BASEBALL TIMELINE

1846    June 19th-first real baseball game at the Elysian Fields.
The “baseball fraternity” gets started. Postgame rituals are important.
1850s    Baseball mania sweeps New York.

Interest in the “New York” game spreads.
Baseball is already being called the “national game.”

Henry Chadwick discovers baseball. Begins writing about the game.
1858    National Association of Base Ball Players (NABBP) is formed. 9 innings
and force out adopted. Umpires authorized to call strikes.

All Star games between Brooklyn and New York clubs held at the Fashion
Race Course on Long Island. Admission is charged.
1859    Chadwick produces the first baseball box score.

NABBP bans pay for players.
1860    Brooklyn Excelsiors embark on the first great baseball tour.

James Creighton of the Excelsiors becomes the first great pitcher and first
player to be paid (under the table).
1861-1865  Civil War. The war helps to spread the game across the country.

1862    William Cammeyer of Brooklyn starts the “enclosure movement” by
building a fence and charging admission fees to watch baseball games.
Chadwick calls it the “beginning of professional base ball playing.”
1863    NABBP permits umpires to allow a “walk” on 3 bad pitches.

Mid-1860s  Enclosure movement spreads. More professional players are employed.
The Baseball Fraternity begins to disintegrate as baseball becomes a more commercial enterprise. Postgame rituals vanish.

Widespread charges of fixes, gambling, drinking and general disorder seriously jeopardize the baseball fraternity’s efforts to maintain Victorian respectability.

Mid-1860s  Player “revolving,” players moving from team to team when they get a better offer (often more money), becomes commonplace.

Despite criticism, baseball continues to grow in popularity.

1867  NABBP excludes African-American clubs.

1869  The Cincinnati Red Stockings, organized by Harry Wright, become the publicly proclaimed professional team. The team goes undefeated on a national tour.

1870  The issue of professionalism brings about the demise of the NABBP.

1871  The National Association of Professional Base Ball Players (NA), baseball’s first professional league, is formed.

Harry Wright moves the Red Stockings team to Boston in the NA. Boston will dominate play in the new league.

1876  William Hulbert of Chicago forms the National League of Professional Base Ball Clubs (NL). To appease Victorian culture and dissociate itself from the NA, the NL bans Sunday games, alcohol sales and gambling. The admission price is set at 50 cents to keep the ruffians out.

New York and Philadelphia expelled from the NL by Hulbert after the first season for failing to play out the schedule.

1877  Cooperative clubs form the International Association of Professional Base Ball Players (IA) to challenge the joint-stock companies of the National League.

The NL responds to the IA by signing a number of non-league clubs to a formal relationship with the NL called the League Alliance.

Hulbert suspends four Louisville players (including star pitcher Art Devlin) for fixing games. None of them ever play another NL game.

Rule change: If a ball goes foul before passing first or third, it is a foul ball.
1879  Reserve system for five players on each club adopted by the NL. The battle between the players and the owners over the reserve system would go on for almost a century.

1880  The International Association, unable to compete with the monopolistic practices of the NL, expires.

8 balls make a walk.

1881  Hulbert hounds Cincinnati out of the NL for selling beer at the ballpark.

Pitching distance increased from 45 feet to 50 feet. Eight balls make a walk.

1882  The American Association (AA), a rival major league, is formed. The AA will be called the beer and whiskey league because it will allow the sale of beer on the ballpark grounds. The AA will also play Sunday games and only charge 25 cents for admission.

William Hulbert dies. Albert Goodwill Spalding assumes control of the National League.

1883  The National League and American Association end their brief war for players and sign an agreement that includes the mutual recognition of reserved players (now up to 11 players) and the establishment of exclusive territorial rights.

Sidearm pitching allowed. One bounce foul ball outs are eliminated.

A postseason exhibition series, the predecessor of the World Series, begins between various teams from the NL and the AA.

1884  Another rival major league, the Union Association, is formed by Henry Lucas. Lucas does not believe in the reserve system.

Moses Fleetwood Walker becomes the first African-American to play major league baseball with the Toledo Blue Stockings of the American Association.

The NL drops all restrictions on overhand pitching.

