

Down Through the Seasons

The St. Louis baseball club just had been embarrassed. Miserably beaten. The team had lost 11–4, and at least one sportswriter covering the game knew it didn't sit well with those who had bought tickets to witness the event.

"Everybody went away in a bad humor, and some of the oldest and steadiest of the fans resolved never to go to the game again," he wrote. "They will all be there today just the same."

That was written in 1897.

It's a rich part of the tradition of this baseball team known as the Cardinals to have some of the most loyal, knowledgeable, and enthusiastic followers anywhere in the United States. Though they haven't always been satisfied, they have demanded excellent effort and fundamental play from their pro baseball team. Because of that love affair, baseball has come to help define the city of St. Louis.

Few sports teams can match the Cardinals' history. The franchise actually began in 1882, when owner Chris Von der Ahe found a spot for his St. Louis Brown Stockings in the American Association as it tried to compete with the National League for players and fans' attention. Ten years later, the St. Louis Browns were accepted into the NL, and the American Association dissolved. Only Chicago, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, and Cincinnati have been in the National League longer.

The Cardinals, as the team came to be called by the 1900 season, developed into one of the most successful and storied franchises in all of sports. That success had begun with the Browns, who won four American Association championships. Since joining the NL, the Cards have won 15 league pennants and nine World Series championships—more than any other team in the league—as well as four division titles since 1969. The Hall of Fame includes more than 30 players who once wore a Cardinals uniform, which has become as distinctive as any in America with its birds-on-the-bat logo across the front.

"It's hard to explain the feeling of tradition here," Marty Marion has said. "The Yankees, Giants, Cardinals, the Dodgers, and that's where it stops. I suppose winning just got to be a big thing with the Cardinals, and it's been passed down from one team to the next.

"The Cardinals are associated with winning baseball. Everyone knows about the team as one of the greatest."

It's an organization that has provided baseball with some of its most memorable characters and incredible teams. The Cardinals are the team of

- Stan "The Man" Musial, one of the most revered and respected players of any generation.
- Bob Gibson, one of the most feared pitchers ever and perhaps the best of a generation of pitchers that included Sandy Koufax, Juan Marichal, and Don Drysdale.
- The Gas House Gang of the 1930s, that colorful band of ragamuffins like Dizzy Dean and Frank Frisch who provided a standard of hustle and dedicated play for years afterward.
- Rogers Hornsby, perhaps the greatest right-handed hitter of all time.
- Branch Rickey, whose brainchild of a minor league farm system of teams revolutionized the game.
- Lou Brock, who balanced the power of the game with an exciting brand of base-path speed and daring.
- Curt Flood, the man who set the wheels of free agency in motion by saying no to a trade.

Mark McGwire injected new life into the club late in the 20th century by shattering all major league home run records. This blast off the Stadium Club windows at Busch Stadium on May 25, 1998, was his 25th homer of the season, which made him the first major-leaguer ever to reach that mark before June 1.

- Whitey Herzog, who helped the Cardinals recapture a spirit and following that had faded and who came to be regarded as one of the game's best managerial minds.

Those have been some of the jewels, along with heroes from Jesse Burkett to Ozzie Smith. Fans have revelled at great moments such as Grover Alexander fanning Tony Lazzeri for the third out with the bases loaded in Game 7 of the 1926 World Series and Jack Clark's majestic 1985 playoff home run against the Los Angeles Dodgers. And they have winced through numerous dismal seasons.

Through it all, baseball has been part of the city's fabric of life.

Historian Harold Seymour has written that St. Louis's first regular game of "base ball," as it was spelled throughout the 19th century, was played July 9, 1860. The city had two clubs, their first professional teams involved in anything resembling a major league, in the final season of the National Association, in 1875. The St. Louis Red Stockings played only 18 games, losing 14, before disbanding. The St. Louis Brown Stockings went 39-29 and finished in fourth place that season. They were led by Lip Pike, a smallish son of a New York City haberdasher who batted .342 in his fifth season in the National Association. And they included an 18-year-old native St. Louisan named James "Bud" Galvin, who compiled a 4-2 record in brief duty before embarking on a long career that eventually led to the Hall of Fame.

The Brown Stockings played that season at the Grand Avenue Grounds at Grand and Dodier, which first had been used as a baseball diamond in 1866 and later was also the site of Sportsman's Park.

