

Maple Leaf Stadium was built at the foot of Bathurst Street in Toronto in 1926 to serve as the home of owner Lol Solman's Toronto Maple Leafs of the International League. It remained the home of the Leafs until the franchise's transfer to Louisville after the 1967 season, and the stadium's subsequent demolition. The Leafs enjoyed a number of periods of sustained winning, one of their most successful being the 1960s. Six of the eight Leafs teams in their truncated decade finished with winning records, including league championships in 1960, 1965 and 1966.

The decade was also indisputably one of overall decline, however, as the stadium was literally falling apart. Attendance mirrored the stadium's condition, as it declined from 2,645 per game during the 100-win championship season of 1960 to merely 1,357 per game in the final 1967 season, cut in half over a seven-year



span. The Fleet Street Flats, as the area was called, was an attractive location to neither player nor fan.

Still, it was a magical place to an 8-year-old boy visiting for the first time in the summer of 1956. It was impossible to even dream that, in eight years' time, I would work inside that clubhouse and on that field with the Toronto Maple Leafs. This is the story of my time with the Leafs in the summers of 1964 and 1965.

One evening during dinner early in 1964, I heard the affable sports reporter Bill Stephenson on CFRB 1010 announce that the Toronto Maple Leafs ball team would be holding tryouts at Maple Leaf Stadium to pick two new batboys for the upcoming season. My dad suggested I should go. There were about 40 of us that Saturday afternoon at the Stadium, ranging in age from 10 to about 30. A couple of physical drills served to narrow the field to four of us. We four were told that each of us would audition as batboy in the first three games of the season and two of us would be chosen, one for the Leafs and one for the visiting team of each home series.

I soon lucked out. At a Friday night game, I was one of the first two candidates called to work in-game and arrived so early in the clubhouse that only clubhouse manager Bill Smith ("Smitty") and incumbent batboy Billy Carnegie were there. That helped earn me (at right in 1965) the job of Leaf batboy for the game; the other



candidate would be the visitors' batboy. Billy showed me how to dress, explaining my duties of delivering baseballs to the umpires and managing the on-deck circle. The second candidate got no such instruction, so I looked like I knew what I was doing during the game by comparison.

Critically, as it turned out, the Leafs won that Friday game 5-2. Deemed to be good luck, I was invited back to work the next game, also a win. The final game completed the series sweep which cemented my status. Smitty came to my locker after the game: "Bill, you're on the team!" In addition, I was to be paid \$10 a game - but I would have done it for free.

The two Leafs teams that I served were a study in contrast. The 1964 team was a farm team of the Washington Senators, who finished in 9th place out of 10 that



Top Row - Ron Piche, J. W. Porter, Eli Grba, Jim Bronstad, Ron Nischwitz, Marshal Bridges.
Middle Row - Bill Smith, - Trainer, Frank Funk, Howie Koplitz, Ken Nixon, Jim McKnight, Don Dillard, John Anderson, Larry Osborne, Stan Kucway-Ass't Trainer.
Bottom Row - Ken Retzer, Bob Sadowski, Ken Hamlin, George Anderson-Manager, Ossie Virgil-Coach, Bill Williams, Dave Eilers, Lee Tate, Bobby Del Greco, Batboys-Wayne Hamblin, Bill Park

year in the American League, losing 100 games. There were no prospects on their AAA team, the Leafs, that could help things get better, as no player on the Leafs had received a signing bonus. The team was old, as six players were older than

manager Sparky Anderson, and another 13 were the same age. It was a team of players on the way down.

The 1965 Leafs were a farm team of the Boston Red Sox, who in 1965 were just as bad as the Senators had been the previous year, also losing 100 games. The



difference was that this was a young team, with most of the players in their low to mid-twenties. Six of the players had received signing bonuses, including Tony Horton's \$35,000. This was a team of players on the way up.

The managers of these two teams offered their own study in contrasts. Sparky Anderson of the 1964 team and Dick Williams the next year were near opposites as motivators and strategists. Sparky had played one full major league season with the Philadelphia Phillies, hitting .218 in 152 games on a horrible team. He never got back to the big leagues even for a cup of coffee, unusual for a player who had played a full rookie season. Dick played much longer, sixteen years in the majors with Brooklyn, Baltimore, Kansas City and Boston, compiling a .260 batting average.