The first “World’s Series” between the Providence Grays, champions of the NL, and the New York Metropolitans, champions of the AA, is held.
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| 1885 | The Union Association goes under, but as a buyout, Lucas brings his St. Louis Maroons (Champions of the Union Association in 1884) into the National League to replace the Cleveland franchise.  
The St. Louis Browns of the AA and the Chicago White Stockings of the NL play a controversial postseason series.  
John Montgomery “Monte” Ward and eight New York Giants teammates create the Brotherhood of Professional Base Ball Players, a secret lodge to provide financial aid to ballplayers down on their luck. It will eventually take on the character of a regular labor union. |
| 1886 | The Brown and the White Stockings again play a postseason series, the first one to be billed as for “the World’s Championship”, with the winner of four games taking all prize money (gate receipts). |
| 1887 | Major rule changes are made: walks count as hits (a one year change leading to aberrant offensive statistics); 5 balls for a walk; 4 called strikes before you’re out (a one year change); batter can no longer request high or low pitch; if a batter fouls off a pitch on purpose, it can be ruled a strike; and if a pitch hits the batter or his uniform, he is entitled to first base.  
A. G. Spalding, owner of the Chicago White Stockings, shocks the baseball world by selling superstar Mike “King” Kelly to the Boston team for the astronomical sum of $10,000.  
Cap Anson, manager and star player of the White Stockings, refuses to let his team take the field in an exhibition game against Newark of the International League (a minor league) unless George Stovey, Newark’s star black pitcher, is kept out of the game. This incident moves professional baseball closed to drawing a color line which will exclude all African-American players.  
Monte Ward publishes an inflammatory article attacking the reserve clause and the blacklisting of players, stressing the “slavery” issue and advocating allowing “supply and demand” to set player salaries. |
| 1888 | The New York Giants of the NL defeats St. Louis of the AA in the World Series.  
A. G. Spalding takes his Chicago team and a group of invited all stars on a tour of the West Coast, Hawaii, New Zealand and Australia, |
While Spalding and the Brotherhood leaders are away, the NL owners decide to implement a classification plan (proposed by J.T. Brush, owner of the NL’s Indianapolis club) for 1889 that grades player performance and personal conduct and imposes a salary cap for each grade.

1889

Spalding and his troupe of world traveling ballplayers are welcomed home with a banquet at Delmonico’s in New York City. The Doubleday myth that baseball was of solely American origins probably has its genesis here.

Baseball finally settles on four balls for a walk.

The classification plan is the last straw. The players revolt and decide to form their own league, the Players League, for the 1890 season.

The Giants defeat Brooklyn of the AA in the World Series.

1890

The Players League goes head to head with the National League (the American Association also continues play).

In October, the financial backers of the Players League are bought out and allowed to invest in NL clubs and the player’s revolt collapses.

1891

In the aftermath of the player’s revolt, the NL and the AA engage in the “Second Association War.” Player salaries shoot up.

A. G. Spalding retires.

1892

A truce is arranged between the two leagues. The National Agreement of 1892 creates a new 12 team National League composed of the original 8 NL clubs plus 4 clubs from the AA. The other AA clubs are bought out. This marks the end of the “beer and whiskey league.” The National League is now a monopoly again. Player salaries go down.

The NL owners decide to have a split season with the winners of each half meeting in a playoff. The customers don’t like the split season and it is abandoned after this year.

1893

Major change: Pitchers must deliver the pitch with their back foot anchored on a rubber slap located 60 feet 6 inches from home plate. The pitcher’s box is eliminated. Pitcher’s mounds are gradually coming into use.
1894 Cincinnati sportswriter Byron Bancroft “Ban” Johnson takes over the presidency of the minor league Western League, which he will eventually build into a major league (the American League) to challenge the NL.

The Temple Cup Series, a postseason series between the first and second place teams in the NL, gets under way. It will continue through the 1897 season, although it is never very popular with the players or the fans.

Mid-1890s The Baltimore Orioles and Boston Beaneaters dominate play in the so-called “dead ball” era with inside or scientific baseball: playing for one run at a time using the sacrifice bunt, the steal, the hit and run, the “Baltimore chop”, daringly taking the extra base on hits, and the employment of “rowdiness” with opposing players and umpires. John McGraw, as a player and later as a manager, becomes one of the foremost practitioners of the inside game which will last till Babe Ruth starts hitting massive numbers of home runs in the 1920s.

