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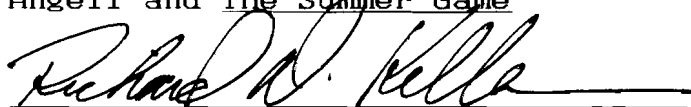
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in English presented on May 14, 1977

Title: The End of This Game May Never Come:

Roger Angell and The Summer Game

Abstract approved:



When Roger Angell first began to write about baseball, he chose to sit not in the press box, but the stands, where he could get the feel of the game as it appeared from there. Angell considered himself lucky, because his first few years of baseball reporting coincided with the birth of the New York Mets, "the greatest fan story of all." Eventually, he made his way to the press box and to the clubhouse, but his main job, as Angell conceived of it, was to continue to try to give the feel of things. "And this was the real luck," said Angell, a fiction editor and general contributor at The New Yorker, "for how could I have guessed then that baseball, of all team sports anywhere, should turn out to be so complex, so rich and various in structure and aesthetics and emotion, as to convince me, after ten years as a writer and forty years as a fan, that I have not yet come close to its heart?" (Summer Game x). Clearly, however, Angell comes as close

or perhaps closer than Grantland Rice, Ring Lardner, Damon Runyon, James Thurber, Red Smith, and a bevy of other talented writers fascinated by baseball, one of America's most enduring rituals.

Angell's first collection of essays on baseball, The Summer Game, was published in 1972. Spanning the ten seasons from 1962 to 1971, The Summer Game is divided into six parts. Yet it is in the book's final chapter, "The Interior Stadium," that Angell not only discovers baseball's heart, but shows it to us. The national pastime is a part of our heritage; it stands for a simpler and better time. By giving ourselves over to baseball, we are renewed, both personally and collectively, and that act of renewal is performed within the interior stadium.

At the ballpark, time is defeated. Keep hitting, keep putting men on base, and the game can continue forever. Since players like Ty Cobb, Babe Ruth, and Mickey Mantle exist outside time, they remain forever young. In the interior stadium, a place we all share, Cobb, Ruth and Mantle play side-by-side with Brett, Gooden, and Boggs; thus, with each new generation of fans, baseball is reborn. Thanks to The Summer Game, so are we, for Angell's book is the ultimate interior stadium.

THE END OF THIS GAME MAY NEVER COME:

ROGER ANGELL AND THE SUMMER GAME

A Thesis

Presented to

the Division of English and Foreign Language

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In Partial Fulfillment

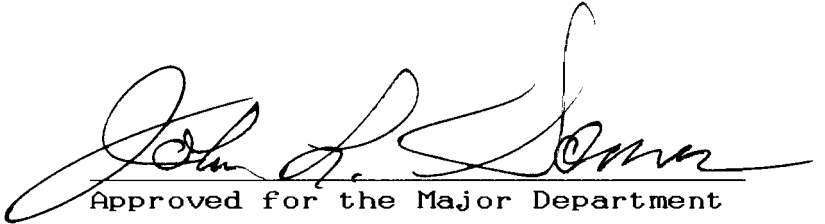
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. Take Me Out to the Ball Game	1
II. "Rustle of Spring"	10
III. "Amazin'"	24
IV. "Classics and Campaigns--I"	49
V. "The Future, Maybe"	82
VI. "Classics and Campaigns--II"	93
VII. "The Interior Stadium"	116
NOTES	127
WORKS CITED	129

Chapter One

Take Me Out to the Ball Game

One day in the spring of 1962, Roger Angell walked into the office of his editor, William Shawn, to ask if The New Yorker could use a piece on baseball.¹ Characteristically, Shawn agreed. "It wasn't that I was given the assignment of 'covering' the sport," recalls Angell, a New Yorker fiction editor. "I went in and asked to see what I could do if I went to a baseball game. That's the way it's done around here" (Plimpton 33).

A member of the New Yorker staff since 1956, Angell was already an accomplished short story writer, and his fiction had appeared regularly in Harold Ross' "little magazine" alongside works by such writers as John Updike and Eudora Welty, yet his heart belonged to baseball. "Ten years ago Angell turned, rather casually, to baseball writing, apparently on the reasonable assumption that a staff writer for The New Yorker ought to write about a subject that is his lifelong love," critic Keith Cushman said in a 1972 review. "It was a wise decision, for Angell is simply the most elegant, stylish and intelligent baseball writer in the country today" (1456). As elegant, stylish and intelligent as he was, Angell regarded himself as little more than an amateur. "Enthusiasm and interest

took me out to the ballpark; I never went out of a sense of duty or history," he admitted. "I was, in short, a fan" (Summer Game ix).

Still, no matter how he chose to portray himself, he was more than just a baseball fan; Angell was the latest in a long line of gentleman New Yorker sports reporters that included Herbert Warren Wind, Audax Minor, and A. J. Liebling, who covered golf, the race track, and boxing, respectively. Unlike Ring Lardner and Damon Runyon, who began their careers as sportswriters and later turned to fiction, Angell turned from fiction to sports. Angell, Lardner, and Runyon had a great deal in common, however. "Cynical, pessimistic, iconoclastic," Lardner devoted himself to baseball out of the faint hope that it might offer him a respite from society's phoniness, observes baseball historian David Quentin Voigt; crushed by the Black Sox scandal of 1919, Lardner gave up sportswriting for short stories. Runyon, says Voigt, was a wordsmith, "an artist at drawing caustic and witty word portraits of baseball characters." Despite his status as the highest-paid baseball writer in New York, when Runyon was given the chance to cover World War I, he severed his baseball connections forever, says Voigt, probably out of the belief that sportswriting was "too stereotyped, too stylized, too confining" to sustain his interest (2: 97-98). Angell combined Lardner's faith in baseball with Runyon's ability

as an artist, without Lardner's gullibility or Runyon's contempt; of all the early sportswriters, perhaps Angell was closest to Grantland Rice. Rice, according to Voigt, was an "unashamed romantic," a "college-trained southerner whose love of Latin poets moved him to lace his columns with the countless verses that became his trademark" (2: 99). A graduate of Harvard, Angell shared Rice's romanticism, and he often drew from literature, yet when it came to sportswriting, Angell preferred prose to Rice's poetry.

Of all Angell's contemporaries, New York Times columnist Red Smith was the most highly esteemed. Smith, a Pulitzer Prize winner, was considered the "laureate" of sportswriters, says Voigt. "Smith's roots were sunk deeply into the brisk, new epoch of baseball writing. Each game was different, he argued; all that was necessary was to keep one's tongue stuck in its natural habitat, 'the left cheek'" (3: 99). Originally with The New York Herald Tribune, Smith refused to elevate either baseball players or the game. "Smith was often praised for reminding his readers that baseball was a game that little boys could play; but so are mathematics and the violin," notes Wilfrid Sheed (45). Angell, to an extent, would agree; true, little boys could play baseball, but when adults like Willie Mays played it, says Angell, baseball became something to lift us out of the ordinary, something to hold dear.

Writers as diverse as James Thurber ("You Could Look

It Up"), Bernard Malamud (The Natural), and Marianne Moore ("Hometown Piece for Mssrs. Alston and Reese") drew upon baseball and, in turn, baseball writers like Roger Kahn borrowed from literature--in Kahn's case, from the "new journalism" pioneered by novelist Tom Wolfe during the late 1960s. Kahn, a reporter who covered the great Brooklyn Dodger teams of the early 1950s, combined his own remisciences with interviews of retired Dodger stars like Jackie Robinson, Duke Snider, and Pee Wee Reese to create The Boys of Summer. Not all of its portraits are successful, observes critic Grace Lichtenstein of The New York Times Book Review, and the book contains gaps, but that is not important. "What counts is that Roger Kahn has composed a very stylish piece of fifties nostalgia that puts us back in touch with our heroes without either cosmetizing them or demeaning them," says Lichtenstein (32). One of the top sellers of 1972, The Boys of Summer is considered a classic of sports literature.

If Angell was going to cover baseball, he needed an angle. He needed something fresh:

When I first began writing sports pieces for The New Yorker, it was clear to me that the doings of big-league baseball--the daily happenings on the field, the managerial strategies, the celebration of heroes, the medical and financial bulletins, the clubhouse gossip--were so enor-

mously reported in the newspapers that I would have to find some other aspect of the game to study. I decided to sit in the stands--for a while at least--and watch the baseball from there. I wanted to concentrate not just on the events down on the field but on their reception and results; I wanted to pick up the feel of the game as it happened to the people around me.

(Summer Game ix-x)

Shortly after speaking with Shawn, Angell set out for Florida, where he compiled the material for "The Old Folks Behind Home," an essay on spring training. Later that season, he also wrote "The 'Go!' Shouters," a story about the New York Mets, and he concluded with "A Tale of Three Cities," an account of the 1962 World Series; by 1972, Angell had accumulated enough material to publish his first collection of essays, The Summer Game.

The critics' praise for The Summer Game was immediate and unqualified, and it has continued ever since. "Along with Roger Kahn's The Boys of Summer, Angell's collection of his random baseball musings written for The New Yorker since 1962 is one of the most appealing sports books of the season," said Albert H. Johnston of Publisher's Weekly (63). "Page for page, The Summer Game contains not only the classiest but also the most resourceful baseball writing I have ever read," observed New

York Times Book Review critic Ted Solotaroff (1). Several years later, Sports Illustrated senior writer Jack McCallum listed The Summer Game as one of "Fifteen Books That Everybody Says Should Be in Your Sports Library" (McCallum, 90).² A place on a list like McCallum's marks The Summer Game as a classic; it is not simply a good sports book--it is literature and, as a work of literature, it tells us as much about ourselves as it does about baseball.

A collection of essays presents certain disadvantages, according to Solotaroff, one of which is continuity. While a novel or a biography is built upon a theme, a collection is usually more disjointed:

Collections don't sell well unless they have an obvious gimmick, and I don't see any in sight for Roger Angell's witty but tactful coverage. Still, "The Summer Game" is a genuine book, unified by its ongoing account of the new developments and distortions of the sport and integrated by Angell's consistent ability to capture the "feel" of the player, the game, the series, the pennant race, and by his articulate and imaginative defense of the sport itself against its adversaries, beginning with the major league owners. (1)

Still, above all else, The Summer Game is unified by

Angell, whose presence is at the center of every essay.

"Writing at length for a leisurely and most generous weekly magazine, I could sum things up, to be sure, and fill in a few gaps that the newspapermen were too hurried or too cramped for space to explore," observes Angell, "but my main job, as I conceived it, was to continue to try to give the feel of things--to explain the baseball as it happened to me, at a distance and in retrospect" (Summer Game x). At a distance and in retrospect The Summer Game is just that--the story of baseball as it happened to Angell between 1962 and 1971.

Since The Summer Game, Angell has continued to write baseball articles for The New Yorker. In 1977, he brought out his second collection of essays, Five Seasons: A Baseball Companion, followed in 1982 by Late Innings: A New Baseball Companion. His fame as a commentator on the national pastime continued when Newsweek opened its coverage of the 1988 baseball season with a review of Angell's latest book, Season Ticket: A Baseball Companion.

Clearly, Roger Angell has taken his place among the short but significant list of accomplished writers who have written about sports. What is perhaps not so clear is that by itself, The Summer Game is ample evidence of Angell's stature as a sportswriter and essayist. Although it is made up of twenty-one separate essays, published in The New

Yorker between 1962 and 1971, The Summer Game is not arranged chronologically. Rather, the book is broken up into six parts. Like baseball itself, which begins with spring training, The Summer Game opens with a chapter called "Rustle of Spring." Since it was the formation of the New York Mets in 1962 that first interested Angell in baseball writing, he devotes chapter two, "Amazin'," to the first three years of the Mets. In chapter three, Angell collects his first four years of World Series coverage under the banner "Classics and Campaigns--I." Faced with a troubling vision of baseball in the late twentieth century, Angell interrupts "Classics and Campaigns--I" to give us a guided tour of the Houston Astrodome in "The Future, Maybe." Finally, after a selective review of regular-season and World Series play between 1966 and 1971 in "Classics and Campaigns--II," Angell concludes The Summer Game with his reflections on the beauty of baseball, "The Interior Stadium."

Angell occasionally revised an essay before he included it in The Summer Game. These revisions sometimes improved the essay and sometimes not; in all cases, however, these essays reveal Angell's growing understanding of baseball, his power of observation, his concern for the human issue, his keen and cultivated intelligence, and his graceful style.

What becomes increasingly clear to his readers is that

Angell is not just a sportswriter, but a skillful essayist who happens to observe, think about, and comment on life as he sees it revealed through the game of baseball. "You are the foremost interpreter of baseball," Angell's stepfather, E.B. White, once told him ("Letters" 542). Reading The Summer Game, it is almost as if White had turned his thoughts to baseball.

Chapter Two

"Rustle Of Spring"

Angell begins chapter one of The Summer Game, "Rustle of Spring," with "Box Scores," an essay which originally appeared in the "Notes and Comment" section of The New Yorker on April 30, 1963. "Today the Times reported the arrival of the first pitchers and catchers at the spring training camps, and the morning was abruptly brightened, as by the delivery of a seed catalogue," says Angell (Summer Game 3). Few other introductions could tell us so much about Angell's past. Angell was born in New York in September 1920, the son of Ernest Angell, a well-known attorney, and his wife, Katharine Sergeant Angell. The Angells divorced in 1924, and Katharine joined The New Yorker the following year. While a New Yorker fiction editor, Katharine met E.B. White, a poet, essayist and short story writer hired by Harold Ross in 1927. Katharine Angell and E.B. White married two years later. After the family moved to Maine in 1938, White quit his full-time job at The New Yorker to write a column for Harper's called "One Man's Meat." Later, he did a similar column for The New Yorker called "Letters From the East." White, like his stepson, regarded the arrival of a seed catalogue as a sign of renewal, as he demonstrated

in the following passage about his son, Joel:

Although winter is still in possession of the land, the days are perceptively longer. Skating on the frog pond under an early moon, I am conscious of the promise of pollywogs under my runners, and my thoughts turn to seeds and the germinal prospect. Snow, which came with a bang at Thanksgiving, is an old story to the little boy now; winter's charms fade out like the picture of Charlie McCarthy on the back of his sweatshirt. Sears Roebuck's midwinter catalogue is shelved in favor of seed catalogues. (White 31-32)

White was not much of a baseball fan, but Katharine was, and so was Ernest Angell. As a child, Angell grew up around baseball and good writing, all of which is reflected in the introduction to "Box Scores."

Even though box scores are small, says Angell, they are personal, and that is part of their appeal. Each morning at breakfast it is possible to review thirteen ball games, from Fenway Park to Dodger Stadium:

In the space of half a cup of coffee I will be able to discover, say, that Ferguson Jenkins went eight innings in Montreal and won his fourth game of the season while giving up five hits, that Al Kaline was horse-collared by Fritz Peterson at

the Stadium, that Tony Oliva hit a double and a single off Mickey Lolich in Detroit, that Juan Marichal was bombed by the Reds in the top of the sixth at Candlestick Park, and that similar disasters and triumphs befell a couple of dozen-odd ballplayers--favorites and knaves--whose fortunes I follow from April to October. (Summer Game 3-4)

It may not have been much of a night for Kaline, but to a Kaline fan, it doesn't matter. Even if Yankees-Tigers box score reads

Kaline, rf 4 0 0 0

indicating that he had four at-bats, no hits, did not score, and did not drive in a run, it is a still chance to think of Kaline, to recall his swing, and that is all that's necessary.

A box score is not only pictorial, gossipy and informative, says Angell, it is also beautiful. "A box score is more than a capsule archive," he explains. "It is a precisely etched miniature of the sport itself, for baseball, in spite of its grassy spaciousness and apparent unpredictability, is the most intensely and satisfyingly mathematical of all our outdoor sports." Every hit, every walk adds up, which allows a fan, aided by memory and experience, "to extract from a box score the same joy, the same hallucinatory reality, that prickles the scalp of a

musician when he glances at a page of his score of Don Giovanni and actually hears bassos and sopranos, woodwinds and violins" (Summer Game 4).

Yet if baseball is part Don Giovanni, it is also part Porgy and Bess. A box score is filled with life and variety. For every quiet, dedicated outfielder like Mitch Webster of the Montreal Expos, there is a brash, powerful slugger like Darryl Strawberry of the New York Mets; for every soft-spoken, journeyman relief pitcher like Craig Lefferts of the San Francisco Giants, there is a quotable, late-inning fireballer like Goose Gossage of the Chicago Cubs. Such names show up daily in the morning box scores, and each day, they grow in vitality. "The daily, breathing reality of the ballplayers' names in box scores accounts in part, it seems to me, for the rarity of convincing baseball fiction," says Angell. "No novelist yet has been able to concoct a baseball hero with as tonic a name as Willie Mays or Duke Snider or Vida Blue" (Summer Game 4). Only baseball could provide us with a Willie Mays.

A box score is the perfect accompaniment to a morning cup of coffee, but a player like Mays, especially, had to be seen to be believed, so Angell set out to see him and write down what he found. He started at spring training, to try to get the feel of things.

For "The Old Folks Behind Home," published April 7, 1962, Angell visited four Florida training camps--Sarasota,

St. Petersburg, Bradenton, and Tampa. One day in Sarasota at a White Sox-Dodgers game, Angell noticed a change in the crowd:

The sun slid behind the grandstand roof, and there was a great stirring and rustling around me as sweaters were produced and sweaters zipped up; seats began to be vacated by deserters, and the fans in the upper rows, who had been in the shade all afternoon, came down looking for a warmer perch. Brief bursts of clapping died away, and the only sound was the shrill two-note whistle of infielders encouraging their pitcher. The old people all around me hunched forward, their necks bent, peering out at the field from under their cap bills, and I had the curious impression that I was in a giant aviary. (Summer Game 9)

Angell spent almost as much time watching the crowd as he did the game; he still seemed to be writing for "The Talk of the Town," the section of short, amusing features that opens each New Yorker. Writing about baseball was still something new to him.

