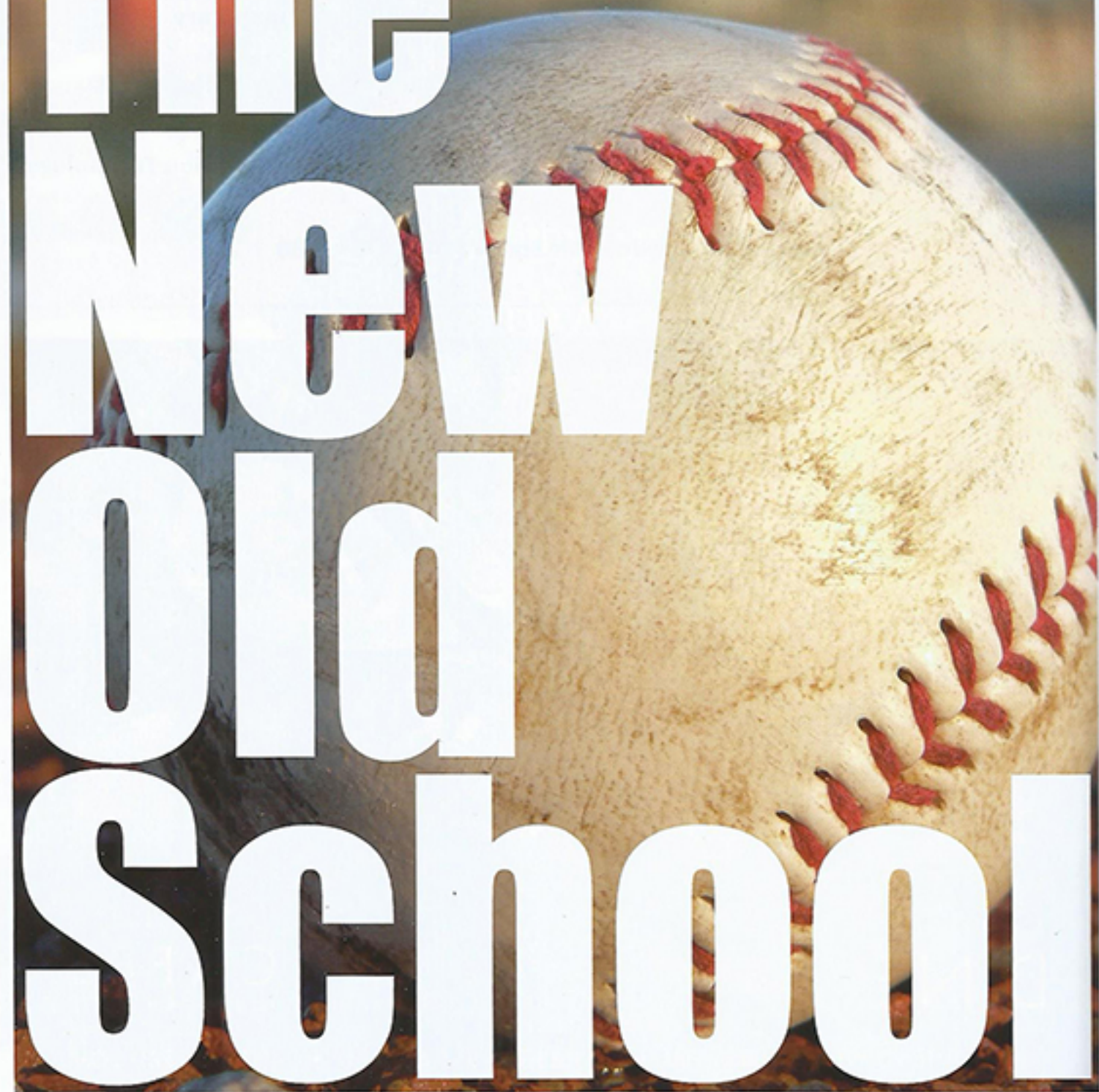


Phillies Manager

Joe Girardi

The New Old School



BY RICH WESTCOTT

It didn't take long for Joe Girardi to earn a special place in Phillies history.

As soon as he was hired last fall, his name became etched among the team's most notable managers.

Just one of the Phillies' 55 managers ever came to the team with more experience as a major league skipper than the 55-year-old Girardi. His 11 years as a pilot are topped only by Bucky Harris, who led teams for 19 years before joining the Phillies in 1943.

Ironically, Harris was fired by the Phillies in mid-season that year after constant battles with team president William Cox, who soon thereafter was banned for life from baseball for betting on his team. Harris, who had piloted the Washington Senators to their first World Series victory in 1924, eventually served as a big-league manager for 29 years with another World Series champion coming in 1947 with the New York Yankees.