Both men came through Branch Rickey's Dodgers' school of baseball where physical mistakes were expected but baseball mistakes were intolerable. Not

surprisingly both had a white-hot desire to win but pursued that objective in vastly different ways.



I saw both sides of Sparky: smiling, chatty and friendly off the field but volcanic during a game. He hived himself away in his office after a loss before he spoke to the players, if he spoke to the players at all. In the dugout, he was in total command, and tended to play for the big inning, the “crooked number.” He seemed to have an innate distrust of pitchers. Someone would be up in the bullpen as soon as there was any combination of two walks or hits in an inning. Thus began the legend of “Captain Hook.” Anderson would remove a pitcher quickly and brook no talk-back when he reached the mound to take the ball. Umpires were even worse for him, as he held nothing but contempt for them. Even on close calls (never mind bad calls) he would storm the field, raging at the umpire until inevitably he unfurled the magic word that earned him an ejection. As he stomped off the field, my job, without being asked, was to unscrew the first two light bulbs in the tunnel which led from the dugout to the clubhouse. That way he could continue to manage the team from the darkened tunnel for the rest of that game. Sparky was quiet and friendly off the field, but he led the league easily in ejections that season.

Apart from his desire to win, Williams was different in almost every way. He was a hard man to like - and that’s being generous. He was mostly placid during the

game but provocative in the clubhouse. He often singled out individual players in front of their teammates with volleys of invective, making for tense moments between Dick and the players, and the players with each other. In the dugout, Williams was more collaborative than Sparky, often consulting with playing coach Roman Mejias, and on occasion even with the players, and playing for the one run inning. He instituted some of the features of the Dodgers' school of baseball, so that in addition to batting and infield practice, on-field tutorials were directed to specific game situations from the night before. Hitting the cutoff man, run downs, pick off moves, double steals, reading the signs and even sliding had to be done the right way. (Dick had a section of the outfield heavily watered down, turning the practice into a 'slip and slide' party.) If any such situation or others had been screwed up, the players knew they would have to arrive early the next day because the tutorial would be longer and more intense.

Part of each tutorial included Williams' running commentary about being "aware" on the field and in the dugout. Does the opposing pitcher take a deep breath when about to throw his fastball, but not when it's a breaking pitch? Does the opposing runner dangle his arms when he's about to steal but have his hands on his hips when he's not? Which opposing outfielder has the strongest arm? Who has the weakest? Where are they positioned? He was obsessive about in-game details.

Following his one-year stint with the Leafs, Anderson managed in the lower levels of A and AA ball for the next four years. He returned to the big leagues in 1969 as a coach with the expansion San Diego Padres, and the next year he became manager of the Cincinnati Reds, eventually earning a place in the Hall of Fame that most observers would not have predicted given his minor league record. Williams, on the other hand, managed the Leafs to two consecutive International League championships in 1965 and 1966, earning a direct promotion to manage Boston the next year. The 1967 Red Sox (with several ex-Leafs in the lineup) won the pennant, and Williams too would later be inducted into the Hall of Fame.

I mentioned that the 1964 team consisted of mostly veteran players. Our best pitcher that season was Ron Piché from Verdun, Quebec, back in the minors after parts of four seasons with the Braves. He went 14-3 with a 2.98 ERA. I never

heard Piché utter a word either in the clubhouse or on the field; he spoke English well but preferred silence. Bobby Del Greco, with eight years in the Show, was as outgoing as Piché was reserved. He was the clown off the field, often to Anderson's head-shaking delight. His season-long project was to get an extremely well-endowed teammate to parade around the clubhouse almost entirely in the buff, wearing only a hot dog bun. He finally succeeded at the end of the year. Hilarity ensued.



Outfielder Jim McKnight was in a sour mood every day despite hitting 24 home runs. At age 28, he sensed he was not going back up - and he was right. Infielder Bob Sadowski was a similarly bitter man. He had played with the Los Angeles Angels the previous year, and like McKnight knew that he wasn't going back up either. He made a point of placing his Angels equipment bag on the top of his locker for all to see. (In the above image, from top left: Piché, McKnight, Sadowski, Dave Eilers, Del Greco, Bridges.)