Across the bay in St. Petersburg, Angell took in a game between the 1961 World Champions, the New York Yankees, and the new kids on the block, the New York Mets, managed by Casey Stengel. One of the most successful managers in major league history, Stengel guided the

Yankees to seven World Championships between 1949 and 1960, including five in a row from 1949-53. Stengel was fired in 1960 after losing the World Series to Bill Mazeroski and the Pittsburgh Pirates, four games to three. Now, coaching against the Yankees, Stengel pulled out all the stops, even changing pitchers in the middle of an inning. (Pitchers are almost never relieved in mid-inning in spring training, explained Angell.) Casey got his wish, and the Mets prevailed, 3-2. Angel was delighted. "What cheered me as I tramped through the peanut shells and discarded programs and out into the hot late sunlight was not just the score and not just Casey's triumph but a freshly renewed appreciation of the marvelous complexity and balance of baseball," he says. Where else could a team of over-the-hill castoffs like Roger Craig, Gus Bell and Gil Hodges defeat a team built around the M & M boys, Mickey Mantle and Roger Maris, at the height of their careers? Only in baseball, concludes Angell:

Offhand, I can think of no other sport in which the world's champions, one of the great teams of its era, would not instantly demolish inferior opposition and reduce a game such as the one we had just seen to cruel ludicrousness. Baseball is harder than that; it requires a full season, hundreds and hundreds of separate games, before quality can emerge, and in that summer span every

hometown fan, every doomed admirer of underdogs will have his afternoons of revenge and joys.

(Summer Game 15)

Angell was starting to learn the ropes; he had started to explain baseball as he saw it from the stands.

Angell's next stop was Bradenton, where he watched the Yankees play the Milwaukee Braves. Once again, he noticed something. As Whitey Ford walked to the mound to take his warm-up tosses at the start of the seventh inning, Warren Spahn started to throw in the Milwaukee bullpen. From Angell's seat behind first base, Spahn, deep in left field, was superimposed on Ford. "It was a trick photograph, a trompe-l'oeil: a 158-game winner and a 309-game winner throwing baseballs in the same fragment of space," says Angell (Summer Game 17). Understandably, he was thrilled. As Jonathan Yardley points out, "Angell's greatest virtue, what sets him apart from other baseball writers, is that he goes beneath the game's daily excitements to disclose what it is about baseball that continues to fascinate and move us" (3). Undoubtedly, he is also set apart by his vocabulary and his point of view. Prior to the publication of "The Old Folks Behind Home," few trompe-l'oeils were reported by sports writers, and they are still scarce today.

Joey Jay of the Reds faced Sandy Koufax of the Dodgers the following day in Tampa, and Angell, rapidly gaining an

appreciation of pitchers, was impressed by Koufax. Even though Los Angeles had finished second to Cincinnati in the 1961 National League pennant race, Koufax went 18-13, struck out 269 batters and compiled a 3.52 ERA. Jay had finished 21-10, but that was last year. Today he was helpless:

The fans, though the Reds are their team, seemed to enjoy it all. They booed Jay lightly; they didn't mind seeing him suffer a little--not with that \$27,500 salary he won after a holdout this spring. They applauded Koufax, the Dodger pitcher, who was working easily and impressively, mixing fast balls and curves and an occasional changeup, pitching in and out to the batters, and hitting the corners. Koufax looked almost ready for opening day. (Summer Game 18)

Earlier, in The New Yorker, Angell said that Koufax was using fastballs, curves and "an occasional knuckler" ("Old Folks" 170). Angell's grasp of pitching may have been getting better, but he still made mistakes, just like the rest of us who sit in the stands. Sometimes a breaking ball is hard to read.

Beat writers for papers like The Boston Herald, The Chicago Tribune, and The Los Angeles Times cover the Grapefruit circuit every spring, but when Angell returned to Florida six years later for "The Short Season,"

it was out of a sense of need. After a week of watching Luis Aparicio fielding ground balls under a bright, warm sky, "I came home with the curious feeling that I had been retrained, too--that the short season had renewed my fondness for small ballparks and small crowds and the country quiet of afternoons given over without regret to the sunshine game," said Angell (Summer Game 20).

On the first day of his trip Angell stopped at Payne Park, "the wooden, old-timey stadium of the Chicago White Sox," to see the Sox play Boston. Here is a portrait of Angell at work:

Next up was Carl Yastrzemski, the Boston demigod who won the American League titles for batting, home runs and runs batted in last year. He was welcomed by awed applause from the Sarasota old folks, and a full shift by the Chicago infield. He grounded out to Aparicio, who was playing a good ten feet on the first-base side of second. "Yaz rbbd.," I noted. "Tgh. yr. ahead." Tony Conigliaro then lined out quickly, offering no immediate evidence about the results of the terrible injury he suffered last August, when he was struck in the face by a pitch and was finished for the season. "Tony C. gnshy?" I asked myself. "Wt. & see." (Summer Game 20-21)

A reporter like Maury Allen of The New York Post or

Jerome Holtzman of The Chicago Sun-Times would have been at Payne Park to cover the White Sox for the morning papers, or perhaps to interview Yaz for the Sunday sports section, but Angell was free to do as he liked. Luckily he was good enough to pull it off, said Wilfrid Sheed:

Angell could write any way he liked for a bright audience with no expectations--a heaven-sent opportunity to be terrific if you're even good. But there's usually a reason for such vacuums. Just try making spring training interesting sometime, with its unknown casts, its changeless routine, and its fly-me-to Florida (or Arizona) settings, and you will see why other writers have left it to Roger. Angell's apparent freedom is like having the run of the Gobi Desert. Yet by a kind of hunt-and-peck method, a promising rookie here, a ruminating veteran there, he floods these bleak encampments with color. There is hardly such a thing as a dull ballplayer or a meaningless game: he will spot something in a pitcher's motion or a hitter's eyes that rivets you on the inessential until it fills the canvas. . . . Anything so sweetly concentrated on as this becomes as important as anything else--while the spell lasts. (47)

Spring training is traditionally the place where rookies

show up to make an impression, and veterans go to get into shape; by traveling to Florida in 1962 for "The Old Folks Behind Home," Angell showed he could play, and when he went back in 1968, it was to work out the kinks for another long season.

Leaving Chain-O'Lakes Stadium in Winter Haven, Florida, one day, Angell stood outside the Boston clubhouse with a group of ballplayers and their wives, watching Red Sox pitcher Jose Santiago play a game of baseball with his four-year-old son, Alex. After fourteen swings in a row without even a pop-up or a foul tip, Alex got a hit, ran a set of imaginary bases, fell down, scrambled to his feet, and made it safely home. Santiago's teammates, their wives and children all cheered.

Alex Santiago was just what Angell needed. Jim Lonborg, the ace of the Boston staff in 1967 (22-9 with a 3.16 ERA), had injured his knee while skiing, and he was not ready to start the season. Slugging right fielder Tony Conigliaro nearly lost an eye when he was hit by a Jack Hamilton fastball last August. Conigliaro was back in uniform, but no one knew if he was able to play. On top of all that, Yaz's sudden fame had seemed to make him withdrawn. How would the Red Sox repeat as league champions?

Surrounded by more elders (the freshwater, or blue-gilled, geezer is almost indistinguishable from the Gulf variety), I watched the Red Sox

split two games in Winter Haven, losing to Detroit by 13-3 and then beating the Phillies the next afternoon, 6-1. I finished my trip as I had begun, looking for omens and finding no sure conclusions or pennant winners. For the Red Sox, much will depend, for instance, on Tony Conigliaro's eyesight, which may have been slightly but significantly affected by his injury. The answer to that question may determine, in turn, whether Tony will win back the last half inch of territory now in front of his toes in the batter's box, indicating that he has reconquered his nerve and will crowd and control the plate as before. He will have to earn this ground, for no pitcher will give it to him; in his first game of spring training, against the White Sox, he was decked twice. Yet all my doubts about the Red Sox--the insufficient pitching, the uncertain catching, Lonborg's leg, Conigliaro's eyes, Yaz's fame--could not entirely shake a stubborn, hunchy conviction in me that this team might again give us some memorable late-summer afternoons. I sustained this optimism, even in the face of some mad contra-indications, by reminding myself of the youth of these marvelously skilled Boston regulars: Conigliaro and Smith are twenty-three;

Scott, Andrews, Petrocelli, and Lonborg are twenty-four; Foy is twenty-five; and Yastrzemski is twenty-eight. Everyone improves at this age level, and the conviction of one's own good luck is almost invincible; baseball is a young man's game. ("Short Season" 142-143)

Later, watching Alex Santiago play baseball with his father outside the Red Sox clubhouse at Chain-O'Lakes Stadium, Angell saw that the sport has a way of renewing itself, of fostering new players, new fans and new insights--insights into the game itself, but most of all, insights into ourselves. Despite Lonborg's knee, Conigliaro's eye and Yaz's stardom, the Red Sox would repeat. Sadly, they failed. Lonborg stumbled to 6-10, Conigliaro did not play, and Yaz, the 1967 triple-crown winner, slipped to a .301 batting average, 23 home runs and 74 RBI. After batting .326, hitting 44 homers and driving in 121 runs to carry the Red Sox to the pennant in '67, Yaz could only watch as pitchers like Denny McClain, Dave McNally, and Luis Tiant took the bat out of his hands in 1968, walking him 119 times. Of course, 1968 was the Year of the Pitcher, and Yaz's .301 batting average was good enough to lead the league, but the Red Sox finished fourth, seventeen games behind Detroit. Once again, Angell was heartbroken. "Boston Globe columnist Mike Barnicle once wrote, 'Baseball is not a life-and-death matter, but the Red Sox are.' And that's

exactly right," said Angell (Langdon 82). Lonborg, Yaz, and Conigliaro were too painful to think about, so he left them out of The Summer Game, along with his "stubborn, hunchy conviction" that the Bosox could still be competitive. Still, outside the clubhouse, on the warm, green grass, Alex is safe, and everyone cheers; baseball, despite its disappointments, has once again renewed us.

Chapter Three

"Amazin"

Following in the family tradition, Angell, who joined the staff of The New Yorker in 1956, became a fine editor, and his short stories, collected in The Stone Arbor and Other Stories, won national acclaim, but it took the New York Mets to interest him in writing about baseball. "It started with the Mets back in 1962 when they were brand-new," said Angell. "They were the worst team that ever took the field, but they were so young and so opposite from the Yankees that New York adopted them with a wild and passionate attachment" (Langdon 81). Appropriately, Angell devotes part two of The Summer Game, "Amazin'" to the early years of the Mets, beginning with "The 'Go!' Shouters," published June 16, 1962.

While the rest of New York welcomed the Mets without hesitation, Angell was a bit more reluctant:

Through April and May, I resisted frequent invitations delivered via radio and television, to come up to the Polo Grounds and see "those amazin' Mets." I even resisted a particularly soft blandishment, extended by one the Mets' announcers, to "bring the wife and come on up tomorrow after church and brunch." My

nonattendance was not caused by any unwillingness to attach my loyalty to New York's new National League team. The only amazement generated by the Mets had been their terrifying departure from the runway in a full nosedive--the team lost the first nine games of its regular season--and I had decided it would be wiser, and perhaps kinder, to postpone my initial visit until the novice crew had grasped the first principles of powered flight. (Summer Game 35)

On the 20th of May, however, when the Mets swept a doubleheader from the Milwaukee Braves, a traditional National League powerhouse, Angell felt it was time to finally take a look. With the Los Angeles Dodgers and the San Francisco Giants coming to town for the first time since 1957, Angell rushed out to buy tickets for all five days.

By Memorial Day weekend Angell could barely control himself, and neither could New York. "I took my fourteen-year-old daughter daughter to the opening doubleheader, against the Dodgers, and even before we arrived at the park, it was clear that neither the city subway system nor the Mets themselves had really believed we were coming," he said in The New Yorker:

Hong Kong slum conditions on the infrequent northbound trains disproved my personal theory

that it is always possible to jam one more passenger into a subway car, and at the Polo Grounds rattled ushers dropped ticket stubs, argued with each other, and made it plain that they had not previously found it necessary to master the intricacies of the park's seating plan. ("The 'Go!' Shouters" 116)

Like his stepfather, another graceful writer who did some of his best reporting about New York, Angell can be funny. Sadly, Angell left the passage about Hong Kong slum conditions, subway cars, and the Polo Grounds out of The Summer Game. Possibly, Angell felt that a general audience would not be receptive to a joke about the New York City subway system, but such is not the case. America is fascinated by New York.

Conditions aboard the IRT aside, Angell often displays a wry sense of humor. Once they were finally seated, Angell and his daughter watched, along with 56,000 other Mets fans, as the Dodgers built a 12-3 lead. Angell was embarrassed:

"Baseball isn't usually like this," I explained to my daughter.

"Sometimes it is," she said. "This is like the fifth grade against the sixth grade at school."

(Summer Game 36)

Just as E.B. White once did, Angell finds humor in the

ordinary, where it is most unexpected. Growing up around one of the foremost essayists in the history of American letters, something must have rubbed off, for Angell's writing at its best displays the same affectionate humor, the same style and elegance as White's "Here is New York," "Death of a Pig," and "Once More to the Lake." "If I was influenced by anyone, I guess it was by my stepfather, E.B. White," Angell told David Lehman of Newsweek. "He suffered writing but made it look easy" (74).

One of Angell's reasons for going back to the Polo Grounds was to see the return of his idol, Willie Mays, whose Giants followed the Dodgers to New York for a four-game series. Mays played center field just as Angell remembered it--beautifully:

Mays, it is a pleasure to say, is just the same --the best ballplayer anywhere. he hit a homer each day at the Polo Grounds, made a simple, hilarious error on a ground single to center, and caught flies in front of his belt buckle like a grocer catching a box of breakfast food pulled from a shelf. All in all, I most enjoy watching him run bases. He runs low to the ground, his shoulders swinging to his huge strides, his spikes digging up great chunks of infield dirt; the cap flies off at second, he cuts the base like a racing car, looking back over his shoulder

at the ball, and lopes grandly into third, and everyone who has watched him finds himself laughing with excitement and shared delight.

(Summer Game 39)

Suddenly, with Mays' fielding and baserunning clear in his mind's eye, Angell is like a little boy, breathless with excitement. Over the years Angell will return to these two subjects--Mays and the power of the imagination--again and again.

Despite the beatings the Mets took at the hands of Los Angeles and San Francisco, the fans at the Polo Grounds continued to roar, pleading, "Let's go, Mets! Let's go, Mets!" Angell was amused--puzzled, but amused. It seemed unlikely, he observed, that even in New York, an entire crowd of 50,000 people could be made up "exclusively of born losers--leftover Landon voters, collectors of mongrel puppies, owners of stock in played-out gold mines--who had been waiting for a suitably hopeless cause" (Summer Game 40). Nor did it seem possible that the "Go!" shouters were old, embittered fans of the New York Giants and Brooklyn Dodgers, turning out to voice their disappointment over the way Walter O'Malley spirited the Dodgers away to California, enticing Horace Stoneham and the Giants to follow suit. "No one can stay that bitter for five years," Angell concluded (Summer Game 40).

During a lull in the eighth inning of a Giants game,

while the Mets brought in a new pitcher, Angell overheard a conversation between a pair of fans:

"I tell you, there isn't one of them--not one--that could make the Yankee club," one of them said. "I never saw such a collection of dogs."

"Well, what about Frank Thomas?" said the other. "What about him? What's he batting now? .315? .320? He's got thirteen homers, don't he?"

"Yeah, and who's he going to push out of the Yankee outfield? Mantle? Maris? Blanchard? You can't call these characters ballplayers. They all belong back in the minors--the low minors."

(Summer Game 40-41)

He did not know the speaker, but he recognized the tone. It was the bold, superior voice of a Yankee fan, spoiled by twenty American League pennants and sixteen World Championships between 1931 and 1961. Winning was somehow a Yankee fan's birthright, and losing was just as intolerable to the fan beside sitting Angell at the Polo Grounds in 1962 as it is to George Steinbrenner today. Now it was all clear, said Angell:

Suddenly the Mets fans made sense to me. What we were witnessing was precisely the opposite kind of rooting that goes on across the river. This was the losing cheer, the gallant yell for a good

try--antimatter to the sounds of Yankee Stadium. This was a new recognition that perfection is admirable but a trifle inhuman, and that a stumbling kind of semi-success can be much more warming. Most of all, perhaps, these exultant yells for the Mets were also yells for ourselves, and came from a wry, half-understood recognition that there is more Met than Yankee in every one of us. (Summer Game 41)

Almost in spite of themselves, the Mets had won a convert, and Angell, an ex-Giants fan, was back where he belonged--back at the Polo Grounds.

