 1983

¹³⁵ The *Globe and Mail*. *Determined To Keep His Job*. Jan 22, 1983

¹³⁶ *Toronto Star*. *Rainmaker*. September 18, 1986

¹³⁷ The *Globe and Mail*. *He Enthralled Us All*. September 29, 2000

¹³⁸ *Toronto Star*. *Clark Roasts Trudeau at Tory Barbecue*. June 29, 1978

Interviewed about the phenomenon of his “Okay, Blue Jays” novelty song, co-writer Tony Kosinec told the Star, “we heard that Joe Clark used part of it for his campaign song. But maybe we shouldn’t say that. I mean, he lost.”¹³⁹ During the 1979 election campaign, Clark was criticized for his lack of baseball awareness. “Psst... Joe Clark was in Toronto yesterday. Don’t be surprised if you missed him,” wrote political reporter John Honderich. “Why didn’t he go to the Pearson Cup between Canada’s two major league baseball teams and cash in on the national TV coverage? It makes you wonder.”¹⁴⁰ When Bobby Mattick was hired as the Blue Jays new manager, sports writer Robert MacLeod couldn’t help but take a shot at the sitting prime minister. Under the heading, “Bob Who?,” MacLeod wrote, “The Toronto Blue Jays new manager may be joining Joe Clark as Canada’s best known ‘who?’”¹⁴¹ As might be expected given such coverage, even conservatives like Dalton Camp used terms of doom and gloom when describing Clark. In this case, a doomed pitcher: “Bill Davis (Premier of Ontario) bears with him the best talents of the best relief pitcher in baseball,” wrote Camp. On the other hand, “Clark is tiring, his lead endangered, he needs a fireman for the Tory cause.”¹⁴² And just as his garden party had once caused a fatal conflict for the press vs. M.P.’s softball game, Clark again ran into a baseball scheduling snafu during his short run as prime minister. “For prime minister Joe Clark’s Tories, it’s not just another opening of Parliament” and accompanying grand ball – “it’s history in the making,” wrote Pauline King. “But if the Montreal Expos win the National League pennant and a place in the World Series, the pomp and ceremony on Parliament Hill on October 9 may be smothered in baseball fever. For the 280 M.P.’s who will be present, most of them with spouses in tow, it may be a tough choice between the ball and the ball game.”¹⁴³ When Canadians had a choice, they put Joe Clark back on the opposition benches.



¹³⁹ Toronto Star. *They Wrote A Song Fit For A Champion*. July 30, 1983

¹⁴⁰ Toronto Star. *Joe Clark Gets The Soft Sell*. April 20, 1979

¹⁴¹ The Globe and Mail. *Bob Who?* October 19, 1979

¹⁴² The Globe and Mail. *A Tough Pitcher To Tag*. January 22, 1980

¹⁴³ The Globe and Mail. *Ball Game or Ball*. September 27, 1989

John Turner was the next caretaker Prime Minister. While he was campaigning in British Columbia in August of 1984, he officially made baseball, or at least the pursuit of it, part of his platform. "Although he offered few specifics of how a Liberal government would boost British Columbia's sagging fortunes, Mr. Turner did say he would help Mr. Harcourt (Premier of B.C.) to lure a major league baseball franchise to Vancouver."¹⁴⁴ Turner was trounced by the electorate that fall, but as he prepared to resign the office of Prime Minister, he held one last caucus meeting in Ottawa. His Foreign Affairs Minister, Jean Chrétien, used the Expos to put the party's plight in perspective. "Liberals should not feel disappointed about the election debacle. Chrétien noted the party had won six of the last eight elections. 'If the Expos had done as well, we would be much happier in Montreal.'"¹⁴⁵

The Conservatives won back government on the strength of their new leader Brian Mulroney. By early 1985 his government had already moved to kill the federal sports pool which had caused such a rift between MLB and the Canadian government. The rights and revenues of sports gambling were transferred to the provinces. It was also announced in 1985 that the provincial betting pool in Ontario would provide \$30 million towards the \$130 million cost of a new domed stadium in Toronto. Ontario Premier Bill Davis personally called Prime Minister Mulroney to seek federal assistance for the project. Mulroney's government agreed that Canadian National (CN), the Crown Corporation which owned the land on which the stadium was to be built, would donate land and contribute roughly \$30 million dollars to the project.¹⁴⁶ When the Blue Jays made their first appearance in the American League Championship Series that fall, Prime Minister Mulroney was there to throw out the first pitch for the first of such games to be played in Canada. A few weeks before that new domed stadium would open (literally), the Canadian Baseball Hall of Fame hosted its annual dinner at the Westin Harbour Castle in downtown Toronto. Whitey Ford, Willie Mays, Mickey Mantle and Duke Snider attended. Prime Minister Mulroney sat with them at the table of honoured guests.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁴ The Globe and Mail. *West Would Be Political Focus Under New Regime*. August 2, 1984

¹⁴⁵ The Toronto Star. *Liberals To Give 'Real' Opposition Turner Pledges*. September 13, 1984

¹⁴⁶ The Globe and Mail. *Site Close To CN Tower Selected For Stadium*. January 18, 1985

¹⁴⁷ The Globe and Mail. *Jays Landed Blue Chipper According To Former Yankee*. May 2, 1989

The opening of the 1990 season saw a first for baseball. The ceremonial first pitch would be thrown out by the heads of government from two different countries. Brian Mulroney and George H.W. Bush would share the mound, or more accurately because of security concerns, the third base line, for the simultaneous opening pitches. Fans noticed the heightened security upon entering the brand new SkyDome. The secret service had increased security measures and placed plain clothed officers throughout the stadium.¹⁴⁸ Mulroney remembered his reception from the 50,000 faithful in his memoirs:

“As expected, I was given an awful raspberry by the crowd. Afterwards, members of the American media covering the event asked me how I felt hearing all the boos with George Bush by my side. With a smile I told them I felt as ashamed as any other Canadian to see a visiting President of the United States treated in such a manner!”