When he came to the Phillies in 1952, Steve O'Neill also had 11 years of managerial experience, including a World Series winner in 1945 with the Detroit Tigers. Nobody else

who has guided the Phillies during their 137 years in the National League comes close to that figure. Moreover, Girardi is the first Phils strategist in nearly three decades to come hereafter previously managing in the majors for more than two seasons. Jim Fregosi was the last one to hit that level when he came to Philadelphia in 1991 with four full and parts of two other years' experience in a big-league dugout.

Girardi, whose career record of 988-794 was earned with the Yankees (2008-2017) and Miami Marlins (2006), has one World Series victory as a manager. Of course, that has a place in Phillies history, too, because it came in 2009 when the Yankees beat the Phils, thus preventing them from winning two straight World Series titles.

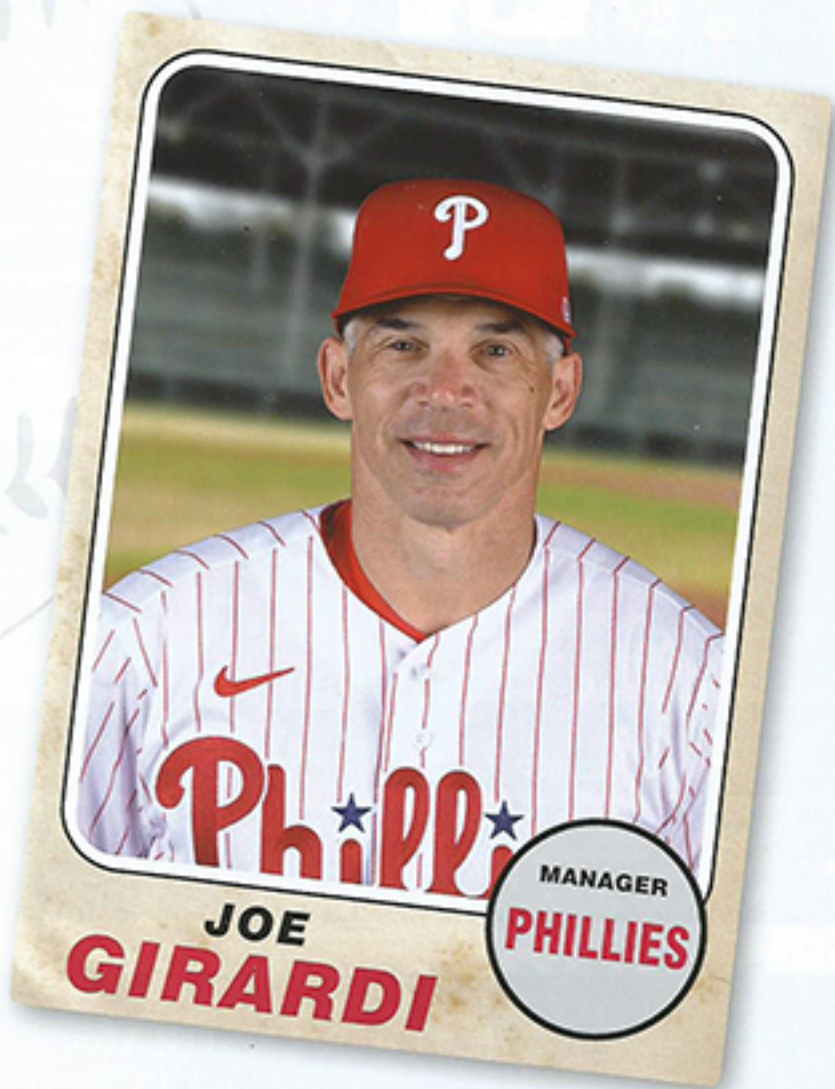
A big-league catcher for 15 years, Girardi comes to town as the eighth backstop who has managed the Phillies. He joins Jack Clements (1890), Chief Zimmer (1903), Red Doolin (1910-14), Pat Moran (1915-18), Jim-

mie Wilson (1934-38), O'Neill (1952-54), and Pat Corrales (1982-83). In addition to that, only five people who managed the Phillies for more than two full seasons appeared in more games as a player than Girardi. The list includes Fregosi and Wilson (both 18), O'Neill and Hugh Duffy (both 17), and Larry Bowa (16).



GIRARDI WAS DRAFTED in the fifth round in 1986 by the Chicago Cubs, and spent time in the majors with the Cubs (twice), Colorado Rockies, Yankees, and St. Louis Cardinals. He played for three World Series winners while compiling a career batting average of .267 with 36 home runs and 422 RBI. He also caught a no-hitter by Dwight Gooden and a perfect game by David Cone.