Once he discovered the Mets he was eager to see them again, so Angell returned to Polo Grounds for "S Is for So Lovable," published May 25, 1963. Unlike the year before, when he didn't visit the ball park for nearly two months, Angell had tickets for opening day. St. Louis defeated New York 7-0, and the Mets went on to lose their first eight games of the season. Only because he'd already purchased the tickets, Angell returned to the Polo Grounds for a Sunday doubleheader between the Mets and the Milwaukee Braves. Just two days earlier, the Mets had defeated the Braves to end their losing streak at eight. Much to Angell's astonishment, they won Saturday, too. When the Mets blew a two-run lead in the opener of Sunday's doubleheader, however, Angell wasn't surprised. "Same old

Mets," he thought to himself. With New York trailing 5-3, something happened:

With two out in the top of the seventh, the Braves' Hank Aaron ripped a low drive through the box, and Ron Hunt, the Mets' rookie second baseman, made a sprint and a flying dive to his right, landing on his belly in a cloud of dirt. He missed the ball by about two inches--it went through for a single--but he brought a gasp from the crowd. There was nothing meretricious or flashy or despairing about that dive, even though the team was behind. Hunt very nearly pulled it off, and I suddenly realized that not once last year had I seen a Met infielder even attempt such a play. It gave me a curious, un-Metsian emotion --hope. (Summer Game 48)

Almost on cue, Jim Hickman hit an eighth-inning grand slam, and the Mets won, 8-5. New York took the second game, too. Leaving the ballpark that evening, Angell was excited. "We had witnessed something like a jail break," he reflects on page 47 of The Summer Game. Originally, however, had no doubt:

We had witnessed a historic jail break, and I was convinced that Ron Hunt had been the one to pick the lock. ("So Lovable" 132)

Shortly thereafter the Mets climbed to eighth place--the

first time in their existence they had not been last, and a diving stab at a ground ball was the play that made the difference. How could Angell forget? Over the years, subtlety replaced emotion. "He is detached, cool, critical . . . but beneath everything his love for the game, his sense of its poetry, paradox and unstated poignancy, comes through," observes Albert H. Johnston (63). Sometimes it doesn't. Once in a while Angell tries to hide the depth of his affection, and it shows.

"S Is for So Lovable," which Ballantine Books garbled as "S Is for So Loveable" in its paperback edition of The Summer Game, got its title from a banner Angell saw at the Polo Grounds:

M is for Mighty
 E is for Exciting
 T is for Terrific
 S is for So Lovable
 (Summer Game 53)

"S Is for So Lovable" was Angell's second essay on the Mets. The more time he spent at the Polo Grounds, cheering for Ron Hunt, the more he learned about baseball. One of his earliest lessons was on the importance of one-run games. Just the year before, Angell's Mets lost thirty-nine one-run contests. "In the lore of baseball, the ability to win one-run-margin ball games is a telling mark of team maturity, pitching depth, and a cool defense," Angell said after the Mets pulled out two 3-2 victories over the Phillies and a third against the Reds (Summer Game 49).

New York's modest little three-game winning streak came to an end when the Reds took the middle two games of the series. Was this the start of another nine-game losing streak? No, it wasn't. Despite blowing two five-run leads, the Mets held on to win the last game, 13-12. They were lucky, said Angell:

But good fortune is an invariable attribute of baseball teams on the rise--which is to say that there is almost nothing lucky about baseball luck. The blooped, wrong-field hit that just falls in at a crucial moment, the enemy line drive that goes smack into a fielder's glove for the last out are predictable mathematical variants, and they benefit only those teams that have been tenacious enough to wait for their arrival. This year, the Mets have looked lucky; last year they were jinxed. ("So Lovable" 134)

Scratch beneath the surface of baseball, and what do you find? Physics, says Angell. Laws of probability. Watching young Ron Hunt, Ed Kranepool, and Jim Hickman as they learned to play together as a team was sometimes frustrating, but it was pure mathematics:

These small virtues--the enemy run cut off, the apparent stroke of luck, the key game well pitched, the close game pulled out--are not just instances of positive new Metsian thinking. They

are also a sampling from the manual of good baseball, a set of lessons in the art of winning games. Big-league baseball is a game of incredible difficulty and unremitting pressure. Day-to-day competition is so intense that even the greatest teams, over the span of a season, almost never win more than three games out of every five they play; at the same time, the weakest, most scorned clubs manage to win an average of two out of every five games they play. (Last year, for instance, the world-champion Yankees won ninety-six games and lost sixty-six in the American League race, which is almost exactly three out of five; the last-place Senators won sixty games and lost a hundred and one, which is almost exactly two out of five.) The determining margin between champions and cellar occupants is established by what happens in the fifth game, and every game, in effect, represents that key fifth game, to be won or lost, in all probability, by the proper execution of one double play, or by one sharp single, or by a throw to the right base at the right time. What is most cheering about the Mets this year is the small but continuous evidence that they have begun to comprehend the nature of this daily

pressure and to respond to its exigent demands, at least to the point where their own fifth games will not often follow four losses. Last year, the Mets established their horrendous record by winning only 1.25 games out of each five played. At this writing, they Mets have won fourteen games while losing eighteen, which, translated, becomes 2.19 wins out of every five games. Extended, extrapolated, and rubbed with juju oil, this ratio will mean seventy victories by the end of the season, good for seventh or eighth place, which, in the curious new Metsian tongue, spells bliss. ("So Lovable" 136)

Working as a reporter for William Shawn was a terrific job, as Wilfrid Sheed suggested, but it demanded a certain style, a certain grace; it demanded accuracy. "Among those of us who cover sports," writes Joel Oppenheimer, author of The Wrong Season, "he's one of the few real writers and one of the very few who reach out past the knowledgeable to the general audience" (35). Since few subscribers to The New Yorker were likely to turn to the box scores first thing in the morning or to hold Mets season tickets at the Polo Grounds, Angell's early essays served as textbooks on baseball. Over time, as Angell's audience grew more sophisticated, so did Angell. For example, Angell trimmed "S Is for So Lovable" by nearly 1,000 words for its

appearance in The Summer Game. Of those 1,000 words, about one third were found in the paragraph on winning percentage--a subject almost any knowledgeable baseball fan would take for granted; another 72 made up the passage on luck. Unlike Steve Hirdt, Peter Hirdt, and Seymour Siwoff, a trio of sabermetricians at the Elias Sports Bureau, Angell's appreciation of the game is not purely statistical.³ By themselves, the numbers aren't important; in The Summer Game, it is Willie Mays, stretching a single into a double, or Stan Musial, slashing another line drive to right--it is the game that matters.

Discussing his love for the Red Sox and Mets, Angell once noted, "I think you can't really belong to baseball unless you belong to a team. You can't belong in the abstract, and belonging and caring is what baseball is all about" (Langdon, 82). Just how deeply he cared about the Mets dawned on him day at the Polo Grounds, during the first game of a doubleheader with the Giants. Willie Mays, Felipe Alou, Orlando Cepeda, and Willie McCovey, fresh from winning the 1962 National League pennant, were ripping line drives all over the ballpark. Nearby, a Giants fan was complaining about the way his team was playing:

"Look at that McCovey," one of them said bitterly, as Stretch fielded a Met single in left.

"He just won't run. He's no goddam outfielder. I tell you, Dark oughtta nail him onna goddam

bench, save him for pinch-hitting." He was not watching the game before us; his mind was weeks and months away, groping through the mists of September, and he saw his team losing. The Giants' pennant of last year, the Giants' power of today had made a miser of him, and he was afraid. I had nothing to lose, though; I clapped my hands and shouted, "Let's go, Mets!"

(Summer Game 53-54)

By now it was apparent even to Angell: he belonged to the Mets. Still, he continued to wonder why. What was it that attracted him, along with thousands of others, to a last-place team? Was it something to do with the Yankees, as he suggested before? Perhaps the Yankees did play a part in it, but it had more to do with the Mets than the Yankees, he said. "Unlike many of us in the city, the Mets have their future entirely in their own hands," wrote Angell. "They will create it, and in the meantime the Met fans, we happy many, can witness and share this youthful adventure" (Summer Game 55).

From 1958 to 1961, Berra, Mantle, and Maris were the only show in town, and Angell was deeply hurt. Without the Giants, who were whisked away to California along with the Brooklyn Dodgers at the end of 1957, what was Angell to do? No more Willie Mays, the Say Hey Kid, robbing Vic Wertz of a triple in the '54 World Series! No more Bobby Thomson and

the shot heard 'round the world! Understandably, returning to the Polo Grounds was an event to remember. "The shouts, the cheers, and the deep, steady roar made by the 56,000-odd fans in excited conversation were comical and astonishing, and a cause for self-congratulation," Angell said of the Memorial Day doubleheader he attended, along with his daughter, between the Mets and the Los Angeles Dodgers; "just by coming out in such ridiculous numbers (ours was the biggest baseball crowd of the 1962 season and the biggest Polo Grounds crowd since September 6, 1942), we had heightened our own occasion, building a considerable phenomenon out of the attention and passion each of us had brought along for the games and the players we were to see" (Summer Game 36).

Built in the late 1800s near the corner of Eighth Avenue and 155th Street, the Polo Grounds were destroyed by fire in 1911. Owner John T. Brush rebuilt the stadium out of concrete and steel, the third such ballpark in the major leagues. Later, Brush sold the Giants, along with the stadium, to the Stoneham family, but even after the Mets arrived, the Polo Grounds remained the heart of a vibrant neighborhood. Memorial Day, the Angells left the ballpark early and hailed a taxi on the Harlem Speedway:

The cab swung left on 155th Street, and I glanced to my right, along Edgecomb Avenue, and saw a little crowd gathered on a path that runs through

a scrap of park and down Coogan's Bluff toward the Polo Grounds. There were perhaps thirty or forty men and women there. Most were Negroes; many were carrying portable radios. Below them, the great bank of lights above the roofed horseshoe illuminated the bones of the absurd, doomed old stadium. The ticketless spectators stood immobile, staring down through the early dusk, although they could see no more of the field than the big scoreboard above the bleachers and a slice of emerald grass in deep center field. It seemed likely that some of them had been there all afternoon, listening to the roars from below, smiling and nudging one another at each momentary bit of good news over their radio--a small standing committee gathered to welcome the new team and the old league to our city. (Summer Game 44)

Ziping along in a cab on the Harlem Speedway, Angell saw the Polo Grounds as an outsider, and its craggy, decrepit appeal dawned upon Angell as if he were seeing the ballpark for the very first time. In a sense, he was.

Out in center field, Mets rookie Jim Hickman chased fly balls where Willie Mays once roamed. On the mound, journeyman right-hander Roger Craig toiled where Sal Maglie once pitched. At shortstop, Elio Chacon dug out ground

balls where Alvin Dark once played. Hickman, Craig, and Chacon could never replace Mays, Maglie, and Dark. Still, Angell returned to the Polo Grounds out of a fondness for the ballpark and the friends there he had not seen since 1957:

The Polo Grounds, which is in the last few years of its disreputable life, is a vast assemblage of front stoops and rusty fire escapes. On a hot summer evening, everyone here is touching everyone else; there are no strangers, no one is private. The air is alive with shouts, gossip, flying rubbish. Old-timers know and love every corner of the crazy, crowded, proud old neighborhood; the last-row walkup flats in the outermost grandstands, where one must peer through girders and pigeon nests for a glimpse of green. . . . and the good box seats just on the curve of the upper deck in short right and short left--front windows on the street, where one can watch the arching fall of a weak fly ball and know in advance, like one who sees a street accident in the making, that it will collide with that ridiculous, dangerous upper tier for another home run. (Summer Game 55)

Even though the Giants were gone, Angell still had the Polo Grounds. It was still the old neighborhood, where the past

was always close at hand.

Meanwhile, work continued on Shea Stadium. When the Polo Grounds were demolished in the spring of 1964, Angell commemorated it in "Farewell," first published as an unsigned essay in the Notes and Comment section of "The Talk of the Town." Most newspaper and television stories focused on the legends who once played and coached there, like John McGraw, Christy Mathewson and Mel Ott, but Angell's loss was more immediate. "Mel Ott's cow-tailed swing, Sal Maglie's scowl, Leo Durocher's pacings in the third-base coach's box are portraits that have long been fixed in my own interior permanent collection, and the fall of the Polo Grounds will barely joggle them," Angell noted in the April 25, 1964, New Yorker (Summer Game 57).

What he missed was smaller and more temporary, he discovered - the sight of a flock of pigeons, flashing across the outfield, only to disappear above the still, lifeless flags on the roof; the warmth of a rusty piece of chain, where he rested his arm while sitting in a box seat; the "Plock!" of a ball hitting the facade of the upper deck in left field:

All these I mourn, for their loss constitutes the death of still another neighborhood--a small landscape of distinctive and reassuring familiarity. Demolition and alteration are a painful city commonplace, but as our surroundings become

more undistinguished and indistinguishable, we sense, at last, that we may not possess the scorecards and record books to help us remember who we are and what we have seen and loved.

(Summer Game 58)

A player like Willie Mays or Bobby Thomson or Sal Maglie is easy to recall because he is a part of history, and history is revised with every pitch; it is constantly before us. Philadelphia third baseman Mike Schmidt cannot hit another home run without inching closer to Jimmie Foxx and Mickey Mantle, and Houston fireballer Nolan Ryan cannot record another strikeout without adding to his lead over Steve Carlton and Gaylord Perry. A feeling is different, however, because an emotion depends upon setting and mood. With the destruction of the Polo Grounds, how was Angell to recall what he had seen and felt? One part of Angell's life had come to an end, but another part was just beginning.

Shea Stadium, built at a cost of \$25,500,000, opened April 17, 1964, and Angell, reporting on the new park in "A Clean, Well-Lighted Cellar," was prepared to hate it from the start. Constructed on a site adjacent to the World's Fair of 1964-65, Shea Stadium was a stark contrast to the Polo Grounds:

Indeed, on my first visit to the new ballyard, with its cyclotron profile, its orange and blue exterior spangles, and its jelly-bean interior

yellows, browns, blues, and greens, looked to me remarkably like an extension of the Fair--an exhibit named "Baseball Land, or perhaps "Stengel-0-Rama." To one nurtured in the gray fortress of Yankee Stadium and the green barn of the Polo Grounds (0 lost!), the place came as a shock; luckily, the Mets supplied a reassuring sense of continuity by giving up sixteen hits to the Pirates and losing, 4-3. (Summer Game 59-60)

On subsequent visits his anger subsided, but he still had complaints. Shea's 21,795 box seats meant that to sit in a general admission seat, a fan had to climb to the top ten rows of the upper deck. With the bullpens safely hidden behind the outfield fence, no one could see who was warming up, and the scoreboard was used more for encouraging the crowd to take part in sing-alongs than it was for providing word on relief pitchers. Shea's lights were the brightest of any ballpark's, but their position just above the upper tier of seats made it difficult for infielders and spectators in the lower sections of the stands to follow pop-ups. Women wouldn't like the lights either, said Angell, once they discovered that the floodlights bouncing off the yellow seats made the section look like "a hepatitis ward" (Summer Game 60).

Worst of all was the ballpark's shape, however. Unlike

the Polo Grounds, Shea Stadium was circular, and it was built of reinforced concrete. Fans were no longer hidden behind girders or tucked away in a corner of the upper right-field deck. The view was unobstructed. "Unobstructed and, I should add, too distant," Angell argued in The Summer Game:

Only in the field level seats--those two scooped sections that roughly parallel the infield foul lines--does one feel close to the action; the loge, mezzanine, and upper levels are all circular, and this imposed geometry keeps the elevated fan forever distant from the doings within the contained square of the infield. All this is because Shea Stadium (and all future big-city stadia) must also be suitable for professional football. The changeover will be achieved, come autumn, by sliding the two massive suspended field-level sections apart on their tracks and around the circle, until they face each other on opposite sides of the gridiron. This is an impressive solution to an old problem, but it has been achieved at the expense of the baseball fan, for the best ballparks--Ebbets Field, say, or Comiskey Park--have all been boxes. (Summer Game 61)

When "A Clean, Well-Lighted Cellar" appeared in The New

Yorker on May 30, 1964, a little more than a month after the new park opened, it contained no explanation of how Shea Stadium would also accommodate football, possibly because football was still not a threat to the national pastime. By the early 1970s the NFL was king, however, and Angell's chief complaint about the new ball park becomes especially poignant:

Many of the games I saw this spring were thickly attended, but again and again I had the impression that I had lost company with the audience. In the broad, sky-filled circle of the new stadium, the shouts, the clapping, the trumpet blasts, and the brave old cries of "Let's go, Mets!" climbed thinly into the air and vanished; the place seemed without echoes, angles, and reassurance. No longer snug in a shoebox, my companions and I were ants perched on the sloping lip of a vast, shiny soup plate, and we were lonelier than we liked. (Summer Game 61)

Just two years earlier Angell attended a doubleheader at the Polo Grounds that attracted a crowd of 56,000 people, but to someone who loved the park and missed it as much as Angell did, it was a snug, reassuring old shoebox.

Discussing the Polo Grounds in "The 'Go!' Shouters" and "S Is for So Lovable," Angell never discussed the

ballpark's dimensions, as strange as they were--two hundred and seventy-nine feet to the left-field corner, four hundred and eighty-three feet to dead center and two hundred fifty-seven feet to right. Shea Stadium's fences, along with its ushers and escalators, caught Angell's attention right away in a passage he omitted from The

Summer Game:

Well, the park will take some getting used to, that's all. With the exceptions noted, there is much to be grateful for at Shea. The seats are broad and wonderfully comfortable. The attendants are niftily dressed and universally polite, and the escalators and ramps, although narrow, can siphon off a large crowd without much jostling. The stark, functional look of the exterior promises to be softened by the planting of trees --a promise that is contained in a number of yellow squares now painted on the pavements outside, containing the words "Met Tree." I don't much relish the twenty-five minute subway ride from and to midtown, but I imagine Queens residents used to feel the same way about getting to the Polo Grounds; now it's their turn. And there is no doubt that the ballfield itself is infinitely better than the old one, with its ridiculously short foul lines and

frightening center-field Sahara. At Shea, the outfield wall is sensibly balanced, curving smoothly from three hundred and forty-one feet at the foul poles to four hundred and ten feet in dead center--a field that will give away no cheap homers but will deservedly reward a powerful straightaway poke. The infield, after some early sogginess, now seems slick and fast--just right for a home team that hits a lot of singles. From here on, my feelings about Shea Stadium will depend largely on the number of those singles the Mets can achieve. I am almost ready to like the place. ("Cellar" 96-98)

By the time he revised "A Clean, Well-Lighted Cellar" for The Summer Game, however, Angell had seen young Tom Seaver and the 1969 Mets defeat the Baltimore Orioles of Frank Robinson, Brooks Robinson, Mike Cuellar, and Dave McNally for the World Championship. Shea Stadium turned out to be just fine, and so did the Mets.