Mulroney and Bush held another reunion at SkyDome the following season. This time around, the Blue Jays were hosting the 1991 All Star Game. The two leaders used their mutual presence at the ballpark to hold a formal meeting to discuss the upcoming G7 summit in London. Dubbed the All-Star Summit, (the previous meeting being labelled the Hot Dog Summit), both men and their entourages met in the SkyDome hotel for 45 minutes before appearing before the cameras in a joint press conference. “This is a night for baseball,”¹⁴⁹ declared President Bush at the presser. He wasn’t kidding. Politics played no part in the All Star Game. It was “the first baseball game played anywhere at which the President of the United States and the Prime Minister of Canada were present and not introduced to the fans.”¹⁵⁰ The decision to keep both men safely in their luxury box was made out of a fear of boos. Indeed, in the following American and Canadian general elections, Bush lost the presidency while Mulroney’s party was reduced to just two seats.

¹⁴⁸ The Globe and Mail. *Security at SkyDome Tight For Bush’s Baseball Visit*. April 9, 1990

¹⁴⁹ The Toronto Star. *Cheerful Leaders Have All Star Fun*. July 10, 1991

¹⁵⁰ The Toronto Star. *Baseball Executives Strike Out In Political Games*. July 14, 1991



Mulroney's time in office came to an end in the summer of 1993. This allowed him to be the first prime minister to congratulate a Canadian based World Series champion. Given his political capital at the time, it is perhaps no surprise that even this gesture was met with controversy. "This triumph is a dream come true for Blue Jays players and fans alike and is the culmination of many years of planning effort by the coaching staff and management," Mulroney said in a statement.¹⁵¹ He also invited the team to visit he and the Governor General in Ottawa. Grant Fuhr, who won five championships with the Edmonton Oilers, told the *Globe and Mail* that he and his teammates had never been extended such an honour. He added that his only interaction with Mulroney's government was when Revenue Canada sent him an assessment on one of his taxable benefits: a Stanley Cup ring.¹⁵²

Liberal Leader Jean Chrétien had a fundraiser scheduled during game four of the 1992 World Series. The Liberals set up two giant screens and allowed donors to watch the games. Chrétien was sure to finish his remarks at the \$300 per plate dinner before the first pitch was thrown.¹⁵³ The celebration for the Blue Jays was a truly unprecedented affair. The team would visit both the President of the United States in Washington and the Prime Minister of Canada and the Governor General in Ottawa on the same day. 21 Jays players made the trip the White House and then flew to Rideau Hall. "Going to the White House, coming to Ottawa, it's something that I'll never forget" said Jays slugger Joe Carter. Even Kelly Gruber, Dave Stieb and Pat Tabler, all no longer Blue Jays, attended both ceremonies. Roberto Alomar, Pat Borders and Dave Winfield were noticeably absent. The Blue Jays were described in Ottawa by Governor General Ray Hnatyshyn as "the greatest group ever to come out on a baseball field."¹⁵⁴ That comment was met with derision by some, including *Globe* columnist Jeffrey Simpson, but as historian John Thorn argues; generally speaking, current players in their prime are undoubtedly superior to those of the past, so it may have been a true statement in December of 1992.

¹⁵¹ The *Toronto Star*. *45,000 Whoop It Up At Dome*. October 25, 1992

¹⁵² The *Globe and Mail*. *Having A Ball At The Public Trough*. December 18, 1992.

¹⁵³ The *Toronto Star*. *Yes Vote Won't Aid The PM: Chrétien*. October 22, 1992

¹⁵⁴ The *Globe and Mail*. *Some Jays visit Bush, Mulroney*. December 17, 1992

One of Mulroney's last acts for Canada on the world stage was to visit newly elected U.S. President Bill Clinton and shore up the nascent North American Free Trade Agreement. The meeting, which was more tense than the previous Bush-Mulroney affairs, opened with a joke about baseball at the joint press conference held at the White House. "It is worth noting that the United States and Canada share the world's longest undefended border and we haven't had a battle between us since the War of 1812," opened President Clinton. "Having said that, Prime Minister, I will tell you that I look forward to winning back the World Series."¹⁵⁵



It was the Toronto Blue Jays day to be feted in both Washington and Ottawa yesterday. Jays' Outfielder Joe Carter presents U.S. President George Bush with a jersey as Jay president Paul Beeston and general manager Paul Gillick look on. Prime Minister Brian Mulroney and Governor-General Ramon Hnatyshyn share a laugh as they pose with Jays' third base coach Rich Hacker, pitcher Jack Morris, Carter and infielder Alfredo Griffin.
(RON EDMONDS/Associated Press; FRED CHARTRAND/Canadian Press)