1898 The specifications for what constitutes a balk by the pitcher are spelled out.

1899 Syndicate baseball, the practice of one group of owners holding stock in two different teams, leads to the Cleveland Spiders worst season record in history (20-134) when its best players are transferred to the owner’s other team in St. Louis.

The troubled National League drops four franchises after the season: Cleveland, Baltimore, Louisville and Washington.

1900 The Western League is renamed the American League (AL). The AL plants franchises in Chicago, Cleveland, Baltimore, and Washington.

Major change: Home base is changed from a 12 inch square to a 17 inch five-sided plate. Pitchers have a larger strike zone to work with.

1901 The National League adopts the foul strike rule. Foul balls, regardless of intent, would count as strikes up to two strikes.

Ban Johnson pulls out of the National Agreement of 1892 and declares the American League a major league. Many NL players jump to the new league. The Great Baseball War begins.

1901 Superstar Napoleon “Nap” Lajoie jumps from the NL Philadelphia Phillies to the AL Philadelphia Athletics. The Phillies seek a court injunction to compel Lajoie to fulfill his contract with them.

John McGraw of the Baltimore Orioles in the new American League tries to pass off black second baseman Charlie Grant as an American
Indian he named Chief Tokohama. The informal color line in baseball, however, is too strong and Grant is discovered and not allowed to play. Most black players at the highest levels can only play on barnstorming teams like the Cuban Giants.

1902 Pennsylvania Supreme Court rules that Lajoie must play for the Phillies. The Athletics trade Lajoie to the Cleveland Blues of the AL. The Ohio courts refuse to enforce the Pennsylvania court injunction—a truly remarkable judgment. Lajoie plays for Cleveland except when they play the Athletics in Pennsylvania.

The Milwaukee Brewers franchise of the AL shifts to St. Louis and becomes the new Browns.

Bitter internal struggle over the presidency divides NL owners.


1903 The Baltimore Oriole franchise in the AL moves to New York City. First known as the Highlanders, the team will eventually become the Yankees.

The National Agreement is signed ending the Baseball War and creating a three man National Commission as “organized baseball’s” governing body. Each league will observe the other’s reserve system. They will coordinate schedules and adopt the same playing rules. The AL adopts the foul strike rule. Pitching mounds are limited to 15 inches. The new National Agreement also covers the minor leagues.

The first modern World Series is held between Boston of the AL and Pittsburgh of the NL.

1904 The NL New York Giants of John McGraw (still feuding with Ban Johnson) refuse to play the AL Boston Pilgrims in a World Series at the end of the season.

1905 The two leagues formally agree on a format for the World Series.

The 1905 World Series is a spectacular success, catching the national imagination. McGraw’s Giants, led by superstar pitcher Christy Mathewson’s three shutouts, defeat Connie Mack’s Philadelphia Athletics.
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<td>1907</td>
<td>The Mills Commission (appointed by Spalding in 1905 and chaired by NL president Abraham G. Mills) issues its report that claims that Civil War hero General Abner Doubleday created baseball at Cooperstown, New York in 1839. Despite contrary evidence, the myth has remained alive.</td>
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<td>1908</td>
<td>Some have called the 1908 baseball season the best ever. Merkle’s boner occurs on September 23 in a game between the Giants and the Cubs.</td>
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<td>1909</td>
<td>Shibe Park in Philadelphia and Forbes Field in Pittsburgh, the first of the massive concrete and steel baseball parks to be constructed, open.</td>
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<td>1911</td>
<td>Andrew “Rube” Foster forms the Chicago American Giants, one of the most popular black baseball teams. He will later create the Negro Leagues.</td>
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<td>1912</td>
<td>David Fultz, a former player and a lawyer, creates the Players Fraternity and makes 17 demands of the National Commission.</td>
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<td>1913</td>
<td>The Federal League starts play as a minor league.</td>
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<td>1914</td>
<td>The Federal League becomes a major league and starts to lure players away from the NL and the AL. Players salaries escalate.</td>
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<td>1915</td>
<td>The Federal league sues Organized Baseball under federal antitrust law for interfering with its attempts to hire major league stars between contracts. The case is assigned to federal judge Kenesaw Mountain Landis.</td>
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<td>1916</td>
<td>In December, an agreement is reached between the Federal League and Organized Baseball. Many Federal League owners are allowed to buy existing franchises or are bought off. The Feds ask Landis to dismiss the antitrust case. Unhappy with the terms of the peace agreement, the Baltimore Terrapin stockholders (from the Federal league) file an antitrust suit against Organized Baseball, charging conspiracy to destroy the Federal League. The case will eventually lead to baseball’s antitrust exemption.</td>
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<td>1917</td>
<td>U. S. enters World War I. Baseball promotes patriotism at every turn during the season but continues to play.</td>
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<td>1918</td>
<td>Baseball is declared a nonessential occupation and many players are drafted. The baseball season is shortened to 140 games and ends right after Labor Day.</td>
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1919