By early 1964, attending Mets' games, whether at Shea Stadium or on the road, was becoming fashionable, and Angell hated it. "The thing is growing cute, like those Pogo for President clubs," he complains (Summer Game, 67). Even the banners had changed. Once upon a time, banners were made overnight, painted on old sheets and towels, their messages often misspelled or made jiggly by

an unsteady hand. "This year, I saw a neatly printed sign that could have been a radio jingle," reports Angell:

In Los Angeles, they wade through smog;
Las Vegans lose their bets,
But we New Yorkers aren't sad--
We have our New York Mets!

(Summer Game 67)

Suddenly, the old banners no longer applied. No one would ever make a sign that said "S Is for So Lovable" anymore, because the Mets were no longer lovable, they were a mediocre, second-division ball club. Winning had changed everything. "The carefree unreality, the joyful bitterness, the self-identification with a brave but hopeless cause will become more and more difficult for Met rooters to sustain as their team draws closer to the rest of the league," concluded Angell (Summer Game 68). As it turned out, the '64 Mets finished 53-109, only two games better than the season before, but the process had started. Soon the "Go!" shouters would no longer have a reason to shout, and Angell would be sad. Just like a child, the Mets had grown up.

Chapter Four

"Classics and Campaigns-- I "

Of all the players he saw at spring training, caught at the Polo Grounds, or followed to Shea Stadium, who was the greatest? Angell could not decide. Granted, the Say Hey Kid was his still his hero, but Angell admired Koufax and Gibson, too:

I have written about some celebrated players --Sandy Koufax, Bob Gibson, Brooks Robinson, Frank Robinson, Willie Mays--again and again, while slighting equally admirable figures such as Hank Aaron and Mickey Mantle. It is unfair, but this book is the work of a part-time, nonprofessional baseball watcher. In most of these ten seasons, I was rarely able to attend as many as twenty-five games before the beginning of the World Series; I watched, or half-watched, a good many more on television. (Summer Game ix)

Part three, "Classics and Campaigns--I," is the story of how Koufax and Gibson ended the reign of the Yankees, of how Walter O'Malley, Charlie Finley, and Joe Cronin almost destroyed the sport, and how television, with the owners' blessing, usurped control of baseball. Caught in the middle, Angell was torn--how could a game so beautiful, a

game that produced Koufax, Gibson, and Mays, suffer so cruelly at the hands of its keepers? "Money has become the name of the national pastime, and a decided elegiac note runs through Angell's expert reporting," Keith Cushman says of The Summer Game (1456). Still, television and O'Malley aside, Angell never gave up hope, for each October the World Series unfolded, and once again the spotlight shifted to Koufax, Gibson and Mays, back where it belonged.

Appropriately, "Classics and Campaigns--I" opens with "A Tale of Three Cities," an account of the 1962 World Series, which pitted the San Francisco Giants, absent from the Polo Grounds for five years, against the New York Yankees. "Willie Mays against Whitey Ford--this was worth the five-year wait!" exclaimed Angell, watching Mays hit a single off Ford at Candlestick Park (Summer Game 77). Just a few days earlier, hoping to see Mays against Ford had seemed too much to ask.

On the final day of the 1962 baseball season the Los Angeles Dodgers lost their sixty-first game, the San Francisco Giants won their one hundred and first, and the Dodgers and Giants were forced to meet in a playoff. The Dodgers led the Giants by four full games with a week left to play, but they collapsed, dropping ten out of their last thirteen, and their last four in a row. "As everyone in this country must know by now, the newly elongated, hundred-and-sixty-two-game National League season proved

insufficient to its purpose in its first year," noted Angell (Summer Game 71). Angell visited Candlestick Park to see the Giants demolish the Dodgers 8-0 in game one, then followed the playoffs south to Los Angeles, where he recorded the following journal entry, dated October 3:

In the first playoff game, on Monday at Candlestick Park in San Francisco, the Dodger team displayed the muscle, the frightfulness, and the total immobility of a woolly mammoth frozen in a glacier; the Giants, finding the beast inert, fell upon it with savage cries and chopped off steaks and rump roasts at will, winning 8-0. The feast continued here for a time yesterday, and after five and a half innings the Giants led, 5-0. At this point, the Dodgers scored their first run in thirty-six innings, and the Giants, aghast at this tiny evidence of life, stood transfixed, their stone axes dropping from their paws, while the monster heaved itself to its feet, scattering chunks of ice, and set about trampling its tormentors. The game, which the Dodgers eventually won, 8-7, is best described in metaphor and hyperbole, for there was no economy in it. It lasted four hours and eighteen minutes --a record for a nine-inning game. (Summer Game 71-72)

Angell, by approaching the game as a "part-time, non-professional baseball watcher," was free to be irreverent. "He never draws upon the stock jargon that has been gathering for a century," Mark Harris, author of the classic baseball trilogy "The Southpaw," "Bang the Drum Slowly," and "It Looked Like Forever," says of Angell. "He sees things by looking at them, not by remembering what has so often said about them" (3). Angell's style was perfect, especially for The New Yorker, where an audience of literate baseball fans understood good writing, but a prose stylist like John O'Hara was bigger than a base stealer like Maury Wills.

Angell's visit to Los Angeles was his first opportunity to visit Dodger Stadium, completed in the spring of 1962. While admittedly impressed, Angell, perhaps recalling Ebbets Field, found much to dislike, starting with the huge electronic scoreboard in left field:

This giant billboard, protruding above the left-field bleachers like a grocer's price placard, was one of several indications to me that the new and impressive Dodger Stadium, which opened this spring, was designed by an admirer of suburban supermarkets. It has the same bright, uneasy colors (turquoise exterior walls, pale green outfield fences, odd yellows and ochers on the grandstand seats); the same superfluous

decorative touches, such as the narrow rickrack roofs over the top row of the bleachers: the same preoccupation with easy access and with total use of interior space; and the same heaps of raw dirt around its vast parking lots. There is a special shelf for high-priced goods--a dugout behind home plate for movie and television stars, ballplayers' wives, and transient millionaires. Outside, a complex system of concentric automobile ramps and colored signs--yellow for field boxes, green for reserved seats, and so forth--is intended to deliver the carborne fan to the proper gate, but on my two visits to O'Malley's Safeway it was evident that the locals had not yet mastered their instructions, for a good many baseball shoppers wound up in the detergent aisle instead of in the cracker department, with a resulting loss of good feeling, and had to be ordered to go away and try again. (Summer Game 73)

Angell hated Shea Stadium two years later for many of the same reasons. Clearly, Angell believed that the suburbs, with their Safeway stores, shopping malls, and street upon street of identical split-level homes, represented a threat to the vitality of the inner city. Still, Chavez Ravine, the site of Dodger Stadium, was only two miles from the center of downtown Los Angeles. Dodger Stadium reflected a

different culture. Yankee Stadium, Fenway Park, and Wrigley Field had all been built in the early 1900s in the center of large communities served by mass transit, but Los Angeles was a city made up of smaller, scattered communities, relying on the freeways. Even in 1962, with Ebbets Field still fresh in Angell's mind, what could possibly be wrong with easy access, big parking lots, and a colorful stadium, reminiscent of its Mexican heritage? Angell still resented Walter O'Malley for abandoning New York and taking the Giants along; in the years to come, Angell continued to scorn O'Malley, but he learned to admire Dodger Stadium.

San Francisco rallied to win game three, 6-4. On his flight to San Francisco, Angell overheard a conversation between several Giants fans. "Jewish fans, it turned out," Angell noted in his journal entry for October 5:

"Listen," said one woman, who was wearing a Giants cap. "Are you going to the Series games in New York?"

"Why, of course," said a man. "I ordered our tickets a long time ago."

"But what about the game there next Monday?" said he woman. "It's Yom Kippur, you know."

"I know. We talked it over, and we decided it was O.K. to go the game, but we won't eat any hot dogs." ("Three Cities" 143)

A reader who originally saw "A Tale of Three Cities" in The New Yorker would have been delighted, simply because a significant part of New York City is Jewish, and Jewish humor is a New York legacy. Unfortunately, however, when The Summer Game was published, conceivably for a broader audience, it did not contain the Yom Kippur story. Angell is sometimes much more colorful in The New Yorker than he appears in The Summer Game.

Angell was still a Giants fan, but San Francisco was a bit more reluctant about embracing a baseball team. "Good God! People will think we're like Milwaukee, or something," a native San Franciscan, upset with all the uproar over the World Series, confided to Angell. Sports columnist Charles McCabe warned the city that victory could be harder to live with than years of past defeats, and San Francisco, already a town "fond of self-examination and afflicted with self-doubt," understood. "We've had a lot of trouble in the past few years," a woman at a cocktail party told Angell. Startled, Angell thought that perhaps she was talking about some sort of family illness or scandal. She wasn't, Angell finally realized; she was talking about the Giants, who were often the favorites to win the National League pennant, only to blow it, to the disappointment of San Francisco:

As an old Giant fan, I was tempted to tell the woman that persistent ill luck and heroic

failure, interspersed with an occasional triumph, had been characteristic of her team ever since Merkle's boner in 1908. I thought of the Snodgrass muff in 1912; of the 1917 Series that was lost when Heinie Zimmerman chased Eddie Collins across the plate with the winning run; of the Series of 1924, when Hank Gowdy stumbled over his catcher's mask and a grounder bounced over Freddy Lindstrom's head and allowed Washington to win the last game; and of the last two games of the 1934 season, when the Dodgers dropped the Giants out of first place after Bill Terry had asked if they were still in the league. But I said nothing, for I realized that her affair with the Giants was a true love match and that she had adopted her mate's flaws as her own. (Summer Game 76)

Angell is not just a casual observer who takes in a handful of games each year at Shea Stadium, working in a game or two at Fenway Park for variety. As Angell admits to George Plimpton, "I've always been a fan" (33). His knowledge of the game and its history is encyclopedic, yet it is also personal; Angell felt the disappointment of Merkle's boner, a baserunning mistake that cost the Giants the 1908 pennant, as if it had happened only yesterday. Despite the years, the distance, and the bitterness, Angell remained a

Giants fan.

Between 1947 and 1961, the New York Yankees were the greatest team in baseball, winning twelve American League pennants and ten World Series. Of all the Yankees, Angell felt that Whitey Ford was the most representative. "Ford stands on the mound like a Fifth Avenue bank president," he wrote while watching the small, elegant lefty beat the Giants 6-2 in the opener. "Tight-lipped, absolutely still between pitches, all business and concentration, he personifies the big-city, emotionless perfection of his team" (Summer Game 77). San Francisco captured game two, 2-0, on a three-hitter by Jack Sanford, and "this jet Subway Series," as Angell called it, moved three thousand miles east, to Yankee Stadium.

Angell could admire the cool, emotionless perfection of a Whitey Ford on the pitcher's mound, but he could not abide it in the box seats at a World Series, as he points out in his journal entry for October 10:

New York is full of cool, knowing baseball fans --a cabdriver the other day gave me an explicit, dispassionate account of the reasons for the Milwaukee Braves' collapse this year--but not many of them got their hands on Series tickets. Before the first game here, on Sunday, the northbound D trains were full of women weighted down with expensive coiffures and mink stoles,

not one of whom, by the look of them, had ever ridden a subway as far as the Bronx before. There was no noise in the stands during batting practice, and the pregame excitement seemed to arise from the crowd's admiration of itself and its size (a sellout 71,431), rather than for the contest to come; ritual and occasion had displaced baseball. (Summer Game 79)

Angell believed that the World Series was to be enjoyed, as a fan, not observed, as a socialite; out of respect for the game, it demanded involvement. As Roger Maris stepped to the plate in the bottom of the second inning, the mink stoles and the coiffures in the box seats applauded politely, but behind them, where it was standing-room-only, a voice rang out, "Boo! C'mon, bum!" and Angell seemed reassured (Summer Game 79).

Predictably, the socialites thinned out after game three, happy just to say they had been to a World Series. New York returned to the West Coast with a three games to two lead, but when San Francisco was hit by a violent rainstorm, play was postponed for three days. Angell, with a deadline to meet, was unable to see games six or seven and was forced to make his final journal entry from New York on October 14. By October 20, the date "A Tale of Three Cities" was published, everyone in America already knew that the Giants took game six and the Yankees won game

seven. Still, it is unfortunate that one of the most famous plays in World Series history, Bobby Richardson's stab of Willie McCovey's line drive with two on and two out in the bottom of the ninth in game seven, preserving the Yankees' 1-0 victory, is only a footnote in The Summer Game.

"Angell is doted on by the dabblers, the people who pick baseball up and put it down as the mood strikes, but is not, I believe, fully approved of in Red Smith's kingdom, the press box, because he doesn't have to meet deadlines," says Wilfrid Sheed (46). Angell's deadlines at The New Yorker, as proved by "A Tale of Three Cities," are just as rigorous, given the nature and length of his essays, as the deadlines at a daily newspaper, and in October 1962, a deadline cost him the integrity of an essay.

Mantle, Maris, and Ford returned to the World Series in 1963, but Angell chose to visit a bar, instead. Actually, it wasn't just one bar, it was four, he pointed out:

By choice, I witnessed the Los Angeles Dodgers' four-game sweep at a remove--over the television in four different bars here in the city. This notion came to me last year, during the games played in Yankee Stadium against the San Francisco Giants, when it became evident to me that my neighbors in the lower grandstand were not, for the most part, the same noisy, casually

dressed, partisan, and knowing baseball fans who come to the park during the regular season. . . . This year, then, I decided to seek out the true Yankee fan in his October retreat--what the baseball beer commercials refer to as "your neighborhood tavern." (Summer Game 83-84)

After checking out the crowds at three or four likely-looking bars, only to find no one there, Angell opens "Taverns in the Town" at O'Leary's Bar.

O'Leary's, on the northwest corner of Fifty-third street and Eighth Avenue, was just what Angell had in mind. "There wasn't a woman in the place, and the bar stools and all the slots along the bar were taken," he reports. "It was mostly a young crowd--men in their twenties, in sport shirts and carefully combed hair" (Summer Game 85).

O'Leary's was a Yankees bar, Angell discovered as he watched the young men at the bar, exchanging happy winks and nudges after Ford fanned shortstop Maury Wills, the Dodgers' leadoff batter, but watching in silence as Koufax struck out the side in the bottom of the first.

Koufax was almost unhittable. He fanned Mantle and Maris in the second and Pepitone in the third. The crowd at O'Leary's was impressed:

With his long legs, his loose hips, his ropelike motion, and his lean, intelligent face, he looked his part elegantly--a magnificent young pitcher

at an early and absolute peak of confidence, knowledge, and ability. In the fourth, facing the top of the order again, he struck out Kubek swinging, with a dipping curve that seemed to bounce on the ground in front of Roseboro, and got Richardson on another big changeup curve; when he fanned Tresh, also for the second time, for his ninth strikeout, the men around me cried "Wow!" in unison. They had been converted; now they were pulling for Koufax. (Summer Game 86)

Clearly, so was Angell. Los Angeles took the opener, 5-2.

Koufax struck out fifteen batters to set a World Series record, but Johnny Podres, the Dodgers' starter in game two, seemed just as effective. Angell, fooled by the dozens of baseball and boxing photographs that hung above the bar, took in game two of the Series at the Charles Cafe, just west of Vanderbilt Avenue on Forty-third street, where young men in dark suits and conservative ties spent more time talking business over their hot-pastrami sandwiches and Beefeater dry martinis on the rocks ("a drink that has perhaps never been served at O'Leary's") than watching the Yankees and the Dodgers. All the game's excitement occurred in the first inning, when Maury Wills singled and beat out a pick-off play. Jim Gilliam singled, Willie Davis lined to right, and Roger Maris fell as he

tried to play the ball. Unfortunately, the camera missed the play. Staked to a 2-0 lead, Podres coasted to a 4-1 win.

The young executives at the Charles Cafe were far too much like the crowd at the Yankee Stadium opener of the 1961 World Series, and Angell was understandably anxious for better company. At Eighty-seventh Street and Lexington Avenue he got lucky and found it. Everyone at the Cameo seemed to know everyone else, said Angell. "It was a good big-city gumbo--men and women, Irishmen and Negroes and Jews and Germans, most of them older than the spectators I had encountered downtown" (Summer Game 89). Up on the screen, it was a close game. Jim Gilliam singled, took second on a wild pitch and scored on a single by Tommy Davis. After that it was all Don Drysdale, who shut out the Dodgers on a three-hitter, 1-0. One of Angell's drinking companions finally couldn't stand it:

In the seventh, the Dodgers seemed certain to widen the gap when they put Roseboro on third and Tracewski on second, with none out. The combination of tension and boilermakers proved too much for one fan at this juncture. "This Roseboro's gonna blast one," he announced loudly. "Just watch and see."

"What's the matter with you?" his companion said, embarrassed. "Roseboro's standing on third.

What are you--bagged or something?"

"That's what I said," the other insisted.