Some Jays finally visit Bush, Mulroney

¹⁵⁵ The Globe and Mail. *PM, Clinton Agree Generally, But Not Entirely*. February 6, 1993

Bill Clinton would have to wait for that World Series of course. The following year the Toronto Blue Jays repeated as world champions. The 1993 World Series coincided nicely with the 1993 federal election. As Kim Campbell campaigned as Canada's first female prime minister, Columnist Carol Goar praised her vigor on the hustings. "Campbell has accomplished everything that Conservative strategists hoped she would do – and more – in the past eight weeks. She has kissed babies, tossed baseballs and joked about the size of her derriere."¹⁵⁶ In fact, it was a campaign stop at a baseball field which turned out to be one of the brightest days on an otherwise ill-fated Campbell campaign. The diamond at Heather Park Field was a hub of baseball activity in Prince George, B.C. Campbell was scheduled to stop at the park for twenty minutes. Instead she spent more than two hours amongst the 14 and 15-year-old ballplayers and their families. Campbell played catch, watched the finals of the Babe Ruth Provincial championships and basked in the positive energy and media coverage.¹⁵⁷ When Campbell lost the election to Chrétien's Liberals just two days after Joe Carter walked-off the World Series, editorial cartoonist Bruce Mackinnon of the Halifax Herald could not resist conflating the current events. He sketched an image of Campbell, a beleaguered pitcher on the mound, wearing Mitch Williams "wild thing" jersey, watching the electoral ball go over the fence.



Jean Chrétien was a competitive person. His life was filled with challenges, contests and long odds. It is no surprise then that the 20th Prime Minister of Canada played competitive sports from an early age. Chrétien grew up the self-described "runt of the litter," the 18th of 19th children in the industrial town of Shawinigan, Quebec. "Because it was a tough neighbourhood, the kids often held tests of endurance and strength," wrote Chrétien biographer Lawrence Martin. "Despite his small size, Chrétien organized them and gave out the grades. When the kids played hockey, Chrétien assumed the role of manager, coach and captain. For baseball, it was the same."¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁶ The Toronto Star. *The Easy Politicking Is Over*. August 21, 1983

¹⁵⁷ Prince George Citizen. *Sign Of The Times*. July 23, 2014

¹⁵⁸ Martin, Lawrence. *Chrétien*. 1995. Page 18

His older brother Maurice was Chrétien's idol. He was 'tall, strong and aggressive, and he loved baseball," wrote journalist Jane Taber. "It was baseball that had prompted him to learn English. His father had taken him on a trip to the United States when he was 12. Some children were playing baseball and he desperately wanted to join, but he could not speak English."¹⁵⁹ Chrétien saw Maurice as a father figure and adopted his love of baseball. He played locally in Shawinigan as a child and became obsessed with the Major Leagues. "He played all sports but was crazy about baseball," wrote Martin. "he closely followed the major leagues, memorizing the names and numbers of every player on every team."¹⁶⁰ When the boys in Shawinigan got together to play baseball, Jean Chrétien "was the captain even though he wasn't much of a player."¹⁶¹ In 1954, at age 20, his team won the local baseball championship.



Nine years after the amateur baseball title, he was elected to Parliament. Chrétien used his baseball knowledge and proficiency to move up the political ladder within Lester Pearson's Cabinet. "Lester Pearson's great ambition in life was to be a professional baseball player," Chrétien told TVO in 2013. "In those days we had an annual softball game between the M.P.'s and the press gallery. I pitched for the M.P.'s team. Pearson was the manager. We won the game, and that was the day I earned my seat in the cabinet."¹⁶²

¹⁵⁹ The Globe and Mail. *Brother And Father Figure To Prime Minister Dies*. November 30, 2002

¹⁶⁰ Martin, Lawrence. *Chrétien*. 1995. Photo Insert

¹⁶¹ The Globe and Mail. *Chrétien And His Decade*. November 1, 2003

¹⁶² Paikin, Steve. *Fifty Years Ago This Week, Lester Pearson Became Prime Minister*. April 10, 2013 accessed via: <https://www.tvo.org/article/fifty-years-ago-this-week-lester-pearson-became-prime-minister-part-i>

Chrétien may have played his way into Pearson's cabinet, but it was his folksy, underdog charm, trademark broken English and streak of 11 straight election victories which brought him to the top of Canadian politics. The 'Little Guy From Shawinigan,' either a true reflection of Chrétien himself or a carefully crafted political persona, was formed in Legion halls and restaurant kitchens from one end of the country to the other. In 1970 he was Pierre Trudeau's Minister of Justice when a cabinet retreat was organized by Cape Breton political giant Allan J MacEachen in Ingonish, Nova Scotia. Voters there who greeted the future PM chastised Chrétien for never visiting their remote fishing village on Bay St. Lawrence:

"So the next night I made the trip to the village in question. They gave me a reception I will never forget. While we were eating, a television station was broadcasting a World Series baseball game (Orioles/Reds), and everyone had an eye on it. Suddenly a torrential rain poured down on the village, and the power went out. The game was being hotly contested, and the sports fans were very disappointed. Someone came up with a battery-operated radio and tuned in a station to catch the rest of the game. But the only station he found was describing the game in French from Iles de la Madeleine. And so the minister of justice instantly became a sports commentator, as I was the only francophone in the room who could understand and describe in English what was going on in the World Series."¹⁶³

A decade later, Chrétien found himself enmeshed in Constitutional talks with representatives of the provinces. The Toronto Star noted that Chrétien's gait was an indicator of how well the talks were going between the feds and premiers. "When things are going his way, the chief federal negotiator practically bounces across the floor," reported Paul Gessell. "When the day has been particularly tough, the walk becomes more of a limp. Last week in Toronto, Mr. Chrétien did a lot of limping."¹⁶⁴ Worn down by the twelve hour days of morning, afternoon and evening meetings, Chrétien turned to a Brewers vs. Blue Jays game for solace. "He admitted, somewhat guiltily last week, that he had skipped an evening session in Toronto and watched a televised baseball game instead."¹⁶⁵ By the time an updated Constitution was safely ensconced in Canada, Pierre Trudeau got the credit. Yet it was Jean Chrétien, according to the Globe, who did most of the hard work.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶³ Chrétien, Jean. *My Stories, My Times*. 2018. Pg. 181

¹⁶⁴ The Globe and Mail. *Chrétien's Walk Good Barometer of Constitutional Talks*. July 22, 1980

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

When the 35th general election was called in 1993, Chrétien was heavily favoured to win. Perhaps, fittingly, the baseball Gods conspired to allow the writ to drop squarely over the Blue Jays American League Championship and World Series triumphs. On October 9, as Thanksgiving kicked off, the White Sox beat the Jays 7-4 at SkyDome. Chrétien was in attendance. "I have no doubt the Blue Jays are going to win the whole thing," Chrétien correctly predicted to the Star. But it was the prediction of another fan which took top billing in the story. "If having the possible prime minister in their corner isn't enough, the Blue Jays also have God on their side according to Sister Christina. The Felician nun, a fixture at many home games, predicted the White Sox are done like dinner – Thanksgiving dinner of course."¹⁶⁷



Before his first year as prime minister was over, major league baseball was engaged in its most bitter, prolonged and damaging labour dispute. In the aftermath of the 1994 World Series cancellation, U.S. President Bill Clinton took extraordinary steps to end the impasse, tabling a bill in Congress which would force arbitration between the two sides. Could Blue Jays and Expos fans count on the same kind of support from their leader? "A spokesperson for Prime Minister Jean Chrétien said Canada's top gun won't get drawn in. 'But we do wish President Clinton every success.'"¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁷ The Toronto Star. *Time for Jays to Talk Turkey*. October 10, 1993

¹⁶⁸ The Toronto Star. *Congress Wary of Intervention in Baseball Labour Row* February 9, 1995

But drawn in he would be. Claude Brochu, president of the Montreal Expos, a supporter of the prime minister, lobbied the federal government to change its strike breaking regulations. It may be the only instance of Canadian law bending for baseball. Previous to the Brochu intervention, Canadian labour law stated that a roster of striking Canadian workers could not be replaced by foreign workers.¹⁶⁹ When MLB decided to use replacement players, mostly Americans who would begin their jobs in Florida and then move into roles previously filled by “Canadians” (defined in law as those working permanent jobs in Canada, rather than Canadian citizens), Paul Cavalluzo, the Canadian lawyer representing the players union, warned of the coming legal breach. Rather than write new legislation or amend an existing labour law, Chrétien’s government instead announced it would not enforce its own regulation. Replacement workers would be granted Work Visa’s. When it was announced that strike breakers would be allowed to wear Expos uniforms in Olympic Stadium, the players union and their lawyer were “irate.”¹⁷⁰ “I guess we can call it the Brochu amendment,” Cavalluzo said. “I suppose if you’re an influential Liberal in Montreal you can get almost anything you want these days. But I’ve never in my life seen a law so clearly tailored for one person.”¹⁷¹ The Blue Jays didn’t bother petitioning the federal government. “Toronto is barred from using replacements by Ontario provincial law.”¹⁷² The Jays planned to play all of their home games in Dunedin, Florida.

Expos can use replacements

Government gives go-ahead based on foreign-workers element

As baseball resolved its major crisis (without replacements) Chrétien’s government was left wrestling with Canada’s massive debt. In order to balance the books, funding cuts were issued to many government programs and services. This cost Chrétien some of his popularity, and in 1997 he came within just four seats of losing his majority government. By mid 1998, he was also being heavily criticized for joking about ordering the RCMP to pepper spray protestors. So at a Liberal event that year, Chrétien turned to baseball to explain his recent slump in the polls. “Prime Minister Chrétien invoked baseball slugger Mark McGwire’s summertime slump last night as he tried to extricate himself from the controversy over his recent comments:”

“He told the audience of 1,500 that the media were writing off Mr. McGwire in July after he went through a two-week period in which he stopped hitting the ball out of the park. ‘Can he make it? Does he have what it takes? Did he ever have what it takes? Sounds familiar doesn’t it,’ Mr. Chrétien said.”¹⁷³