Many players in all sports have nicknames, and the '64 Leafs were no different. Many were ordinary, others were better left unstated, but my favourites were the monikers assigned to J. W. Porter and Marshall Bridges. Porter had a huge

number of freckles, literally all over his body, and so was called "Trout." Bridges had a scar from a bullet wound near his right knee and naturally was called "Sheriff." I never had the nerve to ask him about it.

30-year-old catcher Ken Retzer, more than any other player, befriended me on the team. He had been sent down by the Senators after one good season but seemed resigned rather than angry about it. He commented wryly "If you can't stick with the Senators, you should look at another line of work." I winced on his behalf with every passed ball and error. He gave me new cleats and bats, ate with me on the road sometimes and was always willing to tell me how he called a game and why.



Unlike the '64 outfit, during the 1965 season the Leafs were a typical AAA team. There were players going up, players coming down and there were career "4A" players, a label denoting too good for a AAA team but burdened by one flaw that was going to keep them out of showtime. Everyone knew who belonged in each



group, with manager Williams giving most of his attention to the prospects, the

so-called “Golden Boys”. (In the above image, from top left: Horton, Foy, Andrews, Ryan, Waslewski, Rohr.)

Tony Horton was the shiniest of the Golden Boys. In 1965 he went up to the Red Sox to stay mid-season after batting .301 with 9 HR in 52 games with the Leafs. Joe Foy hit .302 with 14 homers and 73 RBI and was named IL Rookie of the Year and Most Valuable Player, to go along with the batting title. Foy’s best friend on the team was another Golden Boy, Mike Andrews. They were an unlikely pair. Foy grew up in the Bronx, a short distance from Yankee Stadium, and Andrews came from Los Angeles. They had come through the Red Sox farm system together. Foy was Black and Andrews was white. To my surprise, some players on the team took notice of that fact and seemed uncomfortable that the two were friends.

Mike Ryan, another Golden Boy, was a great defensive catcher. He, Gary Waslewski and Billy Rohr would go on to accumulate a combined 46 years of

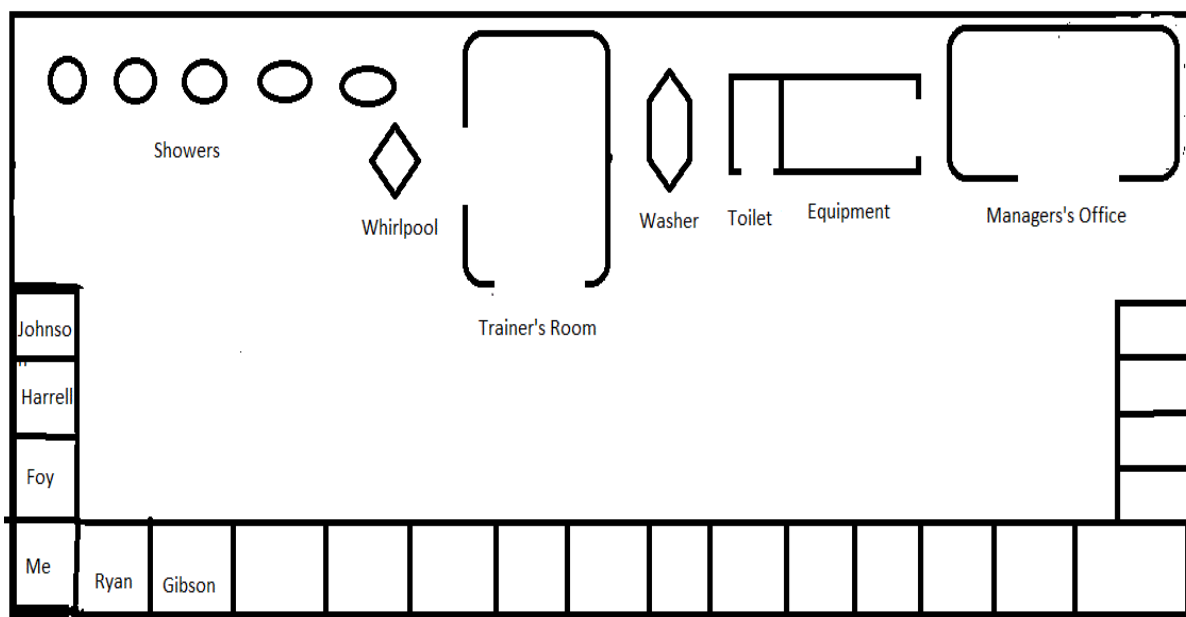


major league service. Ryan befriended me and, like Retzer, was happy to share his perspective on calling a game. Before one game, Ryan, Andrews and I were throwing a football around in the outfield. Williams suddenly appeared at the top step of the dug-out. “You three, get into my F@#\$%&* office!” We were reminded that this was “a F@#\$%&* baseball team not a F@#\$%&* football team!” and even worse, someone “could have been