"He's gonna hit a homer. Roseboro's gonna hit a homer." (Summer Game 90-91)

Although Edward Hoagland of Harper's points out that Angell is sometimes short on atmosphere, "a feel for time and place" (78), Angell often uses dialogue as a way to flesh out character. His ear for speech is consistently accurate. "With baseball it's helpful to notice little things--perhaps that's why I take so many notes. . . . I put everything down," Angell told George Plimpton (33). Off the field, at the Cameo, the same rule applied. Angell took everything down, and he reproduced it perfectly.

Angell took a friend along to the Croydon, a residential hotel on Eighty-sixth street just off Madison Avenue, for game four. At the Croydon, Angell found himself surrounded almost completely by women, along with the occasional bellboys, doormen, and waiters who stopped by to ask the score. Ford pitched brilliantly, but so did Koufax. Finally, in the bottom of the seventh inning Yankee first baseman Joe Pepitone lost a throw from third sacker Clete Boyer in the shirts in the crowd, and Gilliam steamed all the way around to third, scoring on a sacrifice fly by Willie Davis. Angell noticed a change in the crowd:

At this juncture, the talk in the bar, which had been pro-Dodger (when it was not concerned with

haute couture, Madam Nhu, Elizabeth Taylor, and lower-abdominal surgery) took a sharp, shocked swerve toward disbelief and sadness. Even a lifelong Dodger fan who had come with me to the Croydon was affected. "I never thought the Yankees would go out like this, without winning one damned game," he said, shaking his head.

(Summer Game 92)

Koufax held on to win, 2-1.

Although Angell was lucky to find a knowledgeable crowd at O'Leary's, and later at the Cameo, watching the Series on television was a disappointment, he felt.

Somehow, television failed to convey what happened:

This World Series was lost by a handful of Yankee mistakes, most of which were either not visible or not really understandable to television watchers. The cameras were on the hitter when Maris fell in the second game. The grounder that bounced off Richardson in the third game and Pepitone's astonishing fluff in the final game caused everyone around me to ask "What happened?" On the small, two-dimensional screen, it looked as if the throw to Pepitone had hit the dirt, instead of skidding off his wrist, as it did. It is this lack of a third dimension on TV that makes baseball seem less than half the game

it is, that actually deprives it of its essential beauty, clarity, and excitement. (Summer Game 93)

In The Summer Game, Angell's discussion of TV and baseball ends here, but in "Four Taverns in the Town," the title under which "Taverns in the Town" was originally published, Angell goes on to explain where the game's beauty, clarity, and excitement originate:

The nature, the exact heart of the game is perceptible only to the onlooker who can judge the flight of the ball against the flight of the pursuing outfielder, the distance and the line of the shortstop's throw to first against the straining last lunge of the hitter. Inevitably deprived of these, the baseball telecast is but an imprecise and irritating summation of events.

("Four Taverns" 196)

Even with the addition of today's multiple cameras, split screens, and "super slow-mo replays," televised baseball still lacks a third dimension. Saturday's "Game of the Week" is just as flawed today as it was in 1963, when Angell first described for us the beauty, clarity, and excitement of the game.

Angell writes with such grace and insight about "the heart, the exact nature of the game" because it is his heart he is writing about, too. "The fervent loyalties of

baseball are almost, but not quite, indestructible," Angell observes in "Two Strikes on the Image":

I know a New York lady, now in her seventies, whose heart slowly bleeds through the summer over the misadventures of the Boston Red Sox, a team representing the home town she left in 1915. With immense difficulty, I have sustained something of that affection for the San Francisco Giants, once my New York team, but I know that my attachment will not survive the eventual departure of Willie Mays. (Summer Game 96)

Still, at one time, the reference was different:

I know a New York lawyer, now in his seventies, whose heart slowly bleeds through the summer over the misadventures of the Cleveland Indians, a team representing the home town he left in 1919.

("Two Strikes" 224)

Katharine Sergeant, of Brookline, Massachusetts, married Ernest Angell in 1915 and moved to Cleveland, where Ernest's father had practiced law. Shortly after America entered World War I, Ernest joined the army, and he was shipped overseas. Upon his return to the United States, the Angells moved to New York City. Since the dedication in the front of The Summer Game reads, "For my father," Angell possibly wished to remember his mother, also. Angell was correct about baseball's fervent loyalties: as demonstrated

by his mother and father, they survive marriage, divorce, and time. They are nearly indestructible.

Still, a fan's loyalty is often tested. Angell survived the loss of the Giants, and he understood the need for expansion, but he could no longer tolerate the way it was conducted:

In 1957, Walter O'Malley, the owner of the Brooklyn Dodgers, abruptly removed his team to Los Angeles after making a series of impossible demands upon the City of New York for the instantaneous construction of a new ballpark. He was followed at once by Horace Stoneham, who took his Giants to San Francisco while piously denying that he had any understanding with O'Malley. although every schoolboy knew that National League schedules required the presence of two teams on the West Coast. Within a few days, the largest and most vociferously involved baseball audience in the country was deprived of its two oldest franchises and left with the new knowledge that baseball's executives cared only for the profits inherent in novelty and new audiences, and sensed no obligation whatever--not even the obligation of candor--to the fans who had built their business (Summer Game 97).

Following O'Malley's example, Charles O. Finley, owner of

the Kansas City A's, threatened to move his club to Oakland, Atlanta, or Louisville unless he got a better lease on Municipal Stadium. Finley added insult to injury by proposing to outfit the A's with orange baseballs and green-and-gold bats. Fortunately, the baseball Rules Committee prevented it.

Angell was not prepared for what happened next.

Suddenly, the sport seemed intent on destroying itself:

The most meaningful event of the 1964 baseball season was neither the Cardinals' breathless, last-day capture of the National League flag nor the same team's victory in the long gladiatorial bloodletting of the Series. It was, of course, the news on August 13th that the Columbia Broadcasting Company had bought control (80 percent) of the New York Yankees for the sum of \$11,200,000. ("Two Strikes" 226)

Charlie Finley and Chicago White Sox owner Arthur Allyn were both informed of the sale by Joe Cronin, the American League president, who told Finley and Allyn that league rules required both gentlemen to vote on the matter, but the deal already had a three-quarters majority, and their votes were meaningless. Cronin's phone call came just two days after the League's executive meetings in Chicago, where the deal was never mentioned to Finley, Allyn, or the press. When the press raised an outcry, Cronin called a

league meeting in Boston to discuss the possible violations of antitrust laws involved in the deal. Cronin rejected a tentative change of heart by Lee McPhail of the Baltimore Orioles, and the meeting became a whitewash. As Angell explained it, Minnesota Twins president Calvin Griffith was Cronin's brother-in-law, McPhail was the brother of Bill McPhail, director of sports for CBS, at least two American League owners operated CBS affiliates, and several other executives owned blocks of CBS stock. Approval of the sale was automatic. "It is always possible, of course," said Angell, "that the eight club owners who voted for the sale of the Yankees to C.B.S. believed the deal was simply a straightforward business transaction, possibly good for baseball. If so, they understand neither the business of baseball nor the subtler structure of the sport" ("Two Strikes" 227).

As early as 1964, television controlled baseball, and part of the reason the Kansas City A's, the Cleveland Indians, and the Milwaukee Braves all threatened to move was a desire for bigger TV markets, along with their increased revenues. Dan Topping and Del Webb, who sold the Yankees to CBS, made \$1,200,000 a year from local TV rights, plus an additional \$600,000 from CBS for the Yankees' part in "Game of the Week" telecasts. "To drop CBS into the middle of this rich, untidy gumbo as the owner of baseball's No. 1 attraction may look like an engraved

invitation for Congressional antitrust investigations, but it is an entirely appropriate symbol of television's enormous interest in the game," said Angell (Summer Game 100). Earlier, it was more than simply an "appropriate symbol." It was a "pure and terrifying death wish," he wrote ("Two Strikes" 227).

Here, "Two Strikes on the Image" as it appeared in The New Yorker and "Two Strikes on the Image" as it appears in The Summer Game begin to diverge. In the New Yorker version, Angell bitterly concludes that a congressional antitrust investigation is not only likely, but perhaps necessary:

For decades, baseball has been teetering above the sword of antitrust legislation because of its minor-league chains, its buying and selling of athletes, and its rigidly controlled franchise rights. It has escaped so far by pleading that it is not engaged in interstate commerce, and by relying on the tolerance of legislators and high-court justices who love baseball and understand that if baseball were to operate in a free market, like all other businesses, the sport as we know it would be destroyed. It is sadly apparent to me that baseball has long since exhausted this indulgence and now deserves whatever it may get from Washington: congressmen cannot

now do more damage to the sport than its owners have done already. ("Two Strikes" 227-228)

Later, a shift is apparent:

The sports television business has never been happy with baseball, which so far includes only two big-revenue packages--the All Star Games and Series--each year.* Moreover, the old pastime does not produce tidy two-hour segments of marketable time; a nationally televised Saturday game may creep along into the early evening, and it cannot be puffed by much advance billing, since the meaning of its outcome may not be known until late September. This is almost intolerable to the young men in blazers who run sports TV; their dream is fifty weekends of world championships--in football, in baseball, in surfing, in Senior Women's Marbles--that are not to be missed by the weekend watcher. Yet these sportsmen cannot be dismissed so easily, for they command an audience of millions and revenues that are almost immeasurable. It must be assumed that baseball executives will do almost anything to climb aboard this gaudy bandwagon, and that the ultimate shape of baseball in the next ten years--its size, its franchise locations, and even its rules--will be largely determined not by

tradition or regard for the fans or regard for the delicate balances of the game, but by the demands of the little box.

These objections, I am certain, will cut no ice with most baseball magnates, whose instant response to criticism of this nature is to smile and say, "Well, I'm in this for the money, of course." Of course. Baseball is a commercial venture, but it is one of such perfect equipoise that millions of us every year can still unembarrassedly surrender ourselves to its unique and absorbing joys. The ability to find beauty and involvement in artificial constructions is essential to most of us in the modern world; it is the life-giving naivete, But naivete is not gullibility, and those who persistently alter baseball for their quick and selfish purposes will find, I believe, that they are the owners of teams without a following and a sport devoid of passion.

*Now three, with the addition of the inflationary autumn playoffs, the so-called Championship Series, which constitute television's first contribution to the game. (Summer Game 100-101)

Angell shifted the blame for baseball's decline from the

owners to TV. Still, why the change in emphasis? Over the winter of 1964, CBS's lawyers defended the network's purchase of the Yankees before a Senate Committee. "Not only were the firebrands silenced," writes David Quentin Voigt, "but some senators suggested that other networks buy clubs and bring corporate money into baseball" (3: 319). Also, there was the Curt Flood case. Flood, a veteran outfielder with the St. Louis Cardinals, objected to his trade to Philadelphia and filed suit against baseball's reserve clause. On June 19, 1971, the Supreme Court voted 5-3 to uphold the reserve clause and reaffirm baseball's exemption from antitrust laws. O'Malley, Finley, and Cronin were safe, and there was nothing Angell could do. Ted Solotaroff, in his front-page article on The Summer Game for The New York Times Book Review, criticized Angell for his complacency:

Now and then Angell lapses into certain mannerisms of The New Yorker, where he is an editor and where these pieces first appeared. His genuine enthusiasm and empathy can tail off into the habitual amiability and coyness of "The Talk of the Town." Angell sometimes adopts Eustace Tilley's stiff-upper-lip or cautiously balanced response to the rapacious, stupid, vulgar or mendacious policies that have been plaguing the sport, instead of letting his own anger and

dismay rip as decisively as it does elsewhere.

(1).

When "Two Strikes on the Image" was originally published, Angell was angry, but what good would anger do now? Sadly, Curt Flood's loss was Angell's loss, too.

Angell, grateful for the chance to forget about O'Malley, Finley, and Cronin, at least for a while, turned his attention to the playing field, where the St. Louis Cardinals had just defeated the New York Yankees to win the World Championship. Still, even at the World Series, Angell could not escape the business side of baseball, this time in the form of August A. Busch, Jr., the owner of the Cardinals. On June 15, 1964, St. Louis General Manager Bing Devine traded eighteen-game-winner Ernie Broglio to the Chicago Cubs for a .251-hitting outfielder named Lou Brock. Several weeks later, at the urging of "special consultant" Branch Rickey, Busch fired Devine, and also leaked word that Cardinals Manager Johnny Keane would be replaced by Leo Durocher at the end of the season. Sparked by Brock's .348 batting average and forty-three stolen bases, the Cards made up six and a half games on the Philadelphia Phillies and won the pennant on the final day of the season. Busch, shortly before the Cardinals won the pennant, offered Keane a one-year contract. "Keane looked Busch straight in the eye and said he'd think about it after the season was over--an act of character that may

have taught Mr. Busch more about baseball than all of Branch Rickey's counselings," said Angell (Summer Game 104).

St. Louis knocked out Whitey Ford to win game one, 9-5. Game two pitted young Yankees phenomenon Mel Stottlemyre against Cardinals fireballer Bob Gibson. Stottlemyre, a "cool, skinny-necked rookie pitcher with remarkable control," gave Gibson a rare lesson on pitching. "Gibson started out like a Redstone missile, striking out eight men in four innings, and then ran out of fuel and was aborted," reported Angell. "Stottlemyre, content merely to get men out on grounders, kept the ball low and concentrated on the tough hitters" (Summer Game 106). Angell, especially at the World Series, was impressed by good pitching.

Gibson, thanks to a three-run homer by battery mate Tim McCarver in the top of the tenth, won game five 5-2 at Yankee Stadium, striking out thirteen batters along the way. Back in St. Louis, Gibson got the nod again in game seven, defeating Stottlemyre and the Yankees, 7-5. The following day, Keane announced his resignation as manager of the Cardinals, and Yogi Berra was fired by the Yankees. Although Keane was subsequently hired by the Yankees, the Bronx Bombers slipped from contention, failing to appear in another World Series until 1976. "The pleasures of the World Series are already dimmed," Angell says in The

Summer Game. "The image smashers are busy again" (108).

In the original version of "Two Strikes on the Image," however, Angell was unable to hide his bitterness.

Keane's decision is a magnificent defiance of the kind of impatient, meddling greed typified by his own front office. Berra, the last of the old Yankee demigods, was cast aside at the end of his first year at the helm for failing, after a hundred and sixty-nine games, by exactly three runs. The supporters of two baseball capitals have been deprived of their much admired field leaders, and the pleasures of the World Series are obliterated. The baseball wreckers, the image smashers, are busy again. ("Two Strikes" 236)

Sadly, Angell discovered, not even the World Series was safe from the "baseball wreckers." Now more than ever, the game needed a hero. Lucky for Angell, there was Sandy Koufax.

Angell originally called his account of the 1965 World Series between the Los Angeles Dodgers and the Minnesota Twins "The Odd Couple" and, at first glance, it was an odd Series. "To begin with, this was the first Series played between runaway orphans--the former Brooklyn Dodgers, who went west in 1958, vs. the former Washington Senators, who became the Twins in 1961," said Angell (Summer Game 110). Also, he pointed out, the Yankees were

missing. Bob Gibson's victory over the Yankees in game seven of the 1964 World Series marked the end of an era; for just the third time in seventeen years, the Yankees failed to appear in the World Series. Out of respect, Angell retitled his essay, "West of the Bronx."

Normally, the Twins would have faced Sandy Koufax in game one, but the date coincided with Yom Kippur, so Don Drysdale started for the Dodgers. Minnesota, a team built around slugger Harmon Killebrew, batting champion Tony Oliva, and league MVP Zoilo Versalles, clobbered Los Angeles, 8-2. Koufax fared little better, losing game two, 5-1. Minneapolis-St. Paul could not believe its luck. Late in the second game, Minnesota pitcher Jim Kaat slashed a two-run single off Dodger relief ace Ron Perranoski, and the crowd was delighted:

The fans around me were laughing and hooting by now, and one next to me kept repeating, "It's all over now! It's all over now!" I hope he meant the game and not the entire Series. After I had visited the clubhouse and heard Koufax's precise, unapologetic, and totally unruffled analysis of the game, I came away with the curious impression that the Twins, after two straight victories, were only slightly behind in the World Series.

(Summer Game 117)

For the first time in three years as a baseball writer for

The New Yorker, Angell visited a a Major League clubhouse. In his 1977 interview with George Plimpton, Angell explained why he had waited:

When I started, I didn't know anyone in baseball. I was an outsider. I was very nervous--and I'm still a little nervous--about going into clubhouses and perhaps asking a dumb question. I also felt that other writers were concentrating on writing about individual athletes and doing it excellently. I thought I'd better do something else. But the truth is I've come to feel that we pay too much attention, the wrong kind of attention, to athletes. . . . to the extent of concentrating on personalities rather than the game itself. . . . So many people come up and ask, What is, or what was, Willie Mays really like? I don't think that's the right question. What Willie Mays was really like was that he was an extraordinary athlete. He was beautiful to watch--it lifted your imagination. That's what we should remember and pay attention to--watching what these people do. That's why we go to the ball park. (Plimpton 32)

So, despite his initial reluctance, Angell visited the clubhouse to listen to Koufax discuss his loss in game two. No longer a "part-time, nonprofessional baseball watcher,"

Angell was a working journalist, yet his outlook had not changed; to Angell, it was still the game that mattered.