Lip Pike batted .325 in 1876, when the Browns played as one of eight teams in the inaugural season of the National League. The other charter members of the NL were Chicago, Cincinnati, Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Louisville, and Hartford, though only Chicago has remained in the league from its formation.

St. Louis went 45-19 that year and finished second to Chicago. George Washington "Grin" Bradley pitched every one of the Brown Stockings' 573 innings that season and led the league with a 1.23 earned-run average. He also threw the first no-hitter in NL history, a 2-0 victory over Hartford on July 15. Bradley suited up for Chicago the next season, and Pike moved on to Cincinnati. Curiously, St. Louis finished ahead of both of those teams yet still finished in fourth place in 1877, when the league was trimmed to six teams.

The Browns hoped to return for a third NL season in 1878 and signed a group of new players for the task. But several of the newcomers soon were thrown out of the league by president William Hulbert for throwing games the previous season while playing with Louisville.

Team president John Lucas was so disgusted with the events that he dissolved the team. So St. Louis was without professional baseball until 1882, when the American Association began with six clubs in non-National League cities. Eventually, the two leagues battled head-to-head in numerous cities for fans and across the landscape for the best players. The Association thrived at first largely because it offered Sunday baseball—not even considered by the puritanical NL officials. The American Association also allowed admission for only a quarter, half the price of admission into a National League game, and proudly condoned the fans' enjoyment of imbibing beer while also enjoying the ball game.

That latter attraction was perfect for Chris Von der Ahe. He owned a saloon and boardinghouse near Sportsman's Park and enjoyed a bustling business on baseball game days. A second incarnation of the St. Louis Brown Stockings was the resulting work of sportswriter Al Spink, who later founded *The Sporting News*. Spink got Von der Ahe interested in baseball as Von der Ahe "might have become interested in pretzels, peanuts, or any other incitant to thirst and beer drinking," as Harold Seymour has written. Von der Ahe first paid for the rights to sell refreshments at Browns games. He paid for improvements to the ballpark soon afterward, then bought the team and quickly took the chance to take the team into the American Association.

Von der Ahe frequently showed himself to be hasty and ignorant at best and a buffoon at worst. But he occasionally lapsed into moments of uncanny wisdom, such as the signing of a 22-year-old semipro first baseman playing for a team in Dubuque, Iowa. By 1883, Chicago native Charlie Comiskey became the team's manager and one of the club's top players as the Browns finished second in the Association. The league ballooned to 12 teams for 1884, the Browns remaining competitive, and in 1885 they won the first of four consecutive American Association championships.

Those Browns had a reputation first and foremost for their "wild baserunning tactics" and attracted the creativity of opponents hell-bent on stopping them. For instance, the Philadelphia grounds crew piled sand a foot deep around the bases in preparing for a series with the Browns.

Their success didn't keep other teams from trying to woo fans away from the Browns. Henry V. Lucas, a nephew of John Lucas and a member of a family that was one of the earliest to settle in St. Louis, provided much financial support for the St. Louis entry in the short-lived Union Association. The new league struggled all year with teams dropping in and out. But the Maroons, as they were called, played at the Palace Park of America at Jefferson and Cass avenues and survived the summer. After winning the Union Association championship in 1884, the Maroons were accepted into the National League for the 1885 and 1886 seasons.

But the Browns had such a grip on St. Louis fans that the Maroons disbanded after winning only 36 games for a last-place finish in the eight-team league in 1885 and winning 43 to finish sixth the next season.

The Browns could keep their fans. But they couldn't hold onto their star players. Same for other American Association teams, who continually lost top talent to bigger contracts with the National League and, in 1890, to the upstart one-year-wonder Players League. Von der Ahe's team finished second in 1891, their seventh consecutive finish among the top three in the league.

But the American Association had been weakened beyond repair. Once Von der Ahe lost most of the key players from that 1891 team to the NL, he agreed to a peaceful merger into the National League along with the Baltimore, Louisville, and Washington franchises from the American Association.

Perhaps the NL agreed to accept St. Louis in its fold because the league's clubs wanted a new whipping boy. The NL Browns were pitiable new members of the league as long as Von der Ahe owned them. Things took a dramatic turn when he owed creditors so much money that the team had to be sold.