F@#\$%&* hurt”. He promptly fined Ryan and Andrews \$50 each. I was fined \$10, thinking Williams was kidding. Silly me: the \$10 deducted from my next pay cheque was worth a whole day’s work. Williams was a hard man to like.

Two more notable nicknames were for Foy and Billy Harrell. Foy was dubbed “Baby” because of his age and some excess weight around his middle that he would shed by the next season. “Grandpa” was reserved for Harrell, a 37-year-old 4A player who had the season-long assignment of “minding” Foy.

Not surprisingly, my service exposed me as well to a few elephants in the room. The first of these was the reality of segregation. The spartan Leafs' clubhouse (1965 layout shown below) had lockers arranged in an extended U shape with each side having five lockers and the bottom side having fifteen. One had to turn sideways to get access to a locker that housed uniforms, street clothes and equipment. In front of each locker was a 12" square wooden box filled with sand for tobacco chewers and a short four-legged stool to sit on, perfect for donning a uniform (or milking a cow). The shower room had six shower heads, five of them usable. A wheezy whirlpool machine and single toilet completed the gritty scene.



Before long I was educated on how Sixties segregation worked. Black players sat on one of the short rows on one end, white southern players owned the opposite short row at the other end, with white northern players along the middle row. I asked clubhouse manager Smitty why the lockers were arranged that way: "The players want it like that."

My locker was at the elbow between the Black players and the white northerners. Marshall Bridges and Billy Williams were my neighbours along with Ken Retzer and Eli Grba in 1964. In '65 Joe Foy, Billy Harrell and Stan Johnson, the team's only three Black players, sat along the short row and next to me on the long row were catchers Mike Ryan and Russ Gibson. Pre-game, at least two card games were underway (usually gin rummy) before and after batting practice. I never saw the

Black players take part. Post-game, with just five usable shower heads, showers were taken in shifts. In keeping with the locker room “arrangements,” the Black players avoided taking their showers alongside white southern players and vice versa. Nothing was ever said about this silent protocol, but it was impossible not to notice.

The second elephant was the players’ aides. Before taking the field, some of the players would load up with a fresh but disgusting chew of tobacco - leaf style, plugs or powder. Others

wandered by the trainer’s room to help themselves from a paper cup on the training table containing what I came to learn were pills known as “greenies” or “beans” – amphetamines, a



form of speed intended to heighten awareness and stamina. They were banned from Major League Baseball in 2005, but were omnipresent in the minors in the ‘60s.

The third was Baseball Annies, the women in the stands waiting to spend time with the players after the games, and help them unwind. They would wait outside the ballpark, or in the hotel lobby when the team was on the road. Each town had its very own group of “Annies” in attendance at the games. They generally sat directly behind the visitors’ dugout and were easy to spot, each anticipating Sharon Stone’s performance in *Basic Instinct*. They, of course, were up for a “date” after the game. For further reference, re-read *Ball Four* or watch *Bull Durham* - both got it right.

Traveling with the team in the summer months was an eye-opener. Going on the road was fun much of the time, but disturbing scenes sometimes popped up. Travel was usually by bus to the northern cities of Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse and Columbus, and by plane to the more southerly Richmond, Atlanta and Jacksonville. The Toledo Mud Hens replaced Richmond for 1965 and became part of the northern loop. Each city and stadium had its own unique atmosphere.

Most stadiums had seating for 10,000 to 15,000, with a couple of notable exceptions. War Memorial Stadium in Buffalo (the “Rock Pile”, shown at left) held



45,000. It would need a thorough cleaning and a complete paint job before it could even be condemned. Atlanta County Stadium in 1965 held 50,000, awaiting the arrival of the major league Braves from Milwaukee in 1966. Average attendance in IL ballparks was around an anemic 2,000. Mike Ryan noted that a game in County Stadium was “like going to church on a Tuesday.”