The baseball season is again shortened to 140 games even though the war is over.

The minor leagues pull out of the National Agreement.

The Federal District Court in Washington, D.C. awards the Baltimore Terrapins $240,000 in their suit against Organized Baseball.

1919

Pitcher Carl Mays deserts the Red Sox and is traded to the Yankees. Ban Johnson voids the deal insisting that Mays must be disciplined first to preserve the integrity of player contracts. Yankee owners get a court injunction to prevent Johnson from interfering. Mays pitches the rest of the season with the Yankees.

Babe Ruth hits an all-time record 29 home runs.

The big fix is on in the World Series between the Chicago White Sox (later to be labeled the Black Sox) and the Cincinnati Reds.

1920

Some people allege that the owners introduce a livelier ball this year. Whatever the reason, the 1920s and 1930s will witness a hitting revolution: home runs and overall batting averages will soar.

Babe Ruth is sold by Harry Frazee, owner of the Red Sox, to the Yankees for $125,000 and a $350,000 personal loan. Ruth shatters his own record by hitting 54 home runs.

Rube Foster organizes the Negro National League (NNL), the first Negro League.

On August 16th, Ray Chapman of the Cleveland Indians is hit in the temple by a pitch from the Yankees Carl Mays. Chapman dies the next day, the only death resulting from play on the field in major league history. Chapman’s death leads to the use of more fresh (clean, white) baseballs during the game.

The Black Sox scandal erupts. Eight White Sox players are suspended from the team and indicted by a grand jury.

Internal dissension among the owners threatens the entire structure of organized baseball. A war rages over the chairmanship and power of the National Commission. Insurrection is threatened and a new league planned.

Finally, a compromise is arrived at and the owners agree to create a one man new the commission. Judge Kenesaw Mountain Landis is selected as the Commissioner. He will have unlimited authority. He is dubbed by press as the “Czar of Baseball.”
1921 A new Major Leagues-Minor Leagues Agreement is signed. Any minor league could exempt itself from the annual player draft (and most of the top level minors did so). Branch Rickey, General Manager of the St. Louis Cardinals, begins to buy controlling interest in minor league teams, building the first effective farm system.

On August 2, the eight Chicago Black Sox are found not guilty (somehow the confessions and evidence have disappeared). The next day, however, the new commissioner, Landis, bans the eight players for life from Organized Baseball.

A Federal Appellate Court overturns the lower court decision in the Baltimore Terrapins case.

1921 First baseball game is broadcast on radio (KDKA in Pittsburgh).

1922 On May 29, the U.S. Supreme Court upholds the appellate court decision in the Terrapins case. Known as Federal Baseball, the decision is written by Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes. Considered by many to be one of the most ludicrous decisions in the Court’s history, Federal Baseball said baseball did not constitute “interstate trade or commerce” and thus, established an antitrust exemption for professional baseball.

First World Series game is broadcast on radio.

1923 Yankee Stadium, “the house that Ruth built,” opens.

Nat Strong organizes the second Negro League, the Eastern Colored League (ECL).

1924 Foster and Strong organize the first Negro Leagues World Series between the NNL and the ECL. The series would last through 1927.

1927 Babe Ruth hits a record 60 home runs.

1928 The Designated Hitter (DH) rule is proposed, but no action is taken.

1929 The Eastern Colored League goes under.

Another black organization, the American Negro League (taking in most of the ECL teams) struggles through the 1929 season before disbanding.

The Yankees begin to wear numbers on the backs of their uniforms.
The barnstorming Kansas City Monarchs of the Negro Leagues begin to use a portable lighting system.

The stock market crashes and the Great Depression begins.

