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The Tour to End All Tours: The Story of Major League Baseball's 1913-1914 World Tour

James E. Elfers
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The idea for the tour was hatched-over drinks during an all-night bender in “Smiley” Mike Corbett’s bar at Twelfth and Lyttle on Chicago’s East Side-by Charles Comiskey, the Chicago White Sox’s owner, and John McGraw, president and part owner of the New York Giants. From October 18, 1913, to February 26, 1914, the two baseball teams played each other in forty-six games; eleven other games were rained out. The White Sox won twenty-four, the Giants twenty, and two were tied, called because of darkness.

The author, a library analyst at the University of Delaware, tells the story of the tour, which started in Cincinnati and continued in cities across the country. On November 19 the players left from Victoria, British Columbia, aboard the Empress of Japan and, despite a typhoon in the Pacific Ocean that almost sank them, sailed to Japan, China, Hong Kong, and the Philippines.

Jim Thorpe and Christy Mathewson of the Giants were just two of eight future Hall-of-Famers who were recruited for the tour. Hal Chase, “quite possibly the most crooked athlete in history,” was one of the players signed on by the White Sox. “With equal parts larceny and skill, Chase began throwing ball games almost as soon as his big league career began.”

In December they played in Australia, then went to Cairo, Rome, Paris, and London. Elfers includes many interesting details, like the time the players were the guests of Abbas II, the last khedive of Egypt, and stayed at “the swankiest hotel in the world.” On another occasion, wearing morning coats and white vests with matching white bow ties (their wives wore formal gowns), the players met with Pope Pius X in the Vatican.

Once, in El Paso, a game was stopped when an aviator landed his plane in center field. They gambled in Monte Carlo, where, Elfers writes, “Most broke even or pocketed $20 profit for their night of indulgence.” In London, King George V was among 20,000 fans who watched the game.

A decade after the triumphant world tour, the event was lost in obscurity, a casualty of the rise and demise of the Federal League, World War I, and Prohibition, according to the author. Elfers, a genuine storyteller, researched newspaper accounts from forty cities, along with magazine articles and three books written about the tour. He has vividly brought back to life a long-forgotten moment in baseball history with all its charm and piquancy.
GEORGE COHEN (April 15, 2003)

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