The stadiums were never the cookie cutter designs that the major league cities began adopting in the mid-sixties. For the '64 season, Ponce de Leon Park in Atlanta (at right) measured 462 feet to center field, dominated by a magnolia tree just beyond the fence that was referred to by the locals as “the fourth outfielder.” It was huge, with limited range, but could catch the occasional fly ball. Adding to the ambiance was a busy railroad line nearby that made it difficult to hear yourself think. The Buffalo stadium had been designed for football, leaving the left field line at just 290 feet but probably shorter. Wolfson Park in Jacksonville held 10,000 and was next door to the Gator Bowl with its capacity at that time of 62,000. The ballpark looked like a foyer for the football stadium.



The seating arrangement for travel was the same in both years. The manager and playing coaches (Ozzie Virgil Sr. in '64, Roman Mejias in '65) were at the front of the bus, with Smitty and me right behind. The card players sat in the middle and the sleepers in the back. Seating was self-segregating: The Black players on both teams sat together, usually in the middle. The bus drivers were always called “Bussy”, as in “Hey Bussy, can we go any slower?” or “Hey Bussy, are we lost



again?" The card games, usually gin rummy, never ended. Curfew on the road was in effect two and a half hours after the game ended; Dick demanded compliance with the rule, Sparky usually did not.

In the South, Black spectators sat together down the left or right field line even though there were plenty of empty seats closer to home plate. Around the fifth inning (presumably when the beer took effect) various white spectators would start to bray at the Leafs' Black players. Every curse directed at them was loaded with malice and included the N-word. Everyone affected pretended not to notice. And yet we did. Whenever the bus left the hotel for the ballpark the Black players were waiting for it out front. When we returned, I never saw the Black players enter the hotel. My belief is that they were staying elsewhere although that was never expressed.

When the club made the five-hour trip between Atlanta and Jacksonville, Bussy stopped at the halfway mark, usually at a diner. The white players brought food back to the bus for the Black players. The prevailing atmosphere would best be described as heavy. There were two incidents that underlined the point, one in the North and one in the South. Our bus was traveling from the hotel in Rochester to Red Wing Stadium for a game. About halfway, a group of angry Blacks stopped



Rochester, NY 1964

and surrounded our bus, thinking we were sightseers. We had stumbled on the edges of the 1964 “Rochester Race Riot.” Billy Williams and Marshall Bridges, our only Black players, got off the bus to convince the crowd that we were the Toronto Maple Leafs Baseball Club on our way to the stadium. The menacing atmosphere rattled everyone. I found myself shaking. The game somehow went ahead, but I was so upset I have no recollection of it.

The next season I was walking alone along Peachtree St. in Atlanta after a game.



Peachtree Street - Atlanta, GA 1965

At an intersection I noticed a police officer on the sidewalk holding what looked like an aluminum broom handle with a disk on one end. I asked what it was. “You ain't from around here, are ya, son?” he observed. “This here’s a cattle prod. If any uppity N*&&%# don’t want to move along, I’ll use it.” Desegregation had just become the law in the U.S. but had not yet arrived south of the Mason-Dixon line. (For a comprehensive story of that time

read *Southern League* by Larry Colton. It tells the story of the Birmingham Barons AA baseball team in 1964. The Barons were the first integrated team in any sport in Alabama. The roster included Bert Campaneris, Blue Moon Odom and Paul Lindblad.) I moved along with the same sickened feeling I had the previous year in Rochester.

The 1965 Boston Red Sox would rather have been anywhere than playing an exhibition game on a Monday off day against their AAA farm team in Toronto. The game was designed to provide a big gate for the Maple Leafs and to allow Toronto prospects a post-game chance to “meet and greet” with Red Sox General Manager Mike “Pinky” Higgins.