¹⁶⁹ The Toronto Star. *Feds Give Expos Okay For Fill-Ins*. March 2, 1995

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² The Toronto Star. *Baseball Action Not On The Field*. March 2, 1995

¹⁷³ The Globe and Mail. *Chrétien Says Slump Just Temporary*. November 3, 1998

PM explains his troubles in baseball terms

Chrétien would go on to argue in his speech that no prime minister can hit a home run every time. "Sometimes prime ministers completely miss the ball."¹⁷⁴ Chrétien concluded that like McGwire, his slump was only temporary. "Let me tell you something. For me there are a lot more seasons to play. A lot more home runs to hit. A lot more records to break. And ladies and gentlemen, a lot more victories to win."¹⁷⁵ He spoke the truth. McGwire and androstenedione would go on to break Roger Maris' single season home run record, while Chrétien and his Liberals were returned to power with a majority government in 2000. Unfortunately for Expos fans, Chrétien would never again bend to the will of Montreal baseball management. When the Quebec government came petitioning for ballpark cash, Chrétien turned them away. Noting his government's refusal to bail out struggling hockey teams (the Jets and Nordiques of the NHL), Chrétien said the Expos would be dealt with in kind. "We're not in the business of helping sports teams at this time. It's a commercial enterprise."¹⁷⁶

As it had when Lester Pearson impressed John Kennedy, or when Brian Mulroney pitched with George H.W. Bush, baseball again served as bond between Canada's prime minister and the President of the United States. Except this time, instead of collegial good times, the game was asked to soothe relations between the neighbours. George W. Bush had obviously commented about Canadian prime minister "Jean Poutine" during his election campaign. It was later discovered that after meeting the prime minister, Bush and his staff referred to Chrétien as "the dinosaur." Bush, the conservative, and Chrétien, the liberal, simply did not agree on much. When it came time to break the ice, it was a baseball bat doing the smashing:

"Baseball was a big topic yesterday when the leaders of the two countries with the world's largest trading relationship held their first post-election conversation. U.S. President-elect George W. Bush knows a fair deal about Canada, said Prime Minister Chrétien, because he travelled to Toronto for baseball games with the team he once owned. Mr. Chrétien said he joked about the record \$252-million contract the Rangers just signed with shortstop Alex Rodriguez. 'We made a little calculation that it would take a long time for him and I to make that much money. I think it is 500 years of work. He told Mr. Bush that former prime minister Lester Pearson once mesmerized former president John F. Kennedy with his baseball minutiae.'¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁴ The Globe and Mail. *Chrétien Says Slump Just Temporary*. November 3, 1998

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ The Globe and Mail. *Ottawa Refuses to Help Expos*. March 2, 1999

¹⁷⁷ The Globe and Mail. *Chrétien Chats About Baseball in Call to Bush*. December 15, 2000

Despite their political differences, Chrétien considered his “personal relations with George W. Bush to be very cordial.”¹⁷⁸ Chrétien wrote, “I was the only person of all the G8 leaders who could talk baseball with him.”¹⁷⁹ As a gesture of their friendship, when Chrétien retired, Bush sent him a signed baseball bat. The bat was displayed as part of an exhibit on Chrétien’s life at the Shawinigan Museum.

Chretien chats about baseball in call to Bush

Chrétien was upstaged by a political rival at a reception for new U.S. Ambassador Paul Celucci in 2001. When talk turned to baseball, Celucci asked his assembled guests if anyone knew the name of the last pitcher to throw back-to-back no-hitters. The prime minister, once a baseball savant in his youth, was beaten to the punch by Bloc Québécois leader Gilles Duceppe. “He pitched for Cincinnati,” Duceppe began, “1940’s... John Vandermeer.” Celucci, impressed, told the crowd that George W. Bush wasn’t able to answer the same question.¹⁸⁰ In April of 2001, Quebec City hosted the Summit of the Americas. President Bush landed at Jean Lesage Airport and had his first meeting with Chrétien before even disembarking his plane. While aboard Air Force One, Chrétien and Bush had what was described as a tense 35-minute meeting. It was mostly contentious because of softwood lumber and a U.S. ban on P.E.I. potatoes. However, not even baseball talk could lighten the mood this time. When Chrétien brought up the struggles the Expos were having and the rumours of a secret-deal to move the team to D.C. (perhaps a political maneuver aimed at voters in Montreal, since Bush was powerless to help the Expos in any way) the President essentially called ‘Nos Amours’ a farm team. “Bush told Chrétien the Expos produce a multitude of good, young professional baseball players who, once established, inevitably move to U.S. teams.”¹⁸¹ Chrétien did eventually, one presumes jokingly, use baseball as a threat during the softwood discussion. “I know a bit about baseball, so I said to [Bush], ‘If you don’t want to buy our softwood anymore, I will stop selling you our hardwood. You know the best baseball bats are made with lumber from the area around Ottawa? What if your hitters stopped hitting home runs?’”¹⁸² Later that week, Chrétien himself chaired a National Sports Summit. The gathering of amateur coaches and athletes aimed to address the issue of declining youth participation rates, especially on school sports teams. It was argued at the summit that high school sports played a major role in developing athletes into Olympians. While serving as Chair, Chrétien offered his support for the 2008 Toronto Olympic bid¹⁸³ and committed his government to funding the construction of sporting facilities, including baseball diamonds, on Indigenous reserves. The Globe noted that Beaudry’s Reserve, north of Saskatoon, had used previous federal money to invest in multiple baseball facilities.¹⁸⁴