Out on the West Coast, a second change took place. Earlier, in "A Tale of Three Cities," Angell expressed nothing but disgust for "O'Malley's Safeway." Chavez Ravine "is the finest plant in baseball--a model of efficiency and attractiveness which is brightening the design of new ballparks across the country," he concluded three years later (Summer Game 117). Claude Osteen blanked the Twins 4-0 in game three, and Drysdale got even in game four, 7-2. Koufax was astonishing in game five, tossing a four-hitter, 7-0. Angell was amazed at Koufax's artistry:

There were other things to admire that afternoon (Willie Davis's three stolen bases, for instance, and the Twins' not falling apart again), but I concentrated on watching Koufax at work. This is not as easy as it sounds, for there is temptation simply to discredit what one sees. His fast ball, for example, flares upward at the last instant, so that batters swinging at it often look as if they had lashed out at a bad high pitch. Koufax's best curve, by contrast, shoots down, often barely pinching a corner of the plate, inside or out, just above the knees. A typical Koufax victim--even if he is an excellent hitter--having looked so bad by swinging on the first

pitch and letting the second go by, will often simply stand there, his bat nailed to his shoulder, for the next two or three pitches, until the umpire's right hand goes up and he is out. Or if he swings again it is with an awkward last-minute dip of the bat that is a caricature of his normal riffle. (Summer Game 119)

Angell, over the course of "Taverns in the Town" and "West of the Bronx," paints a full-length portrait of the young Dodger southpaw, allowing us to see what made Koufax great, and to share in Angell's pleasure.

Angell did not return to Metropolitan Park, because "I did not want to see or share the pain that I felt certain was waiting for the Minnesota fans" (Summer Game 120).

Angell watched on TV as Jim "Mudcat" Grant defeated the Dodgers 5-1 in game six, and again as Koufax wrapped up the championship on a three-hitter, 2-0. Earlier, while in Minnesota, Angell had befriended a cab driver. "You know, five years ago we had nothing here but the Lakers, and they were bush," the cabbie said to Angell. "Now we got the Vikings, we got the Twins, we got the pennant, and Hubert is Vice-President!" (Summer Game 114-115). Watching as Koufax wrapped up the Series, Angell remembered the cab driver:

I hope by now he has added another line to his little speech: "Anyway, we were beaten by the

best--maybe the best pitcher in the whole history
of baseball!" (Summer Game 121)

Angell had discovered the reason why he still loved
baseball, and the reason was Sandy Koufax.

Chapter Five

"The Future, Maybe"

Mantle, Maris, and Berra played in the House that Ruth Built. Koufax, Drysdale, and Wills played in the Taj O'Malley. Angell interrupts "Classics and Campaigns--I" to tell the story of the Eighth Wonder of the World, the Houston Astrodome. Upon its completion in 1965, the world's first indoor baseball park lifted the Astros' season attendance from 725,773, the smallest in the National League, to 2,151,470, barely second to the World Champion Los Angeles Dodgers. "Since half of the majors' twenty teams have been born or have moved to new cities in the past twelve years, all in panting search of new audiences, these figures were of remarkable interest; Houston seemed on its way to becoming the capital of Baseball's Age of Alteration," Angell observes in "The Cool Bubble" (Summer Game 126). After a three-game visit to the Houston to see the Dodgers play the Astros, Angell finds that although the Astrodome is a bright, pleasant place to watch a baseball game, it damages the sport by stripping it of its slow, pastoral clock and treating it as TV. Under the Astrodome baseball is a variety show, colorful, bright, and gay, but it is no longer the national pastime. As Angell observes in the title of chapter four, a title which is part judgment

and part warning, baseball under the Cool Bubble is "The Future, Maybe."

Sitting in a cushioned, deep-purple loge seat in left field, Angell watched as the Astros and the Dodgers prepared for opening day. Houston starter Robin Roberts dutifully toiled in the Astros' bullpen to the strains of "The Good Old Summertime," but the only good old object in view was Roberts, the one-time ace of the Phillies and Orioles, noted Angell. A drill team from Tyler Junior College assembled along the foul lines, dressed in cowboy hats and peach satin body stockings, and did leg kicks. Out on the base paths, the Houston groundkeepers were dressed in fake orange space suits and fake white helmets. Angell found the Astrodome eye-catching, to say the least. "Each level of the stands was painted a different color--royal blue, gold, purple, black, tangerine, and crimson--and I had the momentary sensation that I was sinking slowly through the blackberry-brandy layer of a pousse-cafe," he noted (Summer Game 127). Jonathan Yardley quoted the pousse-cafe joke in his review of The Summer Game for Life (26), and so did Arthur Cooper, reviewing the book for Newsweek (100). As quips go, it is a fine example of New Yorker wit. Angell's essays "will spellbind the connoisseur and surely engage the average literate fan," predicted Kirkus Reviews (356). Still, although Angell started out The Summer Game sitting in the stands, he

does not write for the crowd in the right-field bleachers. Angell's audience sits in the box seats, just as Angell often does.

With two out in the bottom of the first, Houston outfielder Jimmy Wynn drew a walk. Suddenly, said Angell, the Astrodome's gigantic, three-panel electronic scoreboard erupted with a depiction of a bugle, followed by the lettered command, "CHARGE!" Gleefully, the well-dressed crowd took the hint. "Charge," they roared. "The fans near me were still laughing over this display of a capella ferocity when Joe Morgan flied out and the tiny rally came to a close," reported Angell (Summer Game 128). Stretching from one end of the pavilion seats to another (a distance of four hundred and seventy-four feet), the Astrodome scoreboard was a technological marvel. Its three partitions contained room for the game's lineups and scoring, out-of-town scores, messages, ads for Astros souvenirs, and gigantic, between-innings commercials for potato chips, gasoline, and other products, accompanied by sound effects but without a spoken message. "This is the only mercy, for the giant set is impossible not to look at, and there is no 'off' switch," said Angell (Summer Game 128). Actually, it was a close game, won 6-3 by Dodger rookie Don Sutton, but Angell was distracted. "By the middle innings, I found that I was giving the game only half my attention; along with everyone else, I kept lifting

my eyes to that immense, waiting presence above the players," he admitted (Summer Game 128).

Still, despite its scoreboard, Angell admired the Astrodome's architecture. Perhaps his taste had been shaped by Dodger Stadium, a park he had disliked at first but quickly grew to appreciate;

The exterior is especially pleasing--a broad, white-screened shell of such excellent proportions that you doubt its true dimensions until you stand at its base. The Astrodome is the world's biggest indoor arena, but its ramps are gentle, its portals and aisles brilliantly marked, and its various levels so stacked and tilted that immensity is reduced and made undiscouraging. There are almost no bad seats in the house, and the floors are so antiseptically clean that one hesitates before parting with a peanut shell or a cigarette butt. (Summer Game 130)

Bright, clean, and modern, the Astrodome was a far cry from the Polo Grounds of "S Is for So Lovable", where the stands were alive with "shouts, gossip, flying rubbish" (Summer Game 55). Shouts and gossip would have been welcome in the Astrodome, where Angell felt alone and isolated, diverted by the giant scoreboard; after all, part of the reason we go to the ballpark is to participate in the game

together, as a crowd. Angell missed the warmth and friendship of a park like the Polo Grounds, but he did not miss the trash. Clearly, the Astrodome had its advantages.

Angell found that ballplayers liked the Astrodome, too. Visiting the field during batting practice Angell spoke with many of the Dodgers and Astros, who said that the AstroTurf infield was very fast (although not quite as fast as the closely cropped infield at Dodger Stadium), and the lights were excellent (now that the off-white skylights had been painted a darker color), but the air conditioning was murder on home runs. AstroTurf, said Angell, who went out and walked around on the infield after batting practice, "has the consistency of an immense doormat." Unlike Richie Allen, who once said, "If a horse can't eat it, I don't want to play on it," Angell was not alarmed by the idea of artificial grass. In fact, he found it amusing. "I dug down with my fingers and found the spine of the one of the hidden foul-line-to-to-foul-line zippers that hold the new infield together; I had the sudden feeling that if I unzipped it, I might uncover the world's first plastic worm," he joked (Summer Game 130-131). Sadly, he had somehow missed the point. With its AstroTurf playing surface and its hard-to-reach fences, the Astrodome altered the way the game is played. Suddenly, second basemen and shortstops were no longer infielders; they played on the edge of the outfield, instead. On an artificial surface,

they had to, because ground balls picked up momentum on their way through the infield. Since offense had shifted from home runs to singles and stolen bases, outfielders were groomed for speed, not power. Speedy outfielders were also necessary to run down balls hit to the gap, because artificial turf affected pitching, too; instead of ground balls, pitchers now tried to get long outs to center. A big ballpark like the Astrodome or Royals Stadium, built eight years later, would hold a three hundred and ninety-foot line drive, but a chopper past the mound is a single for Willie Wilson. Granted, all of this was slow to emerge (Whitey Herzog perfected this style of baseball as manager of the Kansas City Royals from 1975 to '79 and skipper of the St. Louis Cardinals from 1980 to the present), yet Angell overlooked it; ironically, Angell was so intent on describing how the Astrodome looked from the left-field seats, he failed to see how AstroTurf would affect a shortstop.

Angell admired the Astrodome's aesthetics, but he scorned the Astros' owner, Judge Roy Hofheinz. Once the city's mayor, Hofheinz, a real estate, television, and radio tycoon, developed the idea of a domed stadium and helped promote the necessary bonds. "There is the undeniable fact that the prodigious idea of a domed year-round stadium was entirely the Judge's, and without his plans for the new miracle park Houston almost certainly

would not have been granted a franchise in the league expansion of 1962," concedes Angell (Summer Game 132). Unfortunately, the Judge's stock began to decline the moment Angell saw him in person:

I visited the Judge one afternoon in his famous Astrodome office--a two-story business pad of such comically voluptuous decor and sybaritic furnishings that I was half convinced it had been designed by, say, John Lennon. My awed gaze took in hanging Moorish lamps and back-lit onyx wall panels in His Honor's sanctum, a pair of giant Oriental lions guarding the black marble and rosewood judicatorial desk, a golden telephone awaiting the Hofheinzian ear, and, at the far end of the boardroom, a suspended baldachin above the elevated red-and-gilt magisterial throne. It would have been irreverent to talk baseball in these surroundings, but luckily the Judge received me in his box on an upper floor, which offered an expansive vista of the lofty, gently breathing dome and a distant view of some Astros working out in the batting cage. (Summer Game 133)

Hofheinz was a Walter O'Malley gone mad--a caricature of Charles Stoneham or Colonel Jacob Ruppert, gentlemen owners of the Giants and Yankees in the early 1900s. Angell was

not alone in this view. Novelist Larry McMurtry, himself a Texan, once referred to Hofheinz as "echt-Texas" (116). While it was true that the scoreboard at Dodger Stadium was responsible for originating the "Charge!" command Angell found so annoying, O'Malley built a ballpark to showcase baseball; Hofheinz built a showcase, but baseball was just an afterthought. During their discussion, Angell asked Hofheinz about Houston's devotion to baseball, since Angell had noticed that very few Astros fans kept scorecards. "This park keeps 'em interested enough so they don't have to keep busy with a pencil and scorecard," answered Hofheinz. "Why, in most other parks, you got nothing to do but watch the game, keep score, and sit on a hard wooden seat. This place was built to keep the fans happy" (Summer Game 134).

As Angell wandered from seat to seat, changing neighbors and moving about the park, he found that the Astrodome had done its job. Guided by the scoreboard, the small, well-dressed crowds applauded at the appropriate times, but they seldom yelled. Angell noticed scattered booing, but it was all directed at the ball and strike calls of the home plate umpire, which Angell dismissed as "bush."⁴ Although booing is a time-honored and vital part of the game, it is a privilege, not a right. Generally, baseball fans recognize that they cannot criticize an umpire unless they are willing to criticize their own team

first, and Angell was understandably upset. "No one booed an Astro player--not once--which distressed me, for the home-town boo is the mark of passion, involvement, and critical honesty," Angell pointed out when "The Cool Bubble" was originally published (138). Typically, he was quick to make amends. "No one booed an Astro player," Angell observes on page 136 of The Summer Game. If it is a flaw, he does not say why. Angell did not remove the "Boo! C'mon, bum!" that Roger Maris got from a Yankee fan in "A Tale of Three Cities" (Summer Game 79), so it is clear that he still regards home-town booing as healthy and worthwhile; outside New York, he is simply too polite to criticize other fans.

Finally, toward the end of the the third game, Angell visited the pavilion seats in center field, where he found the first group of recognizable baseball fans he had seen in Houston. Unlike the fans elsewhere in the Astrodome, the crowd in center field was dressed in shirt sleeves. It was Negro and white, like the Cameo, where Angell watched game three of the 1963 World Series, and full of big families, young people, and babies. In the top of the seventh inning, Houston first baseman Chuck Harrison stabbed a hopper by Maury Wills, but he hesitated for a moment. "I jumped up and yelled, 'Home! Throw home!,' and it came to me suddenly that I had company: a hundred fans near me were screaming the same advice," says Angell. "Harrison got our message

and threw to Bateman, who tagged out Nate Oliver at the plate, and we all sat down, grinning at one another"

(Summer Game 136-137).

Sitting in center field, with the scoreboard safely behind them, Angell and his friends were free to watch the game, to surrender to its rhythm, which is universally understood:

What matters, what appalls, in Houston is the attempt being made there to alter the quality of baseball's time. Baseball's clock ticks inwardly and silently, and a man absorbed in a ball game is caught in a slow, green place of removal and concentration and in a tension that is screwed up slowly and ever more tightly with each pitcher's windup and with the almost imperceptible forward lean and little half-step with which the fielders accompany each pitch. Whatever the pace of the particular ball game we are watching, whatever its outcome, it holds us in its own continuum and mercifully releases us from our own. Any persistent effort to destroy this unique phenomenon, to "use up" baseball's time with planned distractions, will in fact transform the sport into another mere entertainment and thus hasten its descent to the status of a boring and stylized curiosity. (Summer Game 137)

Up to this point, Angell has simply enjoyed baseball, but now he explains why. Absorbed in a baseball game, where time is not kept, we overcome time, if only for a while. Unfortunately, this is what Hofheinz fails to understand, and the result is the Astrodome, which distracts us from the field and alters baseball's clock. We are poorer in the end.

Chapter Six

"Classics and Campaigns-- I I "

Chapter five of The Summer Game, "Classics and Campaigns--II," begins with the Baltimore Orioles' victory over the the Los Angeles Dodgers in the 1966 World Series and concludes five years later with the Orioles' World Series loss to the Pittsburgh Pirates. Along the way, Angell introduces us to such greats as Brooks Robinson and Frank Robinson of the Orioles, Lou Brock of the St. Louis Cardinals, and Roberto Clemente of the Pirates, yet "Classics and Campaigns--II" is far more than just a chronicle of the 1966 to '71 baseball seasons. At first glance, The Summer Game seems like a journal, says Christopher Lehmann-Haupt of The New York Times. "But what such a summary of 'The Summer Game' fails to reckon with is Mr. Angell's love of the game," he concludes (39). Angell's love of the game, as displayed in "Classics and Campaigns--II," shines brightest in "The Flowering and Subsequent Deflowering of New England," the story of the 1967 Boston Red Sox, their struggle to win the pennant, and their loss to the Cardinals in the World Series, and "Days and Nights with the Unbored," Angell's account of the 1969 "Miracle Mets," who defeated the Baltimore Orioles to win the World Championship. "I really think that writing about

baseball is a way of writing about myself," Angell told Dolly Langdon. "I'm a fan, and one of the things I've permitted myself is to let my feelings show. I can say 'my Mets,' and I can talk about my suffering over the Red Sox when they begin inexorably to lose in June or September" (82). "The Flowering and Subsequent Deflowering of New England" and "Days and Nights with the Unbored" provide us with a portrait of Angell, the Red Sox fan, waiting for the other shoe to drop, grateful for what Yaz and Lonborg accomplished, and a second portrait of Angell, the Mets fan, unable to believe Casey's old Amazin's of 1962 could ever be so lucky, or so good. Still, above all else, "The Flowering and Subsequent Deflowering of New England" and "Days and Nights With the Unbored" present a profile of Angell, a baseball fan who deeply loves the game.

As a young man, Angell's favorite team was the New York Giants, a club he continued to root for even after it fled, along with the Dodgers, to the West Coast. Someday, that love would end, he admitted. "I know that my attachment will not survive the eventual departure of Willie Mays," he said (Summer Game 96). Ultimately, Angell's love for the Boston Red Sox proved to be more permanent. Katharine Sergeant White, as Angell pointed out in "Two Strikes on the Image," was a lifelong Red Sox fan, and Angell developed a taste for Fenway Park, as well. Season after season, Angell watched as the Red Sox failed,

committing to memory "a lifetime's amalgam of ill-digested sports headlines, between-innings commercials, and Fenway Park bleacher cries":

Hi, neigh-bor, have a Gansett! . . . DOUBLE-X 9
 GAMES AHEAD OF BABE'S SWAT PACE . . . Oh, God,
look--Slaughter's going for for home! C'mon,
 Pesky, throw the ball, throw the ball! . . .
 YAWKEY VOWS PENNANT . . . but the lowly A's,
 rising for three runs in the eighth, nipped the
 Hose in the nightcap . . . Hi, neigh-bor . . .
 SPLINTER DEFIES SHIFT . . . and now trail the
 Yankees by two in the all-important loss column
 . . . He's better than his brother Joe Domi-
nic DiMaggio . . . RADATZ IN NINETEENTH RELIEF
 STINT . . . and if Pesky takes the ball over his
right shoulder, Enos is dead, I'm telling you
 . . . GOODMAN NEARS BAT CROWN . . . Fenway
 scribes stated that Ted's refusal to doff his cap
 is nothing less than . . . HIGGINS SEES PENNANT
 WITHIN TWO YEARS . . . and Doc Cramer's shotgun
 arm just fails to cut down Averill at third
 . . . DID NOT SPIT, KID SWEARS . . . the aging
 shortstop-manager, lately known in the press box
 as the Ancient Mariner ('who stoppeth one in
 three') . . . ZARILLA TRADE STRENGTHENS O.F.
 . . . better than his brother Joe--Domi-nic

DiMaggio! . . . HIGGINS, REHIRED, VOWS . . . A
 bright spot in the Bosox seventh-place finish was
 Pete Runnels' consistent . . . TED FIRST A.L.
 SLUGGER TO TOP .400 SINCE . . . but Schilling
 dropped the ball . . . delicious Narragansett
 Ale. So, hi, neigh-bor . . . and Keller matched
 Gordon's awesome poke over the inviting left-
 field screen with . . . MALZONE TRADE RUMORS
 DENIED . . . and Slaughter, running all the way,
 beat the startled Pesky's hurried . . . CRONIN,
 NEW MGR, VOWS . . . the hotly fought junior-
 circuit gonfalon . . . FOXX NEARS SWAT MARK . . .
 as Slaughter crosses the plate (Summer
 Game 162-163)

If William Carlos Williams had written a baseball poem, it might have resembled this. Angell's collage on the Red Sox not only elicits the sweet, summer pleasures of radio and the maddening, public contradictions of Ted Williams, but a sense of anger, longing, and sadness that can never be erased.