Even though manager Billy Herman’s AL team would finish ninth that year at 62-100, the Red Sox featured Carl Yastrzemski, Tony Conigliaro, and pitchers Jim Lonborg and Dick “The Monster” Radatz. Yaz would hit .312 with 20 home runs that year while projecting the appearance of a man who had just been sentenced to twenty years at hard labour. Tony C had signed for a \$20,000 bonus and never



stopped smiling. He would hit .269 with 32 home runs at just twenty years of age. The rookie Lonborg, two



years away from winning the Cy Young, didn't make the trip to Toronto. Radatz, the closer, at 6'6" tall and 240 pounds (above right), threw bullets and could be a little wild.

The 7,000 fans in attendance did not expect Leaf pitcher (and non-prospect) Gerry Herron to start for the Red Sox, intent on preserving their pitching staff. The Boston regulars played no more than five routine innings and were showered and on their way to the airport before the game ended. Radatz pitched one inning for the Red Sox, striking out Joe Foy looking. On returning to the dugout Foy paraphrased another player: "I don't know, man, that last one sounded high." After the game I overheard Mike Andrews tell Foy they were both going to be playing in Fenway Park next year. As Andrews walked away Foy muttered that with the Red Sox it was more likely that he would be traded. Joe knew the open secret.

That secret was that the Boston ownership and management were racist. The Red Sox were the last big league team to be integrated with the arrival of Pumpsie Green at Fenway Park in 1959, twelve years after Jackie Robinson broke the colour barrier with the Dodgers. Boston could have signed both Robinson and Willie Mays as rookies but chose not to. Aided and abetted by owner Tom Yawkey, general manager Higgins continued the dubious tradition; Higgins was quoted by a baseball writer: "There will be no N* & \$ % # on the Red Sox as long as I'm associated with the team." Boston had not had a winning season for eight consecutive years up to and including 1965. Nevertheless, Higgins acquired several Black players in his time as GM from 1960-65, but never more than three non-whites on the team per season, as neither his embedded racism nor the team's fortunes changed.

Higgins' planned post-game visit to the Leafs' clubhouse to meet with Dick Williams and acknowledge the players (especially the Golden Boys) never happened. Instead, we watched him stumbling and weaving out of Maple Leaf Stadium around the fourth inning, never to return to Toronto again. Higgins died four years later after serving time in jail for DUI vehicle manslaughter.



Higgins (at right) would be fired at the end of the season, his team having compiled a .449 winning percentage over his roughly five-year tenure. The Red Sox stepped up their efforts to add more Black players to the roster. Foy would indeed be in Fenway Park the next year, followed by Black teammates George Scott (who was at AA Pittsfield in '65) and Reggie Smith (who played for the Maple Leafs in '66). Along with Yaz, Conigliaro and Lonborg, they would all get to the World Series in just two years' time. And Dick Williams would be the manager.

The 1965 Leafs qualified for the Governors' Cup with an 81-64 record, good for third place. They would play the second place Atlanta Crackers in the semi-finals, while first place Columbus took on the Syracuse Chiefs in best-of-seven series. The Leafs mopped up Atlanta in four straight and prepared to face the Columbus Jets in the final. The Jets pitching staff featured Sam "Toothpick" Jones, who had just completed a 14-year major league career, and 23-year-old Steve Blass, about to begin a 10-year career of his own.

The Leafs were riding high after winning the first three games, all by complete game shutout, until brought down to earth in a sloppy 4-3 Game Four loss. In Game Five, relievers Doug Gentry and Mickey Sinks combined for seven scoreless innings while Mike Ryan and Russ Gibson each knocked two-run homers for a final winning score of 5-3. Grandpa Harrell also homered, as the Leafs withstood 12