1930 Numbers on the backs of uniforms become mandatory.

The minor leagues begin using lights and playing night baseball.

1931 Baseball Writers Association of America creates the Most Valuable Player Award.

The Negro National League folds after the death of Rube Foster.

1933 The Negro National League reappears due to the efforts of Gus Greenlee, owner of the famous Pittsburgh Crawfords.

The first All-Star Game between the NL and AL is held in Chicago (the brainchild of Arch Ward, the Sports Editor of the Chicago Tribune).

The Negro Leagues All-Star game now matches the best of the NNL against the stars of the NAL

1934 The three New York teams sign a pact calling for a complete ban on radio broadcasts of their games. The ban will last till 1939 when Larry MacPhail becomes the Brooklyn General Manager.

1935 The first night baseball game in Major League history is held at Crosley Field in Cincinnati on May 24th.

1936 The Negro American League (NAL) is formed by H.G. Hall, owner of Rube Foster’s old Chicago American Giants. The Negro Leagues All-Star game now matches the best of the NNL against the stars of the NAL

The Baseball Hall of Fame is founded. Babe Ruth, Ty Cobb, Honus Wagner, Christy Mathewson and Walter Johnson are the charter members.

1939 The Baseball Hall of Fame And Museum opens in Cooperstown, New York (because of the Doubleday myth).

Little League Baseball is founded in Williamsport, Pennsylvania.

World War II starts in Europe.
1941 Joe DiMaggio has his 56 game hit streak. Ted Williams is the last player to hit over .400 for a season.

Pearl Harbor is attacked and the U.S. enters World War II.

1942 In a letter responding to Commissioner Landis’ query, President Roosevelt urges baseball to continue despite the war, because it will be good for morale. Many players will soon leave to join the military and the overall level of play during the war years will go down.

The Negro Leagues World Series resumes between the Kansas City Monarchs, champs of the NAL, and the Homestead Grays, titlists in the NNL.

1943 Philip Wrigley, owner of the Chicago Cubs, creates the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League (AAGPBL). Four teams, the Rockford (Ill.) Peaches, the South Bend (Ind.) Blue Sox, the Racine (Wis.) Belles, and the Kenosha (Wis.) Belles, start play with a 12 inch ball, underhand pitching, and 65 foot basepaths. Later the league will use overhand pitching, a smaller ball and 72 foot basepaths to move the game closer to the men’s game. All players had to conform to a strict feminine image.

1944 Commissioner Landis Dies.

1945 A new Major League Agreement is signed limiting the powers of the Commissioner somewhat.

Albert B. “Happy” Chandler, a U.S. Senator from Kentucky, succeeds Landis as Commissioner of Baseball.

1945 Branch Rickey, now General manager of the Brooklyn Dodgers, signs Jackie Robinson, an African-American, to a contract after a lengthy interview testing his ability to withstand racial taunting and verbal abuse.

World War II ends. One unexpected consequence of the war was the inauguration of one of the game’s key rituals, the playing or singing of the Star Spangled Banner before each game.

1946 Jackie Robinson plays for the Dodgers top farm club, the Montreal Royals of the International League. Robinson leads the league with a .349 average.

The Mexican League offers a threat to Major League Baseball by trying to sign established major league players. Players that jump to the
Mexican League are banned for 5 years. One such blacklisted player, Danny Gardella, later files an antitrust suit against Major League Baseball. Few players jump and by 1948 the Mexican League threat is over.

Robert Murphy, an attorney with the Congress of Industrial Organizations, persuades the players to form the American Baseball Guild.

1947 The threat of the players’ Guild causes the owners to institute some reforms. Among the reforms: Baseball’s first pension fund with owner and player contributions is set up, a minimum salary of $5,500 is established, and spring training expense money (called Murphy money) is introduced.

In April, Jackie Robinson makes his debut with the Brooklyn Dodgers and becomes the first American-American to play Major League baseball in the 20th Century. While the target of tremendous abuse, Robinson plays well and wins Rookie of the Year honors.

In July, Larry Doby becomes the first African-American to play in the American League when he makes his debut with the Cleveland Indians of Bill Veeck.

With financial assistance from the United States Rubber Company, Little League Baseball begins to flourish in the fast growing suburbs.

1948 The Negro National League disbands.

Attendance peaks in the AAGPBL.

Babe Ruth dies.