In another piece of irony, Girardi made his



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Girardi speaking at the Philadelphia Sports Writers Association banquet.

big-league debut in 1989 against the Phillies on opening day at Wrigley Field. In his first at-bat, he got his first major league hit when he singled off of Floyd Youmans early in the Cubs 5-4 victory. Later, his first road game was played at Veterans Stadium where he singled off of Bruce Ruffin in his first at-bat.

Put these accomplishments together, and

the Peoria, Illinois native not only has his name already lodged on the pages of Phillies history, but he inherits a club that is badly in need of a well-accomplished manager who knows how to build a winner. Girardi, who beat several other high-level managers for the job, certainly has that on his resume, too.

It won't be easy, but Girardi is ready for the challenge. "I'm a manager who really cares," he said. "I care about everyone involved here. I want to win. That's why I came here."

As the 2020 season approaches, he has to put together what would hopefully be an effective starting rotation that initially includes only Aaron Nola and newcomer Zack Wheeler, and a bullpen that is loaded with uncertainty. He also has to decide who plays where in the infield. And he has to put together a suitable outfield, much of which depends on the full recovery of Andrew McCutchen from last year's knee injury. Of course, the Phillies bench is also an enigma that has to be solved.

Girardi is the kind of manager who spends long hours trying to develop solutions for such problems. It helps that he has a positive attitude. Along with that, he is intelligent, intense, enthusiastic, aggressive, focused, an

tenacious. And he's the kind of guy who will not relax one bit if the team turns into a loser or there's any kind of problem among the uniformed participants.

"I can't wait to see the work the men in the Phillies uniform will do this season," Girardi said before spring training began. "I'm excited about this whole team. To be successful, my job is to keep everybody healthy, to stay out of the way, and to put them in the right positions."

"Part of that is finding where players are the most comfortable, and also where it's most advantageous for us. That's a combination that you have to weigh so you get the most out of the player and your team."



THAT WASN'T WHAT HAPPENED with Girardi's three immediate predecessors (Ryne Sandberg, Pete Mackanin, and Gabe Kapler). All had losing records as Phillies managers with none lasting as much as three full seasons. The Phillies' last winning season came

in 2011 under Charlie Manuel, the winningest manager in club history and the skipper of the second of only two Phillies clubs that won a World Series.

Girardi takes the helm while being many miles away from Manuel's 780 Phillies wins. But he has another chance to put his name among noteworthy Phillies managers if he can rebuild the club and lead it to some successful seasons. In Phillies history, only nine skippers have posted winning records while leading the team for three or more years.

Here's one other Girardi footnote: Never before have the Phillies had a manager with the common name of Joe. And the team has had only one other pilot (Dallas Green) whose last name started with G.

As a graduate of Northwestern University where he earned a Bachelor of Science degree while majoring in industrial engineering, Girardi will hopefully not be one of those analytic freaks who guides his team based on creepy numbers. These people ignore the fact that the basic elements of baseball are hit, run, field, and throw, and what really counts among players is their ability, guts, knowledge of the game, hustle, enthusiasm, tenacity and various other physical and mental characteristics. And yes, won-lost records for pitchers and batting averages for hitters do matter, despite the current trend to ignore

such statistics.

Based on his winter appearances, it seems likely that Girardi is not caught up in the numbers rubbish. "I'm a manager who really cares about everyone involved here," he said. "I want to be around people who are passionate and who want to play hard and win."

As he already knew, 'passionate' is a key word in the description of Philadelphia sports fans, and, in what matters most to him, among Phillies fans. He looks forward to the Citizens Bank Park attendees playing a major role in helping his team out of the doldrums of recent seasons.

"I'm well aware of the passion of baseball fans here," he said. "This is a special place, and I know the importance of winning here. The fans are the ones who push us every day to be great. They're the ones who demand excellence from us."



PHILLIES PLAYERS ARE ALSO PASSIONATE about having the chance to play under Girardi. One of those who expressed this feeling was J.T. Realmuto, who has often been described as the best catcher in baseball.

"I'm really excited about playing for him," said Realmuto, who came to the Phillies in the winter of 2018 in a trade with the Marlins. "He's got a lot of feel. He knows exactly what he wants to do as manager. He has a lot of confidence, and he'll be able to instill that confidence in us."

And if that's the case, the 2020 season has the potential to be the time when the Phillies start to rejoin the elite teams of the National League after an absence of nearly one decade. It could also add substance to Girardi's place among the Phillies most notable managers. ■