| Toronto | | | | Columbus | | | | | |
|----------------------------------|-----|-----|-----|------------|----|---|----|----|----|
| ab | r | h | rr | ab | r | h | rr | | |
| Andrews ss | 3 | 0 | 0 | Marí'ez 3b | 5 | 0 | 1 | | |
| Page rf | 3 | 0 | 0 | Wissman rf | 4 | 1 | 0 | | |
| Harrell lf | 3 | 1 | 1 | Goldy lf | 5 | 0 | 1 | | |
| Foy 3b | 4 | 1 | 2 | Herrera 1b | 5 | 1 | 1 | | |
| Gibson 1b | 4 | 1 | 2 | Damaska 2b | 4 | 1 | 2 | | |
| Mejias cf | 4 | 1 | 0 | Perry cf | 4 | 0 | 1 | | |
| Sadowski 2b | 4 | 0 | 0 | May c | 4 | 0 | 1 | | |
| Ryan c | 3 | 1 | 2 | Michael ss | 4 | 0 | 0 | | |
| Spansw'k p | 1 | 0 | 0 | Fryman p | 2 | 0 | 0 | | |
| Gentry p | 2 | 0 | 0 | Powers ph | 0 | 0 | 0 | | |
| | | | | Price ph | 1 | 0 | 0 | | |
| Totals | 31 | 5 | 6 | Totals | 38 | 3 | 12 | | |
| Toronto | 000 | 022 | 010 | 5 | 6 | | | | |
| Columbus | 021 | 000 | 000 | 3 | 12 | 0 | | | |
| Foy, DP—Toronto 1, Columbus 1 | | | | | | | | | |
| GB—Toronto 2, Columbus 12, 2B—D | | | | | | | | | |
| amaska, Wissman, Herrera. HR—H | | | | | | | | | |
| ara, Ryan Gibson, Harrell. S—Dam | | | | | | | | | |
| as. A—1,251. | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | IP | H | R | ER | BB | SO |
| Spanswick | 2 | 7 | 3 | 3 | 0 | 2 | | | |
| Gentry (W) | 4 | 1-2 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 4 | | |
| Sinks | 2 | 2-3 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | | |
| Fryman (L) | 6 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 7 | | | |
| Hobaugh | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 4 | | | |
| Jones | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | | | |

Columbus hits. Woody Fryman took the loss, as Sam Jones mopped up. The Toronto Maple Leafs were Governors' Cup Champions.

Pandemonium on the field spilled over into the clubhouse. The jubilation was real, accompanied by an overwhelming sense of relief and too many beers to count. In the moment it was clear that nobody noticed who was Black and who was white: Winning does that. Dick called for quiet, handed out

cigars all round, and with a half smile, half sneer said: "This is why we play the F@#\$%&* game." He added, "Team meeting at noon tomorrow. No, wait. Two o'clock". I was voted a half share of the playoff money: \$50 US.

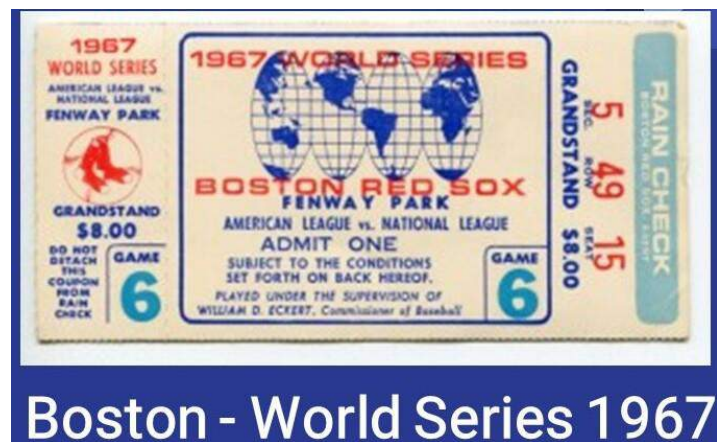
Fast forward two years, and the baseball fortunes of Boston and Toronto offer another study in contrasts. Boston's were decidedly on the way up, Toronto's just as decidedly on the way down. The Red Sox would go on a tear in the season's second half, going 51-31 to win the AL pennant with a 92-70 record. They had lost 100 games just two years earlier. They won by a single game over Detroit and Minnesota, the last great pure pennant race, immortalized by Sox fans as the Impossible Dream season. The World Series appearance was their first since 1946.

Yastrzemski won the Triple Crown with a .326 BA, 44 home runs and 121 RBI, earning the Most Valuable Player Award. To most observers, he still looked miserable doing it. Yaz would be stripped of his captaincy by Williams, who won Associated Press Manager of the Year. The ever-smiling Tony Conigliaro, only 22, was having a great year until August. After 95 games he was hitting .287 with 20 home runs. But a devastating bean ball delivered to Tony's head by an Angels pitcher put him out of baseball for a year and a half. He would never fully recover.

Jim Lonborg (22-9) was unhittable at times, winning the AL Cy Young Award at just 25 years of age. The Golden Boys had a season of mixed results. Andrews and Foy hit .263 and .251 respectively, while Mike Ryan hit below the "Mendoza Line" at .199.