1949 The federal Second Circuit Court of Appeals rules 2-1 in favor of the antitrust case of Mexican League refugee Danny Gardella. The court finds that baseball is clearly involved in interstate commerce and thus is covered by the Sherman Antitrust Act. The court blasted the reserve clause as “shockingly repugnant to moral principles.” Gardella later settled out of court and his case did not, therefore, go to the Supreme Court. But many observers felt that this ruling meant that baseball’s antitrust exemption, created by the case of Federal Baseball back in 1922, had been overturned.

1951 Uncertainty over whether the Gardella Court of Appeals ruling or the 1922 Federal Baseball decision would be in effect in the future led Major League Baseball to seek Congressional approval of the antitrust exemption. The Subcommittee on the Study of Monopoly Power of the House of Representatives held hearings chaired by Congressman Emmanuel Celler of New York. No legislation was adopted.
Ford Frick, a baseball man, becomes the new Commissioner of Baseball.

Bobby Thomson hits “the shot heard round the world,” a 3-run home run to give the Giants the pennant over the Dodgers in the third game of their National League Playoff series.

1953 In another antitrust case against Major League Baseball involving George Toolson and the Yankees, the Supreme Court surprisingly upholds Federal Baseball. The Court urges Congress to legislate whatever status it thinks Baseball ought to have. But the Congress did not create the exemption in the first place and didn’t pass legislation in 1951 because it thought the Gardella decision had overturned Federal baseball.

ABC begins to televise The Game of the Week. Television in general starts to have a devastating impact on the minor leagues. Major League attendance also begins to decline in the 1950s due to television and a fundamental shift in urban leisure patterns.

The Little League World Series in Williamsport is televised for the first time.

The Boston Braves move to Milwaukee, the first franchise shift in 50 years. They play in a new stadium and draw 1.83 million, the highest ever in the National League.

The players hire attorney J. Norman Lewis to help them negotiate with the owners.

1954 The St. Louis Browns move to Baltimore and become the new Orioles.

The owners agree to give the players pension fund guaranteed funding: all the All-Star Game receipts and 60% of the radio-television World Series money will go into it. A higher minimum salary and other requests are denied.

In July, during the All-Star break, the Major League Baseball Players Association is formed. The players claim it is not a labor union, although later on it will become a very powerful labor union.

The Kalamazoo Lassies win the last pennant in the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League. After the season the league folds.

1955 The Philadelphia Athletics move to Kansas City.

1958 The Brooklyn Dodgers move to Los Angeles and the New York Giants move to San Francisco.
1959  Branch Rickey and New York attorney William Shea begin to make plans
to create a third major league, the Continental League. The league would
begin play in 1961 as an eight team circuit. The first five franchises are
awarded to New York, Denver, Toronto, Houston and Minneapolis-St.
Paul. Atlanta, Dallas and Buffalo later completed the lineup.

Judge Robert Cannon becomes the legal advisor for the Major League
Baseball Players Association. He publicly endorses the reserve clause and
does nothing to upset the owners.

1960  The threat of the Continental League causes the American and National
Leagues to negotiate and seriously consider expansion. In July, the AL
votes for two new teams in 1961 and the NL for two new teams in 1962.
The four new ownership groups will supposedly all come from the
Continental League group (that would not happen). The Continental
League then dissolves without ever having played a game, but Rickey and
Shea have forced expansion and brought National League baseball back
to New York.

Following the 1960 season the now down to four teams Negro American
League disbands.

1961  Calvin Griffith moves the Washington Senators franchise to Minneapolis-
St. Paul where it becomes the Minnesota Twins.

The American League expands with two new teams: The Los Angeles
Angels and a new franchise in Washington, D.C., also to be called the
Senators. The new ten team structure causes the American League to go
to a 162 schedule (up from the traditional 154 game schedule), which
will lead to some controversy about records.

The Sports Broadcasting Act legalizes league-wide package contracts with
the national television networks. Each team in the league (whether
the NFL, MLB or NBA) shares equally in the money generated by
these contracts. Major League Baseball teams are still free to negotiate
with local TV stations as they have in the past.

Roger Maris hits 61 home runs to break Babe Ruth’s record. In the
famous asterisk controversy, Commissioner Frick rules that it is a record
only for a 162 game schedule while Ruth’s is still the record for a 154
game schedule.