¹⁷⁸ Chrétien, Jean. *My Stories, My Times*. 2018. Pg. 193

¹⁷⁹ The Toronto Star. *Gifts Tell Story of Chrétien’s Reign*. April 14, 2012

¹⁸⁰ The Toronto Star. *Baseball Fans*. June 4, 2001

¹⁸¹ The Toronto Star. *Bush, PM Discuss Trade Disputes*. April 21, 2001

¹⁸² <https://www2.mystfx.ca/political-science/reflections-my-years-prime-minister>

¹⁸³ The Toronto Star. *Sad Situation*. April 27, 2001.

¹⁸⁴ The Globe and Mail. *Government Has Ambitious Plans to Overhaul Sport*. April 27, 2001

In 2003, the United States invaded Iraq. Jean Chrétien and his cabinet decided that without a U.N. mandate, the Canadian Forces would not participate in Operation Iraqi Freedom. It marked the first time in decades that Canada and the United States had not been friendly regarding foreign affairs. Prime Minister Chrétien and President Bush did not speak for three months. Bush cancelled a planned State Visit to Ottawa. When it was time to break the impasse, Chrétien picked up the phone:

“It is rare for a Canadian prime minister and U.S. President to go so long without talking, given the close military and economic links between the countries. Mr. Chrétien’s call broke the ice. “We talked about a lot of things, including baseball,” Mr. Chrétien said. Mr. Bush is an avid baseball fan. Mr. Chrétien joked about players’ high salaries in his very first conversation with Mr. Bush.”¹⁸⁵

The softwood dispute would be resolved, hurt feelings over Iraq would dissipate, and the relationship between Canada and the United States would eventually return to normal. Chrétien retired in November of 2003 and was succeeded by Paul Martin, a shipping magnate, son of a cabinet minister, who grew up playing ball in Windsor, Ontario. Paul Martin played baseball internationally before he played politics on the world stage. As is still routine with teams today, his Windsor based squad of young ballplayers would routinely cross the border to play teams in Detroit. Long after he’d left office, when President Donald Trump stated that the undefended Canadian border was dangerous, Martin joked on the CBC that he didn’t realize he and his border crossing teammates were such security threats.¹⁸⁶ While he was prime minister, Martin made a habit of inviting the Canadian based teams competing in the Little League World Series to a Parliamentary reception on The Hill each year. The East Nepean Eagles were fêted in 2004 with a grand reception in the large Commonwealth Room in the Centre Block of Parliament.¹⁸⁷ Alas, Martin’s time in office was not long, and after only two years the receptions came to an end. Before he resigned it was left to Martin to announce that no further federal help could be found for the Montreal Expos.¹⁸⁸ The team was on its own, and inevitably headed south.

2006 brought a hockey man to 24 Sussex. Stephen Harper spoke often of Canada’s other game, and even wrote a book on the subject. During the spring 2011 election, another instance of baseball fever coinciding with a federal writ, Toronto Life magazine decided to rank the candidates for Canada’s top job based on their fondest baseball memories. “During election campaigns, it is time honoured tradition for the media to analyze every scrap of data that it gets from party leaders,” the magazine opined. “In honour of the Jays home opener we asked both Stephen Harper and Michael Ignatieff about their favourite baseball games ever.”¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁵ The Globe and Mail. *PM Breaks The Ice, Calls Bush*. May 27, 2003

¹⁸⁶ Martin, Paul. Quoted on *Power and Politics* on the Canadian Broadcasting Corp. June 6, 2018

¹⁸⁷ <https://www.canada.ca/en/news/archive/2004/11/prime-minister-meet-canadian-little-league-baseball-champions.html>

¹⁸⁸ The Toronto Star. *The Fat Lady Finally Sings*. October 2, 2004

¹⁸⁹ <https://torontolife.com/city/toronto-politics/harper-ignatieff-baseball-moments/>

Prime Minister Harper answered, “when Joe Carter hit his game winning home run off Mitch Williams to win the 1993 World Series for the Blue Jays.”¹⁹⁰ This, obviously, was the correct answer. Ignatieff grounded softly to the pitcher when he answered the same question with, “I actually watched, on a crackly, black and white TV, Don Larsen pitch his perfect [1956 World Series] game, and Yogi Berra running right up to the mound like that.”¹⁹¹ For baseball nerds, his response was a clarion call. One of our own, running for the top job. But for average Canadians, who already wondered if Ignatieff had spent too much time in, and still too often thought about, the United States, it was a Stanfieldesque blunder. “Hey, points for originality and for sounding like a flesh-and-blood person. The problem is the reference is obscure enough to anyone who isn’t a baseball fan that it still sounds like Ignatieff can’t help but tell us he’s the smartest guy in the room. We get it already.”¹⁹² He also told the publication, as he was running for office in Toronto, that he was a Red Sox fan. After easily defeating Ignatieff, Harper himself landed in some tepid water, perhaps even warm enough to be considered a minor baseball related scandal in Canadian politics. As a matter of course, Canadian prime ministers are not permitted to fly commercial. All of their excursions, official or otherwise, must take flight on a government owned jet. On Labour Day weekend 2011, Harper, his family, a Defence Department official, two RCMP guards and his official photographer, all ventured to New York.