New ownership, led by Frank de Haas Robison, ushered in what can be considered the modern era of Cardinals baseball. Literally. First, he swapped his best players to St. Louis from the Cleveland franchise, which he also owned with brother Stanley Robison. That strategy turned the St. Louis club competitive. Then, he sought a completely new image by ditching the brown socks and opting for uniforms trimmed in a shade of red.

The team was called the Perfectos and Red Caps during the 1899 season, but neither seemed to stick as an accepted nickname. One day, a St. Louis writer overheard a female fan remark, "My, what a lovely shade of cardinal on their uniforms!" Soon, everyone was calling them the Cardinals.

For several years afterward, no one really connected that nickname to the bird that populated the St. Louis region. Branch Rickey, then the Cardinals manager and a key member of the team's brain trust, attended a banquet at a Presbyterian church in suburban Ferguson, Missouri. Women decorating the hall had propped up red cardboard cardinals on tablecloths for the dinner. Within days, Rickey had adopted the cardinal bird as the team's symbol and asked local commercial artist Edward Schmidt to design a logo with the bird incorporated, something like a red bird perched on a bat in front of a large baseball.

Eventually, the birds-on-the-bat logo across the front of the Cardinals' jerseys became one of the most unique and recognizable in all of sports.

Rickey also hatched the thought of letting young boys into games free to sit in a specific section. Those boys, many of whom had fit a stereotype of trying to sneak a peek at the action through knotholes in the outfield fence, came to be known as the Knothole Gang, a practice continued for decades by the team. Often, the ball club was referred to in print as the Knotholers.

But nothing could replace the name Cardinals. Nothing ever will.

Note: Parentheses surrounding a statistic in a roster indicate that the player or team led the league in that category. Statistics for stolen bases for 1882-86 and for runs batted in for 1882-87 and 1890 are not available because such records were not kept at the time or have been lost.

Offensive totals for each team do not match the sum of the totals of the players listed, because batting statistics are not shown for pitchers. Win-loss records for each year may include forfeits and therefore may not match the sum for the pitchers listed.

1882

Record: 37-43

Finish: Fifth (American Association)

Games Behind: 18

Manager: Ned Cuthbert

Opening day came on a beautiful May 2 afternoon at Sportsman's Park, site of the city's first professional baseball field laid out by Gus Solari 16 years earlier. And finally, pro ball was back in St. Louis.

Owner Chris Von der Ahe made certain the first game was something memorable for approximately 2,000 fans who paid a quarter apiece to watch. He hired a band to brighten the mood beforehand, then trotted out a team in new white uniforms with brown caps, brown stockings, and brown trim. They were the Browns, of course.

Assembling the Browns had been a collaborative effort. Von der Ahe supplied the membership in the American Association, the enthusiasm for his new beer-selling venture, and funds to entice players to St. Louis. Adviser Al Spink offered a tip to sign a skilled young first baseman playing in Dubuque, Iowa; so Von der Ahe sought out Charlie Comiskey and signed him.

Ned Cuthbert, a former pro player in St. Louis, had retired to tending a bar in the city. He also had influenced Von der Ahe's decision to venture into ownership of the team and still was prominent in local baseball circles; so Von der Ahe hired Cuthbert to be his first captain, with all the duties of a field manager. Cuthbert used his experience to round up several players from the East, but most of the first-year Browns were St. Louis lads: brothers Jack and Bill Gleason, pitcher Jumbo McGinnis, outfielder George Seward, catcher Tom Sullivan.

They had played numerous local nines in some April exhibitions, then opened the season against the Eclipse of Louisville. McGinnis was the first pitcher—he would start 44 of the team's 80 games. Jack Gleason had the franchise's first hit, a leadoff single in the first, and scored the first run on Comiskey's three-base hit. The Browns won 9-7, with McGinnis not only getting the complete-game victory but contributing two doubles as well.

The Browns were tied for first in the six-team league late in May and were eight games over .500, just a game behind first-place Cincinnati, in late June. But a dreadful stretch in which the Browns lost 16 games more than they won in a matter of seven weeks ended any hopes of contending.

On the whole, Von der Ahe had to be pleased with his first foray into pro baseball. The Browns drew more than 175,000 customers during the season and had a couple of early heroes in Comiskey, among the most productive offensive players in the league, and workhorse McGinnis.