After a ninth-place Bosox finish a season earlier, Angell had few hopes for a 1967 pennant. First baseman George "Boomer" Scott had established himself as an All-Star, but he slumped badly in the second half of 1966. Up the middle, the Red Sox consisted of a young, light-hitting catcher named Mike Ryan, rookie second baseman Mike

Andrews and rookie center fielder Reggie Smith. Bosox third baseman Joe Foy and shortstop Rico Petrocelli could both loft an occasional home run over the Green Monster in left, but both Foy and Petrocelli "were subject to fatal spells of introspection when approaching ground balls," as Angell delicately put it (Summer Game 160). Left fielder Carl Yastrzemski and right fielder Tony Conigliaro were the club's only two true stars, but neither player had batted close to .300 in 1966, and Yastrzemski, the 1963 batting champion, had never hit more than 20 home runs in a season. Right-hander Jim Lonborg, the Red Sox ace, had never recorded a winning record, and to top it all off, the Bosox had a new manager, Dick Williams, hired after two successful years with the Toronto farm club. "Reasonable hope cannot be constructed out of such a sad pile of feathers," Angell concluded, "but the lifelong Red Sox fan is not a reasonable man" (Summer Game 161).

Angell was more reasonable than most, choosing to maintain his distance. By Memorial Day, the Red Sox were a game above .500, but a flurry of trades brought right-handed starter Gary Bell from the Indians, catcher Elston Howard from the Yankees, and outfielder Ken Harrelson from the Kansas City A's. Lonborg suddenly got tough, plunking batters right and left, and keeping track on the back of his glove, "like a fighter pilot pasting confirmed kill decals on his plane's fusilage [sic]," noted Angell, who

served in the Pacific Theatre as a member of the Army Air Forces during World War II (Summer Game 164). Bell, who won twelve games and lost eight after coming over to the Red Sox, helped shore up the Boston pitching staff, Yastrzemski, Conigliaro, and Petrocelli all got off to fine starts, Andrews and Smith proved to be solid defensively, and Williams asserted his control over the Bosox once and for all by benching Scott for three games because the slugger was overweight. Late in July, after a ten-game winning streak, Boston returned home from a road trip in second place. "I refused to believe what was happening," Angell admitted (Summer Game 164).

Angell held back, wary of the first-place White Sox, with their formidable pitching staff, the Twins, with their fine hitters, and the Tigers, with their lineup of accomplished veterans. "Then, too, I was waiting for the Red Sox bad break--the moment of ill fortune, the undeserved loss, that so often cracks the heart of a young team playing over its head," said Angell, who had seen many such bad breaks in his years of watching the Bosox. On August 18, the break happened when a fastball thrown by California Angels right-hander Jack Hamilton struck Tony Conigliaro on the cheekbone, putting him out for the season. Just like that, the Red Sox not only lost their right fielder, but also a cleanup hitter who had already slugged twenty home runs. Conigliaro's teammates responded by winning seven games in

a row, climbing from fourth place to within one game of the Twins and White Sox, the league leaders. "I gave up; from that week on, I belonged," conceded Angell (Summer Game 165).

Occasionally, a ballplayer puts together a season that captures America's imagination, a season that becomes legend--George Brett's brilliant run at .400, which fell just short during the final weeks of the 1980 season; Pete Rose's dogged 1979 hitting streak, finally ended after forty-four games; Mark McGwire's astonishing 49 home runs as a rookie in 1987. Yaz's season was a dream come true. After Conigliaro was beamed on August 18, Yastrzemski carried the Red Sox, poking 44 home runs, collecting 121 RBIs, and batting .326. On the final weekend of the season, the Red Sox entertained the Twins at Fenway Park. Minnesota, one game up, could eliminate the Bosox with a single victory. Detroit, playing two home doubleheaders against the Angels, could clinch at least a tie by sweeping all four games. Only one thing stood in the way, and that was Yaz. With the help of a three-run Yastrzemski homer, Boston took game one, 6-4. Late in game two, with two men on, two men out, and the Bosox nursing a 5-2 lead, Minnesota left fielder Bob Allison banded a single to left. Suddenly, the American League pennant hung in the balance:

Yastrzemski charged the ball, hesitated only an instant at the sight of the runner racing for

home, and then threw brilliantly to second to cut down the flying Allison. You could see it all in the same twilight instant--the ball coming in a deadly line, and Allison's desperate, skidding slide, and the tag, and the umpire's arm shooting up, and the game and the season saved. (Summer Game 172)

Unlike a sports reporter for a daily newspaper, Angell does not pretend to be omniscient; instead, Yaz's play is retold from at least three individual points of view. Yastrzemski charged the ball, hesitated, and threw to second. Allison, anticipating a close play, flew around first and skidded into the bag. Finally, after Yaz's "brilliant" peg and Allison's "desperate" slide, Angell could rejoice, secure in the knowledge that the game had been saved. Angell, by reporting Yastrzemski's play through the eyes of a Red Sox fan, makes it appear as fast and as breathtaking as it originally must have seemed. Open a sports page from 1967, and its account of Yastrzemski's throw will seem small and unimportant. In a sense, Angell's story is far more accurate, for twenty-one years later, it still retains the flavor of a championship baseball game, a crisp New England twilight, and the achievements of a young man at the height of his abilities.

Angell and Yastrzemski still had to wait, however, for the Tigers, even though they had split the day before with

the Angels, Detroit had won the opener of today's double-header. While the Red Sox loitered around the clubhouse, listening to the Tigers' game, Angell reflected on Yaz's season. Yastrzemski, of course, had captured the triple crown, but there was more to it than that, sensed Angell:

Other fine hitters, including Frank Robinson last season, had finished with comparable statistics. But no other player in memory had so clearly pushed a team to such a height in the final days of a difficult season. The Allison peg was typical of Yastrzemski's ardent outfield play. In the final two weeks at the plate, Yaz had hammered twenty-three hits in forty-four times at bat, including four doubles and five home runs, and had driven in sixteen runs. In those two games against the Twins, he went seven for eight and hit a game-winning homer. This sort of performance would be hard to countenance in a Ralph Henry Barbour novel, and I found it difficult to make the connection between the epic and the person of the pleasant, twenty-eight-year-old young man of unheroic dimensions who was now explaining to reporters, with articulate dispassion, that his great leap forward this year might have been the result of a small change in batting style--a blocking of the right hip and a

slightly more open stance--which was urged on him in spring training by Ted Williams. There was something sad here--perhaps the thought that for Yastrzemski, more than for anyone else, this summer could not come again. He had become a famous star, with all the prizes and ugly burdens we force on victims of celebrity, and from now on he would be set apart from us and his teammates and the easy time of his youth. (Summer Game 173-174)

Angell had drawn portraits of ballplayers before--most notably, Mays and Koufax--but never in such detail as his description of Yaz. Koufax had done remarkable things, too, like spinning four no-hitters and striking out 382 hitters in a season, but Angell was a Red Sox fan, and Koufax had never affected Angell as deeply as Yastrzemski had. After all, Yastrzemski had carried the Bosox to the verge of an American League pennant. A few moments later, it was official. California defeated Detroit, 8-5. Angell, delighted, soaked up the bedlam. "The champagne arrived in a giant barrel of ice, and for an instant I was disappointed with Mr. Yawkey when I saw that it was Great Western," said Angell, criticizing Tom Yawkey, the owner of the Red Sox. "But I had forgotten what pennant champagne is for. In two minutes, the clubhouse looked like a YMCA water-polo meet, and it was everybody into the pool" (Summer Game 174).

Upon first glance, Angell's remark smacks of the country club and old money, a tendency he normally avoids. Still, if Angell initially was confused by Yawkey's choice of champagne, he can be forgiven. Since beginning his career as a "part-time, nonprofessional baseball watcher" for The New Yorker, Angell, whose favorite teams were the Mets and the Red Sox, had seen very little champagne splashed around the clubhouse, Great Western or otherwise.

At this point, Angell introduces us to the 1967 World Champions, the St. Louis Cardinals. "Cardinal fans who have managed to keep their seats through this interminable first feature will probably not be placated by my delayed compliments to their heroes," Angell concedes in The Summer Game. "The Cardinals not only were the best ball club I saw this season but struck me as being in many ways the most admirable team I can remember in recent years" (174). Originally, however, Cardinals fans had to wait even longer, for Angell wasn't through yet. Angell was disturbed by the possibility of expansion, rumored to be ahead in 1971:

A Professional sport so constructed that four out of ten teams can still be in hot contention in the final three days of a hundred-and-sixty-two-game season would seem to be a paragon of aesthetic and commercial endeavor. It is possible that the only people in North America who do not

hold this view of baseball at the moment are the big-league owners, who are currently engaged in a scheme to dismantle their Parthenon. As matters now stand, it is almost certain that in 1971, when the current three-year television contracts expire, both leagues will be expanded from ten to twelve clubs and subdivided into six-team regional conferences; each team will continue to play all other teams in its league (with the added possibility of inter-league contests, to whet midsummer appetites), but the standings will determine only conference champions. Two playoffs will then precede the World Series (or "Super Series," perhaps), with the excellent possibility that at least one pre-playoff playoff will be needed to settle one of the four conference races. The fact that the artificially constructed sub-leagues will almost surely produce some inferior champions is of no concern to these planners. What they see is more money and more prizes for all--the initial freshet of dollars that accompanies the appearance of each new, weak franchise team in an expanded league, and the guarantee of three autumn extravaganzas instead of one. ("New England" 196-199)

O'Malley, Finley, Hofheinz and friends had an ally, of

course, Angell points out. "The magnet that is about to pull baseball into this tortured shape is television," he says. If Angell's reflections on TV and baseball sound familiar, they should. They appear in The Summer Game as part of "Two Strikes on the Image," where they are much more to the point. Expansion took place and divisional playoffs began sooner than Angell had anticipated, in 1969; ironically, the New York Mets won the 1969 World Series, perhaps softening Angell's opposition to an additional autumn showcase. He continued to resent television's almost total control of the national pastime, however, for he believed that baseball was perfect, just the way it was played between the Red Sox and the Cardinals in 1967.

St. Louis, behind the base stealing of Lou Brock and the pitching of Bob Gibson, won the Series opener, 2-1. Angell described Brock, who collected four singles and stole two bases, as "a tiny little time pill that kept going off at intervals during the entire week" (Summer Game 175). Lonborg put an end to all that, at least momentarily, the following day, however, buzzing his first pitch of the game at Brock's head. As Angell points out, it was Lonborg's only high pitch of the afternoon, and St. Louis got the message. Lonborg, who finished the season 22-9, retired the first twenty Cardinal batters in a row. Finally, with two outs in the top of the eighth, St. Louis second baseman Julian Javier doubled for the only Cardinal

hit of the game. By that time, Yastrzemski had homered twice, and the Red Sox won, 5-0.

Game three, played in St. Louis' "steep, elegant gray" Busch Memorial Stadium, started with a Lou Brock triple in the bottom of the first, and ended as a 5-2 Redbirds victory. Gibson tossed a five-hitter, and St. Louis enjoyed a 6-0 blowout in game four. Yaz wasn't worried, however. "Lonborg goes tomorrow," he pointed out to Angell, "and then it's back to Boston, back to the lion's den" (Summer Game 178). Lonborg stopped the Cardinals on just three hits, 3-1.

Angell is always careful to inform us of anything that may affect his reporting, and news of his cold, caught during game four, was no exception. "Laid low by too much baseball and a National League virus, I was unable to make it back to the lion's den, and thus missed the noisiest and most exciting game of the Series," he confides. "I saw it on television, between sneezes and commercials" (Summer Game 178). As familiar as we have become, we are sorry he is sick and hope he's feeling better. Unfortunately, the game he missed was a classic, come-from-behind, 8-4 victory by the Red Sox. Cold or no cold, Angell was not about to miss game seven, in which Lonborg, on just two days' rest, was to face Gibson, with the World Championship at stake.

Fenway Park was packed to the rafters, but the crowd was so quiet that at first, Angell attributed the silence

to his stuffed-up ears. "It was real, though--the silence of foreboding that descended on all of us when Lou Brock hit a long drive of Lonborg in the first, which Yastrzemski just managed to chase down," observed Angell. "Lonborg, when he is strong and his fast ball is dipping, does not give up high-hit balls to enemy batters in the early going. After that, everyone sat there glumly and watched it happen" (Summer Game 179). After the game, a 7-2 Cardinals victory, Angell visited both clubhouses, but he felt he had seen enough champagne and emotion for one year already, and he quickly left. On his way out of Fenway, he strolled up one of the runways for a final look at the field. Much to his surprise, Angell found several thousand people still sitting in the stands, mourning the Series and the onset of another autumn. Angell mourned, too. It was a season so unexpected, so delightful, it was sad to see it end.

Critic Jonathan Yardley regarded "The Flowering and Subsequent Deflowering of New England" as the summation of The Summer Game ("Why Diamonds Are Forever" 26). Still, if "The Flowering and Subsequent Deflowering of New England" is the heart of The Summer Game, "Days and Nights with the Unbored," Angell's account of the New York Mets' 1969 World Championship, is its soul. As he once pointed out to Dolly Langdon, it was the Mets, brand-new and terrible, who inspired Angell to become a baseball

writer. Angell recorded the Mets' disastrous first season (their one hundred and twenty losses are still a Major League record) in "The 'Go!' Shouters," returned again in 1963 to fret over a team that was almost as bad in "S Is for So Lovable," bid a loving "Farewell" to the Polo Grounds, and followed the Mets to Shea Stadium, which he dubbed "A Clean, Well-Lighted Cellar," in 1964. Over the years, he saw some awful baseball; all told, between 1962 and 1968, the Mets lost seven hundred and thirty-seven games and finished a total of two hundred and eighty-eight and a half games out of first place. "Winning is wonderful, but in a way you have to deserve it," he told Langdon. "I think the real fans are the fans of the terrible teams, because they know what good baseball is and they know how far their own players fall short" (82). After years of watching the Mets fall painfully short, Angell deserved a World Championship, perhaps almost as much as the Mets did.

Yastrzemski was the Red Sox hero, and Seaver was the Mets'. A three-time All Star at the tender age of twenty-four, Seaver was simply astonishing, compiling a 25-7 record and a 2.21 ERA. Seaver, winner of the 1969 National League Cy Young Award, impressed Angell as much by his maturity as his powerful, ninety-mile-per-hour fastball:

Arriving two years ago to join a hopeless
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clear at once that losing was unacceptable to him. His positive qualities--good looks, enthusiasm, seriousness, lack of affectation, good humor, intelligence--are so evident that any ball team would try to keep him on the roster even if he could only pitch batting practice. . . . Such a combination of Galahad-like virtues has caused some baseball old-timers to compare him with Christy Matthewson. Others, a minority, see an unpleasantly planned aspect to this golden image --planned, that is, by Tom Seaver, who is a student of public relations. (Summer Game 222)

In "The Flowering and Subsequent Deflowering of New England," Angell's portrayal of Yastrzemski, the quiet, good-natured slugger, was tragic, for Yaz had become a star, forever set apart. Seaver, on the other hand, was an American success story. Handsome and bright, Seaver sought fame eagerly. Events did not control Seaver, as they had Yastrzemski; on the field and off, Seaver controlled events, and Angell watched, admiringly.

Angell watched the Mets with a sense of disbelief. Just a year before, Manager Gil Hodges' club had finished 73-89, ninth in the National League. Outside of adding rookie pitcher Gary Gentry, who went 13-12, and trading for first baseman Donn Clendenon in mid-June, the Mets were largely unchanged. Seaver and Jerry Koosman still anchored

the pitching staff, Cleon Jones, Tommie Agee, and Ron Swoboda still patrolled the outfield, scrappy little Bud Harrelson still made the play at shortstop, and hard-nosed Jerry Grote still called the pitches for Seaver, Koosman and company:

Again and again this summer, fans or friends, sitting next to me in the stands at Shea Stadium would fill out their scorecards just before game time, and then turn their heads and say, "There is no way--just no way--the Mets can take this team tonight." I would compare the two lineups and agree. And then, later in the evening or at breakfast the next morning, I would think back on the game--another game won by the Mets, and perhaps another series swept--and find it hard to recall just how they had won it, for there was still no way, no way it could have happened.

