

FIVE SKIP SCHOOL

IN THE SPRING OF 1939 AT THIS BOY'S HIGH SCHOOL, ONE SENIOR MENTIONED THAT HE WANTED TO GO TO CLEVELAND TO SEE THE INDIANS PLAY AN AFTERNOON BASEBALL GAME. MUCH OF THE CLASS EXPRESSED SOME INTEREST. PARENTS WERE CONSULTED. THAT REDUCED INTEREST. THE HEADMASTER WAS NOT ASKED; THAT WAS A CERTAIN NEGATIVE. ON THE DAY BEFORE THE THURSDAY MAY 4 GAME, FIVE MADE PREPARATION. THE NEXT MORNING THEY MET AT THE SAME MOMENT THEY WOULD HAVE HEADED TO THEIR SENIOR CLASSES.

BRIGHT THAT SUNNY DAY OF THEIR DEPARTURE, THOSE FOR WHOM THE INDIANS WERE ALWAYS THE FAVORITE AMERICAN LEAGUE TEAM, RECOUNTED THIS YEARS STATISTICS. YES THERE WAS A CHANCE THEIR HEROES WOULD PLAY THAT OCTOBER IN THE WORLDS SERIES. IT WAS EARLY IN THE SEASON AND THE INDIANS WERE IN SEVENTH PLACE WINNING 4 OF 12, WITH BOB FELLER WINNING THREE OF THOSE. TODAY'S GAME, AGAINST THE YANKEES WHO IN THE 1938 SERIES AND SWEEPED THE CHICAGO CUBS IN FOUR, COULD CHANGE EVERYTHING. THE CLEVELAND'S PLAIN DEALER SAID SO.

A YANKEE PROBLEM. IN DETROIT THIS PAST WEEK END, ON MAY 1, LOU GEHRIG HAD BENCHED HIMSELF. HE ENDED THE 2130 CONSECUTIVE GAME PLAYED STREAK, WHICH HE BEGAN AS A YANKEE IN A PINCH HIT ROLE FOR BRIGGS STRATTON ON JUNE 1 1925. IT ENDED 30 APRIL 1939 IN WASHINGTON. AGAINST THE SENATORS LOU HAD GONE 0 FOR 4, NO BALL SOLIDLY HIT, HAS PLAYED POORLY AFIELD. ON ARRIVING IN DETROIT THE NEXT MORNING, HE TOLD MANAGER JOE MCCARTHY THAT HE WOULD NOT PLAY, BECAUSE HE COULD NOT HELP THE TEAM. THE CONSECUTIVE STREAK WAS OVER. FOURTEEN MAGNIFICENT YEARS.

TO BEGIN THE GAME, THE TEAM CAPTAIN GIVES THE LINE UP TO THE UMPIRE. ON MAY 1, 1939 GEHRIG DID THIS WITH TEARS, HIS POSITION REPLACED BY BABE DAHLGREN. NONE KNEW THAT GEHRIG WOULD NEVER AGAIN BE IN A YANKEE BATTING ORDER.

FOUR DAYS LATER ON A CLOUDLESS DAY THE CLASS OF FIVE SENIORS ARRIVED WITH THE OPENING OF THE STADIUM GATES. THEY HAD GREAT SEATS ON THE SECOND LEVEL OF THE HUGE CLEVELAND LAKEFRONT STADIUM . WATCHED EVERYTHING FROM BEHIND THIRD BASE. KNEW THE CLEVELAND PLAYERS, MOST OF THE YANKEES. WHEN THE YANKEES TOOK BATTING PRACTICE, GEHRIG DID NOT BAT. LATER HE WAS SEEN FOR AT LEAST 15 MINUTES IN RIGHT FIELD SHAGGING FLIES. THE FUNGO BATTER WOULD HIT A HIGH LONG ONE TO GEHRIG'S LEFT AND LOU WOULD CHASE AFTER IT, NEVER QUITE REACHING THE BALL. REPEATED RIGHT WITH THE SAME RESULT. ON AN ON.

BEING YOUNG, AND KNOWING THAT WE WERE CONSTANTLY CHALLENGED THE SAME WAY, RUN FASTER, YOU CAN DO IT, WE DID NOT REALIZE WE WERE WITNESSING THE FINAL CHAPTER IN THE CAREER OF THE FIRST SPORT FIGURE TO HAVE HIS NUMBER RETIRED FROM TEAM USE. IN THE GAME, NOW AN ANTICLIMAX TO THE FIVE, CLEVELAND LOST 10-6.

AT SCHOOL ON FRIDAY, OPENLY, THE HEADMASTER SAID HE DID NOT CARE ABOUT THE EVENT, WE HAD TO BE DISCIPLINED FOR SKIPPING SCHOOL. FOR THE FIVE, IN THE LOWER HALF OF THE CLASS SCHOLASTICALLY, THE PENALTY WE WOULD BE INELIGIBILITY FOR ANY MERIT AWARD THAT FINAL SEMESTER. THE TOLERANT HEADMASTER ADMIRING GREATNESS, URGED THIS SAME GOAL ON ALL ATTENDING HIS PAROCHIAL SCHOOL. DISCOURAGED NO ONE.

JULY 4 THAT YEAR GEHRIG WORE THE YANKEE PIN STRIPES A FINAL TIME, AND REMINDED EACH OF THE 5 BOYS OF THIS CLASS OF 1939, AND THE WORLD,
"TODAY I CONSIDER MYSELF THE LUCKIEST MAN ON THE EARTH."

NO, THESE FIVE WERE.