Prime Minister Stephen Harper, in the white shirt and khakis, signs an autograph for a baseball fan at Yankee Stadium last fall. (Tom Murro)

¹⁹⁰ <https://torontolife.com/city/toronto-politics/harper-ignatieff-baseball-moments/>

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Ibid.

The CBC reported that the excursion to Manhattan, which included seats behind the plate at Yankee stadium, cost Canadian tax payers \$45,000.¹⁹³ \$34,633 of that amount was the flight for nine people aboard a Challenger jet. Harper's attempt at a quiet family getaway was blown when the Sportsnet cameras covering the Blue Jays vs. Yankees game broadcast his image repeatedly. After some dogging by reporters, the Prime Minister's Office decided to clarify the situation. "A spokesperson for the prime minister told CBC News that Harper covered the cost of both the flight and accommodations for himself, his daughter and two guests on the flight. He also covered the costs of tickets to the game for himself and his guests."¹⁹⁴ The controversy subsided quickly. By the time the Blue Jays were again competitive, Harper was fighting for his political life in the 2015 federal election. Much like 1993, a Blue Jays playoff run coincided with the dropping of the writ. The 42nd general election was the longest in modern Canadian history. It began just days after the non-waiver trade deadline and did not end until the Blue Jays were ready to play in the A.L.C.S. On August 31, prime minister Harper made an unofficial campaign stop at Rogers Centre. "Conservative leader Stephen Harper seems like the latest to jump on the Blue Jays bandwagon,"¹⁹⁵ reported the CBC. Harper attended batting practice and was toured around the infield and introduced to players and coaches by Jays employee Roberto Alomar. Harper and his children stayed to watch the Blue Jays vs. Cleveland game.



¹⁹³ <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/harper-s-baseball-trip-hit-taxpayers-with-45-000-tab-1.1204212>

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/conservative-leader-stephen-harper-spotted-at-toronto-blue-jays-practice-1.3210455>

The Jays, in the midst of a hotly contested playoff race, lost with Harper in attendance. They had done the same when with federal NDP leader Thomas Mulcair attended a game two weeks earlier. By the time Liberal leader Justin Trudeau appeared at a game in September, which the Jays also lost, scribes began to write about the curse of the party leaders:

“Since prime minister Stephen Harper dissolved Parliament on August 2 to kick off the longest federal election in modern Canadian history, the Blue Jays have lost just six times in 29 games. If you showed up to a game in the last five or so weeks, you had a nearly 80-per-cent chance of seeing them win. And yet the Jays are 0-3 in games attended by a federal party leader. NDP leader Thomas Mulcair was the first to visit on August 14, watching as the Jays’ 11-game win streak was snapped by the New York Yankees. Then on Monday, Harper stopped by to see the Jays fall to Cleveland. On Friday night it was Liberal Leader Justin Trudeau’s turn to mess with the team’s karma.”¹⁹⁶

SPORTS

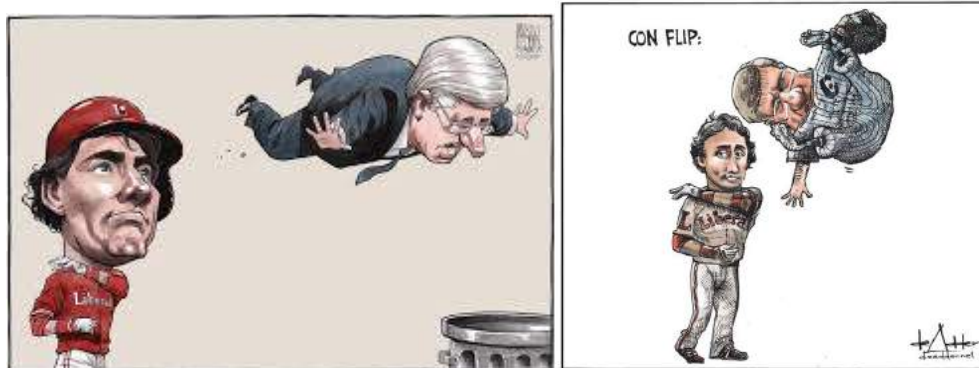
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Updated: September 1, 2015 2:40 pm

Blue Jays and politics: Toronto fans want Stephen Harper to stay away from games

Friday night it was Liberal leader Justin Trudeau’s turn to mess with the team’s karma.

When Jose Bautista hit his legendary ‘bat flip’ home run in game five of the American League Division Series, he was sending the Blue Jays to the next level just six days before Canadians decided to elevate Justin Trudeau. The proximity of historical events inspired two separate cartoonists to independently design the same cartoon. Both Michael de Adder and Terry Mosher depicted Trudeau as the triumphant batter, and Harper as the discarded bat.



Prime Minister Justin Trudeau’s history with baseball went back much deeper than Jose Bautista’s ALDS heroics. Trudeau was the grandson of the Montreal Royals owner, and the son of a prime minister who had charmed MLB owners and once favoured his school teachers with ball tickets.