(Summer Game 216)

Still, it happened. Agee, who had batted just .217 the year before, rallied to hit .271 and clout 26 home runs. Jones, whose average had dipped as low as .223 in 1968, rallied to bat .340, third in the league behind Pete Rose's .348 and Roberto Clemente's .345. Angell continued to search for an explanation. "Their immense good fortune was to find themselves together at the same moment of sudden maturity, combined skills, and high spirits," Angell said of the

Mets. "Perhaps they won only because they didn't want this ended. Perhaps they won because they were unbored" (Summer Game 223).

Trailing the Chicago Cubs by nine and a half games in mid-August, the Mets won thirty-eight of their last forty-nine games. Koosman and Seaver defeated the Cubs back-to-back September 8th and 9th at Shea Stadium, and the following day, the Mets took over first place, clinching the National League East on September 24th. In the play-offs, the Mets swept the Atlanta Braves in three straight. Now, all the Mets needed to do to win a World Series was take four of seven from the Baltimore Orioles. Just no way.

Angell held out little hope for the Mets. Guided by Earl Weaver, the Orioles won a hundred nine games in the regular season, finishing nineteen games ahead of Detroit in the AL East and sweeping the Twins in the playoffs. Screwballer Mike Cuellar, the American League Cy Young winner, finished 23-11, while Dave McNally went 20-7, and Jim Palmer was 16-4. Offensively, the Birds were led by right fielder Frank Robinson, who batted .308, hit 32 homers, and drove in 100 runs, first baseman Boog Powell, whose numbers were .304, 37, and 121, and center fielder Paul Blair, who batted .285, hit 26 home runs and stole 20 bases. Still, if that wasn't enough, there was always Brooks Robinson, perhaps the finest third baseman to ever

play the game. "The announcement of the opening lineups was received in predictable fashion ('Just no way . . .') and I could only agree," admitted Angell (Summer Game 228). Baltimore got to Seaver early in game one, defeating the Mets' ace, 4-1.

Koosman pitched six innings of no-hit ball in game two, but it took an Al Weiss single to win it for the Mets in the top of the ninth, 2-1. Game three, back at Shea Stadium, belonged to Tommie Agee. First, Agee greeted Palmer with a leadoff home run. Mets pitcher Gary Gentry was nursing a 3-0 lead in the top of the fourth when Agee sprinted to deep to left center to pull down a drive by Orioles catcher Elrod Hendricks. Agee collided with the fence, but he held on to the ball, saving two Baltimore runs. Leading 4-0 in the seventh, Gentry walked the bases loaded. Reliever Nolan Ryan worked the count to 0-2 on Paul Blair, but Blair smashed Ryan's next pitch deep to right. Agee took off like a shot, dove for the ball just before the warning track, and made the catch. "The entire crowd --all 56,335 of us--jumped to its feet in astonished, shouting tribute as he trotted off the field," says Angell. "The final score was 5-0, or, more accurately, 5-5--five runs for the Mets, five runs saved by Tommie Agee. Almost incidentally, it seemed, the Orioles were suddenly in deep trouble in the Series" (Summer Game 231).

Great catches were not the exclusive domain of Tommie

Agee, however, as right fielder Ron Swoboda proved in game four. With Seaver leading the Orioles 1-0 in the top of the ninth, Frank Robinson and Boog Powell singled. Brooks Robinson then slashed a low, sinking liner, apparently in the gap between Agee and Swoboda. Swoboda, who was playing close, lunged to his right, dived on his chest, and caught the ball. Robinson tagged up to score, but Swoboda had saved the game. "This marvel settled a lengthy discussion held in Gil Hodges' office the day before, when Gil and several writers had tried to decide whether Agee's first or second feat was the finest Series catch of all time. Swoboda's was," noted Angell, who must have somehow forgotten Willie Mays' over-the-shoulder grab of Vic Weitz's blast at the Polo Grounds in 1954 (Summer Game 231-232). Seaver picked up the win in the 10th when Grote doubled and pinch-runner Rod Gaspar scored all the way from second on J.C. Martin's bunt, which relief pitcher Pete Richert fielded and bounced off Martin's wrist, wide of first. Finally, the Mets rallied from a 3-0 deficit to win game five, 5-3.

Down on the infield, amid the chaos, a youngster held up a sign that said "WHAT NEXT?" Angell had no answer. "What was past was good enough," he reflected. Still, despite the Mets' victory, Angell detected a hint of regret:

Nothing was lost on this team, not even an a-

wareness of the accompanying sadness of the victory--the knowledge that adulation and money and the winter disbanding of this true club would mean that the young Mets were now gone forever . . . Ron Swoboda said it precisely for the TV cameras: "This is the first time. Nothing can ever be as sweet again". (Summer Game 233)

Part of the sadness is Angell's. In 1962, Casey's Amazin' Mets lost a hundred and twenty games, and a World Series was just a dream--a faraway dream. Seven years later, the Mets were World Champions. Angell's dream had become a reality, and now it was time to start over, to dream anew. Fortunately, baseball is kind to dreamers.

Chapter Seven

"The Interior Stadium"

Originally, critic Jonathan Yardley, reviewing The Summer Game for Life, described "The Flowering and Subsequent Deflowering of New England," as "unexcelled in the literature of American sport" ("Why Diamonds Are Forever" 26). While compiling a list of his ten favorite sports books for Bookworld in 1982, Yardley discovered its equal--"The Interior Stadium," which is the essay that concludes The Summer Game:

Two of the pieces in The Summer Game--"The Flowering and Subsequent Deflowering of New England" and "The Interior Stadium"--are among the half-dozen finest articles ever written about baseball. These pieces, like the rest of The Summer Game, were composed before Angell had begun to sit in the press box and to talk with the players; they have the verve, the commitment, the emotion and the love of the true fan, and they are works of real art. ("Ten Best" 17)

Just as Yardley discovered, the clarity of "The Interior Stadium" grows with the passage of time. In many ways, "The Interior Stadium" surpasses "The Flowering and Subsequent Deflowering of New England" in importance, for "The

Interior Stadium" is more than just biography or reflections on a sport; it is a personal confession of faith.

Sports, thanks to television, now dominates us, says Angell. Unfortunately, as sports continue to proliferate, we lose our powers of identification. "More and more," he notes, "each sport resembles all sports; the flavor, the special joys of place and season, the unique displays of courage and strength and style that once isolated each game and fixed it in our affections have disappeared somewhere in the noise and crush" (Summer Game 292). Sadly, he observes, baseball is no exception.

Even though the game has suffered, it has survived basically unchanged, says Angell, "obdurately unaltered and comparable only with itself," because baseball's sense of balance--both physical and psychological--makes it the one sport whose games can be played again, from any point, in retrospect. "This inner game--baseball in the mind--is best played in the winter, without the distraction of other baseball news," Angell advises:

At first it is a game of recollections, recapturing, and visions. Figures and occasions return, enormous sounds rise and swell, and the interior stadium fills with light and yields up the sight of a young ballplayer--some hero perfectly memorized--just completing his own unique swing and now racing toward first. See the

way he runs? Yes, that's him! Unmistakable, he leans in, still following the distant flight of the ball with his eyes, and takes his big turn at the base. Yet this is only the beginning, for baseball in the mind is not mere returning. In time, this easy summoning up of restored players, winning hits, and famous rallies gives way to reconsiderations and reflections about the sport itself. . . . With luck, we may even penetrate some of its mysteries. (Summer Game 292)

One of its mysteries is its vividness, says Angell, who points out that father, now eighty-one, still recalls the great Cleveland Indians of his youth. Cleveland had Nap Lajoie at second, Ernest Angell told his son. "'You've heard of him. A great big broad-shouldered fellow, but a beautiful fielder. . . . The shortstop was Terry Turner--a smaller man, and blond. I can still see Lajoie picking up a grounder and wheeling and floating the ball over the Turner. Oh, he was quick on his feet!'" Granted, old men dwell in the past, but Angell has his memories, too--Lefty Gomez, "skinny-necked and frighteningly wild," pitching his first game at Yankee Stadium; Babe Ruth, carrying a new, bright yellow glove as he trotted out to right field, "a swollen ballet dancer, with those delicate, almost feminine feet and ankles"; and Carl Hubbell, Angell's own great pitcher:

Hub pitching: the loose motion; two slow, formal bows from the waist, glove and hands held almost in front of his face as he pivots, the long right leg (in long, peculiar pants) striding; and the ball, angling oddly, shooting past the batter. Hubbell walks gravely back to the bench, his pitching arm, as always, turned the wrong way round, with the palm out. Screwballer. (Summer Game 293-94)

Angell's father taught his son to love baseball; still, the ties between father and son are stronger than a common interest. What they share is a place they can meet, where Nap Lajoie flips the ball to Terry Turner, and sixty-seven years later, Angell sees it perfectly. just as his father once did. Clearly, to Angell, baseball is more than just a game; it is a rite of renewal.

America's fascination with baseball is connected with the religious celebration of spring, says Professor Allen Guttman. "Is it wholly accidental that the four bases correspond numerically to the four seasons of the year? Perhaps it is," Guttman muses:

And yet. . . . Although I am not yet ready to say that Americans have been drawn to baseball because of the persistence of myth in our collective unconscious, I am nonetheless convinced that pastoral traits are important to

the game and that modern man is not totally untouched by the annual revitalization of the earth. (107-108)

As suggested by Angell, children, too, play a part in this ritual. First, children learn to play the game. At the ballpark, they learn to copy their heroes--George Brett's flat, perfect swing, or Ozzie Smith's long, graceful pegs to first base. Gradually, children hear their parents talking about stars like Ty Cobb, Lou Gehrig, and Ted Williams, and their interest in the game begins to grow; they enter baseball's interior stadium. Cobb, Gehrig, and Williams become real, as real as Brett and Smith, and time has been defeated. Generation by generation, baseball's legacy is continually renewed. "It's about stability of values and the worshipping of tradition," A. Bartlett Giammati, the former Yale University president who is now president of the National League, recently said of baseball. "And in a mobile, information-based, fast-moving society, baseball has been about an older America, an idealized, traditional America that everybody thinks they remember. Baseball is basically in the business of reminding people of their first memories, of their best hopes" ("That Says It All" C 22).

Anyone can play interior baseball, says Angell; its possibilities are endless. "Hubbell pitches to Ted Williams, and the Kid, grinding the bat in his fists,

twitches and blocks his hips with the pitch; he holds off, but still follows the ball, leaning over and studying it like some curator as it leaps in just under his hands," Angell says of an at-bat that never took place (Summer Game 294). Carl Hubbell pitched for the New York Giants between 1928 and 1943, while the Splendid Splinter played left field for the Red Sox from 1939 to 1960. Williams played in only one World Series, in 1946. Still, it does not matter. Angell sees it perfectly. "Why this vividness, even from an imaginary confrontation?" asks Angell (Summer Game 294). It is because baseball forces us to watch it so intensely, he concludes:

In the ballpark, scattered across an immense green, each player is isolated in our attention, utterly visible. Watch that fielder just below us. Little seems to be expected of him. He waits in easy composure, his hands on his knees, when the ball at last soars or bounces out to him, he seizes it with swift, haughty ease. It all looks easy, slow, and, above all, safe. Yet we know better, for what is certain in baseball is that someone, perhaps several people, will fail. They will be searched out, caught in the open, and defeated, and there will be no confusion about it or sharing of the blame. This is sure to happen, because what baseball requires of its athletes,

of course, is nothing less than perfection, and perfection cannot be eased or divided. (Summer Game 294-95)

Every moment of every game is recorded and measured against an absolute standard, says Angell, and this is also a reason for baseball's clarity; as he pointed out in his opening essay, "Box Scores," once a game is recorded as a box score, a baseball fan, "aided by experience and memory," is sure to find there the same joy, the same reality, as the crowd at the ballpark, who witnessed the game firsthand.

Televised baseball is incapable of creating this same emotion, Angell quickly adds. Despite its use of multiple cameras, television is a two-dimensional medium. "Fore-shortened on our screen, the players on the field seem to be squashed together, almost touching each other, and, watching them, we lose the sense of their separateness and lonesome waiting" (Summer Game, 295). Without a grasp of the space that separates each player, baseball loses its clarity; vividness, Angell suggests, is a product of attending baseball games, where the players, "scattered across an immense green," are plainly on display.

Occasionally, a player overcomes distance and approaches perfection; these are the players who become our heroes:

No one, it becomes clear, can conquer this im-

possible and unpredictable game. Yet every player tries, and now and again--very rarely--we see a man who seems to have met all the demands, challenged all the implacable averages, spurned mere luck. He has defied baseball, even altered it, and for a time at least the game is truly his. (Summer Game 297)

When it comes to heroes, Angell thinks of young Willie Mays, batting at the Polo Grounds, "his whole body seeming to leap at the ball as he swings in an explosion of exuberance"; Jackie Robinson, "playing the infield and glaring at the enemy hitter, hating him and daring him, refusing to be beaten"; Sandy Koufax, whose fastball, "appearing suddenly in the strike zone, sometimes jumps up so immoderately that his catcher has to take it with his glove shooting upward, like an infielder stabbing at a bad-hop grounder"; Joe DiMaggio, who sometimes at the plate gave the impression "that the old rules and dimensions of baseball no longer applied to him, and that the game had at last grown unfairly easy"; and one more, Carl Yastrzemski, approaching the plate in September 1967, "settling himself in the batter's box--touching his helmet, tugging at his belt, and just touching the tip of the bat to the ground, in precisely the same set of gestures--and then, in a storm of noise and pleading, swinging violently and perfectly . . . and hitting" (Summer Game 297-99). By overcoming

distance and approaching perfection, ballplayers not only become heroes, they attain the vividness that makes them immortal.

Still, there is more to love about baseball than Mays, Koufax, and Yastrzemski; there is the game itself:

Always, it seems, there is something more to be discovered about this game. Sit quietly in the upper stand and look at the field. Half close your eyes against the sun, so that the players recede a little, and watch the movements of baseball. The pitcher, immobile on the mound, holds the inert white ball, his little lump of physics. Now, with abrupt gestures, he gives it enormous speed and direction, converting it suddenly into a line, a moving line. The batter, wielding a plane, attempts to intercept the line and acutely alter it, but he fails; the ball, a line again, is redrawn to the pitcher, in the center of this square, the diamond. Again the pitcher studies his task--the projection of his next line through the smallest possible segment of an invisible seven-sided solid (the strike zone has depth as well as height and width) six feet and six inches away; again the batter considers his even more difficult proposition, which is to reverse this imminent white speck, to

redirect its energy not in a soft parabola or a series of diminishing squiggles, but into a beautiful and dangerous new force, of perfect straightness and immense distance. (Summer Game 302)

Throughout The Summer Game, Angell insists he is one of us, "a part-time, nonprofessional baseball watcher," yet it simply is not true; Angell is consumed by baseball. Each essay he writes is a reflection of his interest and his craft as a writer. Chicago White Sox catcher Carlton Fisk told me during a short but thrilling conversation in Kansas City last summer, "He approaches baseball more scientifically than a lot of other writers." Luckily, he writes for The New Yorker, where editor William Shawn provided Angell the space, the time and the encouragement to develop his material in his own special way.⁵

Ultimately, says Angell, the interior stadium derives its clarity from baseball's sense of clockless time. "Baseball's time is seamless and invisible, a bubble within which players move at exactly the same pace and rhythms as all their predecessors," he explains. "This is the way the game was played in our youth and in our fathers' youth, and even back then--back in the country days--there must have been the same feeling that time could be stopped" (Summer Game, 303). At the ballpark, time is measured by outs. All a team must do is keep hitting, keep putting men on

base, and the game will continue forever. Since ballplayers like Mays and Yastrzemski are suspended in this timeless bubble, they remain forever young. "Sitting in the stands, we sense this, if only dimly," says Angell. "The players below us--Mays, DiMaggio, Ruth, Snodgrass--swim and blur in memory, the ball floats over to Terry Turner, and the end of this game may never come" (Summer Game 303). With the help of The Summer Game, it never will, for Angell's book is the ultimate interior stadium. In The Summer Game, Willie Mays plays center field every day, Sandy Koufax is pitching, and Yastrzemski is at the plate. We turn to the fan in the next seat, and it is the finest companion of all--Roger Angell, who preserves this seamless world for the baseball fans who will follow us.

Notes

¹ Angell is vague about when he first started to toy with the idea of doing a piece on baseball. "I began doing the reports for The New Yorker in 1962 or '63," he told George Plimpton (33), yet Angell's first baseball essay, "The Old Folks Behind Home," appeared in The New Yorker on April 7, 1962. Finally, I asked Martin Baron, a fact checker at The New Yorker, if he could find out from Angell exactly what had happened. "His recollection is that he talked to Mr. Shawn about doing a baseball piece late in 1961 or early in 1962," Mr. Baron replied.

² The other books on McCallum's list: The Sweet Science, by A. J. Liebling; The Long Season, by Jim Brosnan; Instant Replay, by Jerry Kramer and Dick Schaap; Ball Four, by Jim Bouton; The Boys of Summer; Veeck as in Wreck, by Bill Veeck and Ed Linn; Babe, by Robert Creamer; The Glory of Their Times, by Lawrence S. Ritter; Bang the Drum Slowly, by Mark Harris; A False Spring, by Pat Jordan; Eight Men Out, by Eliot Asinof; About Three Bricks Shy of a Load, by Roy Blount Jr.; Semi-Tough, by Dan Jenkins; and Paper Lion, by George Plimpton.

³ "Sabermetrics" can be loosely defined as the study of baseball through statistical analysis. It derives its name from "SABR," the Society for American Baseball

Research. Steve Hirdt, Peter Hirdt, and Seymour Siwoff are the authors of the annual Elias Baseball Analyst.

* "Bush" is short for "bush-league," or second-rate.

5 Shawn left The New Yorker in 1987, and he was succeeded by Robert Gottlieb.

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