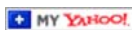


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Posted on Tue, Oct. 27, 2009

A look back at Yanks vs. Phils in 1950

By Rich Westcott
For The Inquirer

The first baseman was recovering from a gunshot wound to the chest. The catcher was playing with a fractured ankle. One of the star pitchers sat in the dugout wearing his military uniform.

And the ace relief pitcher, the best reliever that year in all of baseball, was the starting pitcher in the opening game.

The year was 1950, and these were some of the Phillies players the last time the team met the New York Yankees in the World Series.

It was only the second time the Phillies had ever played in the World Series. But the meeting 59 years ago between teams from the two biggest cities on the East Coast still holds a special place in Phillies history.

The World Series was different back then. All games were played in the afternoon. In 1950, the first game of the Series was played on Oct. 4, the same date that this year's regular season ended. There were no off days between games.

Like today's Phillies team that will meet the Yankees once again, the 1950 club was enormously popular. Called the Whiz Kids because it was heavily stocked with young players - the average age was 26 - the Phillies were by far the favorite team of Philadelphia sports fans. That year, Phillies' attendance (1,217,035) was its largest ever.

At the time, the Phils were emerging from a prolonged period in the pits of the National League. Starting in 1918, they had gone 31 years with just one first-division finish while placing last 16 times. From 1938 through 1942, the team lost more than 100 games every season.

In the mid-1940s, new owner Bob Carpenter began signing talented young players, and the Phillies finally started moving upward. After finishing third in 1949, the team reached the top the following year.

The Yankees, on the other hand, had just won their 17th American League pennant and were in search of their 13th World Series crown. In the 1940s alone, the Yanks had won four World Series, including one in 1949.

As did the current team, the '50 Phillies had beaten the Dodgers to win the National League pennant, clinching victory on the last day of the season on Dick Sisler's three-run homer. The Yankees had posted 98 wins in a tight race in which the top four teams were separated by only six games.

New York was managed by Casey Stengel, a Phillies outfielder in the early 1920s. Philadelphia's skipper was Eddie Sawyer, who spent his playing career in the Yankees' farm system.

Five future Hall of Famers - Joe DiMaggio, Yogi Berra, Phil Rizzuto, Johnny Mize, and Whitey Ford - graced the Yanks' roster. The Phillies had two future Hall inductees, Robin Roberts and Richie Ashburn. Sisler's father, George Sisler, was also a Hall of Famer.

The Phillies' roster was filled with players with special footnotes. Rightfielder Del Ennis, who had led the league with 126 RBIs, was a Philadelphia native who attended Olney High. Roberts had gone to college (Michigan State) on a basketball scholarship. Pitcher Jocko Thompson was the most decorated big leaguer in World War II with two Purple Hearts, Silver and Bronze Stars, and seven battle stars.

Shortstop Granny Hamner had broken into the big leagues at the age of 17.

Third baseman Willie Jones had the unlikely nickname of "Puddin' Head."

Second baseman Mike Goliat was in his only full season with the team. And the centerfielder was a former college journalism major named Richie Ashburn who would someday become one of the most revered sportscasters in Philadelphia history.

Eddie Waitkus had been shot by a deranged woman in 1949 in a Chicago hotel room and was still feeling the effects. Andy Seminick had been in a late-season collision at the plate and was hobbled by an ankle injury. Curt Simmons had been called during the season to serve in the National Guard and was unable to resume what so far had been his finest season with 17 wins.



MLB photo

Casey Stengel (left) and the Phillies' Eddie Sawyer were the opposing managers in the 1950 World Series. The Yankees went on to win their second of five straight World Series titles.

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The Yankees' powerful roster included talented players such as Hank Bauer, Gene Woodling, Jerry Coleman, and Bobby Brown. It included an outstanding pitching staff led by Vic Raschi, Allie Reynolds, Eddie Lopat, Tommy Byrne, Ford, and relievers Joe Page and Tom Ferrick, a longtime resident of the Philadelphia area.

The Phillies, who had nearly blown a seven-game lead with 11 games to play, had won 91 games but were hurt and exhausted. The Series opened at Shibe Park with Sawyer making a move that stunned baseball aficionados everywhere.

Roberts, a 20-game winner, normally would have pitched, but having started four of the Phillies' final eight games, was far too spent to take the mound. Instead, reliever Jim Konstanty got the call, although he hadn't started a game since 1946. Big Jim, who had won 16 and saved 22 while working in a club-record 74 games, would later be named the National League's most valuable player.

By 7 a.m., a line to purchase bleacher tickets at \$1 apiece was six blocks long. Scalpers were asking \$125 to \$150 for the best seats. Incredibly, about 2,000 tickets went unused because of a mix-up in the front office.

Before a crowd of 30,746, Konstanty pitched valiantly, allowing four hits in eight innings. But Raschi was better, hurling a two-hitter. The Yanks won, 1-0, scoring in the fourth on Brown's double and two fly balls.

Roberts started Game 2, but the Yankees won again, 2-1, this time on DiMaggio's 10th-inning home run. Roberts, who allowed 10 hits, and Reynolds went the distance.

Moving to Yankee Stadium, the Phillies lost their third straight one-run game, 3-2, despite a strong outing by aging veteran Ken Heintzelman and three hits by Hammer. Coleman drove home the winning run in the ninth after Phillies substitute second baseman Jimmy Bloodworth misplayed two balls.

The following day, with an attendance of 68,098, including former Phillies pitching ace Grover Cleveland Alexander, the Yankees won, 5-2, behind the pitching of Ford. Phillies rookie Bob Miller failed to last through the first inning. Konstanty, working in his third game of the Series, pitched 62/3 innings, and Roberts finished out. Woodling dropped Seminick's fly ball in the ninth to give the Phillies their only runs.

The Series was over. The Phillies, with no home runs and a team batting average of .203, had been swept by a club that was on its way to winning five straight World Series. It would be 30 more years before the Phillies returned to the Series and 59 years before they met the Yankees again.

Rich Westcott is a baseball writer and historian and the author of 20 books, including five about the Phillies.

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