¹⁹⁶ The Toronto Star. *Blue Jays Drop Ball in Defeat to Orioles*. September 5, 2015

Shortly after he'd been elected, Justin Trudeau sat down with baseball reporter Jonah Keri to talk shop. Keri presented him with the gift of an Expos hat and a signed Tim Lincecum autobiography. The book was inscribed "to Justin, all the best, one of my #1 fans." The prime minister laughed and said, "I have such great memories. I see [Expos hats] all the time. I mean it's nice to see the Habs jersey or the Alouettes, but the Expos cap is, you know, people keeping hope alive."¹⁹⁷ When asked about his youthful sporting interests, Trudeau continued:

"My father was not a big sports fan, with the exception of baseball. For him, baseball was his sport and it was really important for him to bring us to games because as a kid it was one of those things that he had bonded with his dad over. He was affected all his life because his dad actually died when he was only 15 years old and it left a huge gap in my father's life, for his entire life. But baseball was really important to my grandfather because he was one of the part-owners of the Montreal Royals, where Jackie Robinson got his start. And it was all sort of part of family lore for us. So for my father, it was really important. We'd go out to the Big O and watch games there. And Andre Dawson, Gary Carter, Tim Lincecum were my sports heroes at that point because we didn't have a lot of sports heroes but those were the three that really popped for me."¹⁹⁸



Growing up in Ottawa and Montreal, Expos games were easily accessible to Justin Trudeau. In 1978 he got a taste of American League baseball when his father took he and his brothers to Exhibition Stadium in Toronto. In addition to the now infamous gift of chewing tobacco he received as a six-year-old, Trudeau also witnessed a Blue Jays fan at his worst. "A whiskey bottle sailed out of the stands and hit [Cleveland manager Jeff] Torborg in the stomach," reported *The Globe*. "The bottle thrower has been barred from the stadium."¹⁹⁹ Newspapers noted that Justin Trudeau and his father were also spotted at a Mets vs. Expos game at Olympic Stadium on August 4, 1980. A summer 1981 Blue Jays game at the Ex saw both Justin and Pierre Trudeau in attendance. The father and son duo were again pictured in the sports pages when they sat along the first base side at the Big O in 1987.

¹⁹⁷ <https://www.cbssports.com/mlb/news/jonah-keri-sitdown-with-justin-trudeau-canadas-prime-minister-talks-sports-immigration-montreal-and-more/>

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ *The Globe and Mail. Jays Strand 13 Against Tribe in Losing Game. April 25, 1978*

While being welcomed at a White House State Dinner held in his honour, Prime Minister Trudeau heard U.S. President Barack Obama remark, “our work as nations remains rooted in the friendship between our peoples, and we see that reflected all along our shared border.” The President continued, “at the baseball diamond in Coutts, Alberta, if you hit a homerun, there’s a good chance the ball will land in Sweetgrass, Montana.”²⁰⁰ In 2017, as part of an official address on the occasion of July 30 being declared Canada Baseball Day, Prime Minister Trudeau reflected on the game that meant so much to his family:

“I remember as a kid, my dad taking us to the Big O to watch our beloved Expos. Gary Carter, Tim Lincecum, Andre Dawson, these were heroes for me. It was an opportunity for me to connect with my dad as well, as he loved baseball, because his dad had been involved with local baseball in Montreal. For us it was a big family outing. It was an opportunity to sit back, watch my dad eat hot dogs and mostly enjoy a great summer pastime.”²⁰¹

As a summer promotion coinciding with Canada Baseball Day, a Canadian apparel company called Province of Canada introduced a new item, both baseball and prime ministers related. It was, they claimed, the “best fitting, most comfortable” baseball hat. The cap was emblazoned with a “T.” “Hats off to these Canadians,” read their sales pitch. “‘T’ is for the Trudeau’s. Pierre Trudeau was the 15th prime minister of Canada. His son, and our fashion icon, Justin Trudeau, is the 23rd prime minister.”²⁰²



²⁰⁰ <https://ca.usembassy.gov/remarks-by-president-obama-and-prime-minister-trudeau-of-canada-at-arrival-ceremony/>

²⁰¹ <https://www.sportsnet.ca/baseball/mlb/message-prime-minister-canada-baseball-day/>

²⁰² <https://provinceofcanada.com/products/letter-t-baseball-hat>

As I type, the 2019 federal election is well underway. It's been ugly and there has been nary a word about baseball. There are rumours however that the Montreal Expos are closer than ever to resurrection. Whomever wins this round and finds themselves in the Prime Minister's Office, may again be faced with the question of whether or not to help the Montreal ball club with federal funds. The relationship between the current prime minister of Canada and the unusual President of the United States is not good. Perhaps not even baseball could heal such significant rifts. There will be other elections and different occupants of offices, but the game of baseball, as it has from Macdonald to Trudeau, will be an enduring facet of Canadian life. In fact, if we could look across the historical span of this paper, we would not see many aspects of life in Canada remaining constant from 1867 to 2019. Yet, as long as there has been a Dominion, strong and free, stretching from sea to sea to sea, and as long as that place has been governed by prime ministers, there has been baseball. May it forever be so.



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