And then there were the Cardinals. If the Red Sox 1967 season record was “impossible,” the St. Louis Cardinals were more than just a “dream.” With their 101-60 record, many pundits felt the 1967 World Series would be a Card walk-over. The Cardinals featured Lou Brock, who hit .299 with 21 home runs and 52 stolen bases, Curt Flood (.335) and Orlando Cepeda (.325, 25 home runs and the Most Valuable Player award). Future Hall of Fame pitchers Bob Gibson and Steve Carlton were 13-7 and 14-9 respectively. Former Leaf Jack Lamabe from the '66 Governors' Cup Leafs was 3-4 with the Cardinals.

Gibson and Lonborg each pitched two gems over the first five games of the Series. Facing the end of their season in Game Six, the Red Sox stormed back into the Series with an 8-4 win. Andrews and Foy had three hits between them. Waslewski started and went 5½ strong innings. The key hit in the game was a double by Foy off losing pitcher and former teammate Jack Lamabe.



The two most exciting words in sport are “Game 7” and so it was on October 12th in Boston. As expected, it was Gibson versus Lonborg. The Series and all the money were on the table. It turned out to be no contest. Lonborg, pitching on just two days’ rest, gave up ten hits over six innings. Gibson’s complete game three-hitter earned him the World Series MVP. The Impossible Dream for the Red Sox proved to be just that.

The demise of the Toronto Maple Leafs, on the other hand, had been years in the making. After a decade or more of decline, at least off the field, the Leafs played their last AAA game on September 4, 1967. They lost 7-2 to the Syracuse Chiefs before 802 fans, with the last hit coming on a two-run homer by Leaf Syd O’Brien in the ninth, with perhaps a few dozen left in the stands. The team finished sixth



Bottom of the 9th, Three Out

with a 64-75 record, their average attendance a meagre 1,357. The franchise moved to Louisville for the 1968 season, Maple Leaf Stadium was demolished that same year, and the once proud franchise melted away into history. Owner Robert Hunter claimed that the team lost \$500,000 (\$4.5 million today) over its last four years of existence.

The Louisville Colonels moved to Pawtucket, Rhode Island in 1970 to become the Pawtucket Red Sox, then in 2021 to Worcester, Massachusetts to become the Worcester Red Sox, always at the AAA level, and always as a Boston farm team.

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The managers of the 1964 and '65 Toronto Maple Leafs, of course, went on to greater things. The amiable (at least off the field) Sparky Anderson managed in the majors for 26 seasons, winning 2,194 games and losing only 1,834, a winning percentage of .534. The gruff Dick Williams spent 21 seasons in the majors, winning 1,531 and losing 1,451, a winning percentage of .520. Sparky was a three-time World Series winner (twice with the Reds and once with the Tigers), and a two-time Manager of the Year. Dick won two World Series himself, both with



Oakland. The two met in the World Series twice, Williams' A's winning in 1972 and Anderson's Tigers in 1984. Anderson was named to the National Baseball Hall

of Fame in 2000, and the Canadian Baseball Hall of Fame in 2007. Williams joined him in the National Baseball Hall of Fame in 2008.

Yogi Berra said “You can observe a lot by watching.” By so doing, I was able to make a few observations myself. I realize now that as people, I barely knew the players at all, with the exception of Ken Retzer and Mike Ryan, two guys going in opposite directions in their baseball careers. Each gave me something incredibly valuable: They gave me their time and their interest with no expectation of anything in return.

Baseball, like life, is not always fair: a scorched line drive is caught by a diving infielder, a perfect pitch results in a duck-snort single that falls just in front of a charging outfielder. The game, also like life, can be cruel and sometimes even vicious. A pitch is deliberately thrown at a batter's head. Segregated clubhouses and the virulent racism of Pinky Higgins lead in a direct line to a riot in Rochester and to cattle prods in Atlanta.

There is nothing like winning a championship. For a few brief moments everyone is a brother, and that feeling is accompanied by equal measures of exhilaration and sheer relief.

I leave you with this image from 2022. The bench belongs to my friend Mike FitzGerald, who saved it from the demolition of Maple Leaf Stadium in 1968.

Bill Park
November 2023