	W	L	G	GS	CG	IP	H	BB	K	ERA
Ed Brown	0	0	1	0	0	2	2	0	1	0.00
Charlie Comiskey	0	1	2	1	1	8	12	3	2	0.00
Marrie Crockett	1	4	5	5	5	45	50	8	5	3.35
Bert Dorr	2	6	8	8	8	66	55	1	34	2.59
John Doyle	0	3	3	3	3	24	41	3	5	2.63
Ed Fusselbach	1	2	4	2	2	23	34	2	3	4.70
Eddie Hogan	0	1	1	1	1	8	10	0	4	1.13
Jumbo McGinnis	25	17	44	44	42	379½	376	52	134	2.47
Bobby Mitchell	0	1	1	1	0	7	12	2	2	7.71
Jack Schappert	8	7	15	14	13	128	131	32	28	3.52

	W	L	G	GS	CG	IP	H	BB	K	ERA
Sleeper Sullivan	0	1	1	1	1	9	15	1	0	8.00
	37	43		80	76	688½	729	183	225	2.85

Shutouts: McGinnis (2)

Save: Fusselbach

	G	AB	R	H	2B	3B	HR	AVG
Charlie Comiskey (1B)	78	329	58	90	9	1	1	.243
Bill Smiley (2B)	59	240	30	51	4	2	0	.213
Bill Gleason (3B)	79	347	63	100	11	8	1	.288
Jack Gleason (SS)	78	331	53	84	10	1	2	.254
George Seward (RF)	58	144	25	31	5	1	0	.210
Oscar Walker (CF)	76	318	46	76	15	7	(7)	.239
Ned Cuthbert (LF)	60	233	28	52	16	5	0	.223
Sleeper Sullivan (C)	51	180	24	34	3	3	0	.181
Ed Brown	17	60	4	11	0	0	0	.183
Joe Crotty	8	38	2	6	1	0	0	.143
Frank Decker	2	8	0	2	0	0	0	.250
Ed Fusselbach	35	130	13	31	2	0	0	.228
Harry McCarthey	38	153	23	42	6	6	0	.215
Charlie Morton	9	32	2	2	0	1	0	.063
John Smepe	2	7	1	0	0	0	0	.000
		2,885	398	863	87	41	11	.231

1883

Record: 65-33

Finish: Second

Games Behind: 1

Managers: Ted Sullivan, Charlie Comiskey

Von der Ahe found another veteran to guide his club in Sullivan, who had played with Comiskey in Dubuque. More importantly, he got pitcher Tony Mullane to jump from Louisville.

Mullane, a handsome man popular enough to inspire Ladies Day promotions, had been one of the Association's top hurlers in 1882. He and McGinnis formed the loop's best pitching duo in '83, as they started 94 of the club's 98 games and helped the Browns to a league-leading 2.23 ERA.

As a result, St. Louis fans got to enjoy their first truly major-league pennant race.

After a sluggish start, the Browns played above-.500 ball from late May on and led the eight-team league several times. Their latest lead was a brief one in early September, but they still had a chance at moving into first when the front-running Athletic Club of Philadelphia came to town for a three-game series beginning September 21.

Philly led by 2½ games with six to play. In the series opener, Mullane allowed only one earned run. But the Browns played like amateurs, booting the ball 12 times—with Arlie Latham making five of the errors. The Athletic team won 13-11. The Browns won 9-8 the following day, but Philadelphia, which had swept a three-game series earlier in the month against the visiting Browns, won the finale 9-2 to clinch at least a tie for first.

The Browns won their last three games yet finished a game off the pace. Going 5-9 against Philadelphia during their season series made the difference.

	W	L	G	GS	CG	IP	H	BB	K	ERA
Tom Delan	8	0	1	0	0	4	4	0	0	4.50
Charlie Hodson	2	2	4	4	3	32	28	7	5	1.41
Jumbo McGinnis	26	16	45	45	41	382½	325	69	128	2.23
Tony Mullane	35	15	52	49	49	480½	372	74	191	2.18
	65	33		98	93	879½	(725)	150	325	2.23

Shutouts: McGinnis (6), Mullane (3)

Save: Mullane