

## Guest Column: Girardi already among Phils' most notable skippers

By Rich Westcott Times Guest Columnist Nov 3, 2019



MATT ROURKE - THE ASSOCIATED PRESS New Phillies manager Joe Girardi.

With his hiring as the new Phillies manager, Joe Girardi has already earned a special place in the annals of the team's long history. In so doing, he has joined some of the Phils most notable skippers even before putting on a uniform.

For example, only one manager hired by the Phillies during their 137-year history came to the team with more experience as a major league pilot than Girardi, who has 11 years as the head man in the dugout. Bucky Harris led teams for 19 years before joining the Phils in 1943. Hard as it is to believe, Harris was dismissed at mid-season by Phillies owner William Cox as the result of constant battles between the two (One of the outcomes of these battles was Cox's getting banned for life from baseball.)

Coincidentally, before last week Harris was the only manager ever to lead a Washington team to a World Series victory when his Senators won in 1924. Altogether, he managed for 29 years, winning another World Series in 1947 with the New York Yankees.

Like Girardi, who so far has posted a 988-794 record as a manager, Steve O'Neill, who led the Phillies for three years starting in 1952, also joined the club with 11 years managerial experience. But nobody else among the Phils' 55 different people who have guided the team comes close.

Along with that mark on his resume, Girardi is also the first Phillies strategist in nearly the last three decades to come here after previously managing in the big leagues for more than two seasons. Jim Fregosi was the last one to do it when he joined the club in 1991 with six years of experience in the majors.

Girardi won one World Series as a manager and was a member of three World Champs as a player. A catcher, he played for 15 years in the big leagues, compiling a .267 lifetime batting average. One season (2000), while playing with the Chicago Cubs, he replaced the injured Mike Piazza on the National League All-Star team.

The new Phillies skipper is the eighth catcher to hold the reigns of the local team. Jack Clements, a lefthanded backstop who managed in part of 1890, Chief Zimmer (1903), Red Dooin (1910-14), Pat Moran (1915-18), Jimmie Wilson (1934-38), O'Neill, and Pat Corrales (1982-83) preceded him.

Of course, as the new man in town, Girardi will have more important duties than just being saluted for his previous numbers. He has to make this team a winner again, something that has conspicuously evaded his three immediate predecessors.

Hopefully, even though he has a degree in industrial engineering, Girardi will not be too locked into the rubbish called analytics, although it is evident that he is not opposed to mixing this system with what really counts, such as a player's ability, his guts, his knowledge of the game, his hustle, his tenacity, his enthusiasm and various other physical and mental characteristics.

Hopefully, too, he will not tell every hitter to swing up or to wait until the fifth or sixth pitch to do it; he will not constantly use five, six, or seven pitchers in a game while relying mostly on pitch counts for his starters and yanking them even though they're firing a two-hit shutout in the seventh inning; he will make defensive shifts only when they are really necessary; and he will call for sacrifice bunts, stolen bases, pinch-hitters and other increasingly lost arts. Such maneuvers, of course, have been mostly ignored as seemingly everyone in baseball is undergoing numerous but often – to at least some of us –unwelcome changes.

Did you know that the average number of relievers used in a game during the regular season was 6.72? No starting pitcher – whose won-lost records are irritatingly never mentioned by many who write about baseball these days – completed more than two games, and there were only 42 complete games pitched in the entire majors. Former Phillies Hall of Fame pitcher Grover Cleveland Alexander once hurled 16 shutouts in one season (1916).

There were 6,776 home runs hit in 2019, an increase of 671 over the previous year's record. There were more than 8,000 more defensive shifts – the last-recorded number was 32,673 in 2018 – compared to 2,463 in 2010. In 2018, batters struck out 41,207 times. That number was passed in 2019 with one week to go in the season. There were some 800 fewer balls put into play by batters. The number of pinch-hitters was the lowest in 68 years, while the number of pinch-runners reached a 76-year low.

Only one team stole more bases than Rickey Henderson did by himself (130) in 1982. And sacrifice bunts, stolen bases, hits, singles, and balls hit in play were at all-time lows while strikeouts, hit batters, and number of pitches per game were at all-time highs.

What's happening to our old game? Well, in 2019 the average time to play a game was 3 hours and 10 minutes. The average time in 1972 was 2:23. (The Phillies played a game in 1919 in 51 minutes.) Longer games have seemingly had an impact on attendance. Average attendance at major league games in 2019 was 28,198, down more than 4,000 from the record set in 2007. What does that tell you?

Girardi, of course, faces other important matters. Hopefully, he will not be subjected to stupid trades like the one two years ago that sent away Howie Kendrick for money and a minor league pitcher, who the Phillies dumped last year after he had a losing record at Class A Clearwater. Since then, Kendrick has had several standout seasons for the Washington Nationals.

Somehow, somewhere, the powers that be need to figure out that this team badly needs pitching, and go out and grab some good hurlers instead of relaying on a staff that's been highly unsuccessful.

There are lots of other issues that need to be resolved. But if his press conference last week was any indication, Girardi is a guy who is intense, intelligent, aggressive, focused, enthusiastic, tough, articulate, tenacious, and who will not rest until a winning team arrives again.

"I'm well aware of the passion of the baseball fans here," he said. "This is a special place, and I know the importance of winning here." To that, he added: "I'm a manager who really cares. I care about everyone involved here. I want to win. That's why I came here."

And if he does win, his name will be added to even more lists relating to Phillies managers. Certainly, the best list of all would be the one that includes only Charlie Manuel and Dallas Green. involved here. I want to win. That's why I came here."does win, his name will be added to more lists relating to Phillies managers. Certainly, the best list of all would be the one that includes only Charlie Manuel and Dallas Green.

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