1962  The National League expands with two new teams: The New York
Metropolitans (Mets) and the Houston Colt 45s (they will later
become the Astros when they move into the Astrodome).

1966  The Braves move again, this time from Milwaukee to Atlanta.
William Eckert becomes the new Commissioner.

Star pitchers Sandy Koufax and Don Drysdale of the LA Dodgers hold out together and insist that the club bargain with their agent.

1966 Labor economist Marvin Miller accepts a position as full time executive director of the Major League Baseball Players Association, after Judge Cannon (miffed that he wasn’t named the new commissioner) declines their offer.

The owners renege on their earlier promise to fund the Players Association office. The owners squeeze out of their commitment by raising their payment to the pension fund and eliminating entirely the players contribution. Given the option to pocket this money or use it to cover the cost of Miller’s salary and his office the players surprise the owners and do the latter. The owners ploy to drive a wedge between Miller and the players fails.

The owners appoint a special Players Relations Committee (PRC) and employ a professional negotiator, John Gaherin, to represent them in dealing with Miller.

1968 Faced with a threat of federal mediation, the owners reluctantly sign a “Basic Agreement” with the MLBPA. The two year contract, the first ever negotiated in any sport, increases the minimum salary from $7,000 to $10,000, grants players the right to use agents in their contract negotiations, and establishes a grievance procedure with the Commissioner as the arbitrator.

Charlie Finley moves the Athletics from Kansas City to Oakland.

Pitchers dominate the game as never before.

1969 Both leagues expand again. The American League adds a franchise in Kansas City to be called the Royals (to mollify the opposition created when they allowed Finley to move the A’s) and a franchise in Seattle to be called the Pilots. The National League expands into San Diego with the Padres and Montreal with the Expos.

With 12 teams in each league now, a new divisional format is adopted with 2 divisions of 6 teams each in both leagues. A new round of postseason playoffs is now necessary. The two divisional winners in each league will now play a best of five (later a best of seven) League Championship Series to determine which two teams will advance to the World Series.
Players win an increase in the pension fund after holding out in Spring Training. NBC TV put pressure on the owners to resolve the dispute.

NL lawyer Bowie Kuhn becomes the new commissioner.

To help the hitters, the mound is reduced from 15 to 10 inches and the strike zone is made smaller.

After the season, Curt Flood is traded from the St. Louis Cardinals to the Philadelphia Phillies. This trade will lead to another effort to challenge baseball’s antitrust exemption.

1970  After only one year, the expansion Seattle Pilots move to Milwaukee and become the new Brewers.

Curt Flood refuses to report to the Phillies and writes a letter to Commissioner Kuhn protesting the trade and asking to be a free agent. Kuhn responds that if Flood does not play for the Phillies, he could choose not to play professional baseball. Flood responds by filing suit in a Federal District Court in New York. Both the District Court and the Second Circuit Court of Appeals dismiss Flood’s action based on the Federal Baseball and Toolson precedents. Flood appeals to the U.S. Supreme Court.

The second Basic Agreement between the owners and the Players Association is signed. In this agreement, baseball management formally recognizes the Players Association as “the sole and exclusive bargaining agent for all Major League Players.” The agreement also raised the minimum salary to $15,000. However, the most significant bargaining gain in this agreement, a mammoth change, is that the owners agree to have unresolved disputes arbitrated before a neutral, permanent arbitrator, to be selected jointly by both parties. This grievance procedure will eventually lead to the demise of the reserve clause and free agency for the players. This was the key victory in the entire history of the Players Association, but at the time the owners didn’t grasp the full implications of this change.

1972  The first actual strike since 1890 occurs over the renewal of the pension plan. The final weekend of spring training and the first 13 days of the regular season were wiped out. The disunited owners eventually give in to the united players under Miller.

The Supreme Court, in a 5-3 decision, rules against Curt Flood. The opinion, written by Justice Harry Blackmun, upholds the judgments of the lower courts and reaffirms the tainted line of baseball cases going back to
1922. The Federal Baseball, Toolson, and Flood trilogy is a remarkable example of the Supreme Court’s incapacity to address legal issues arising out of the national pastime. In their arguments before the court however, the owners make a strategic mistake and argue that the reserve issue was really a question of labor negotiation, now that there was a union, and not an antitrust matter at all. This meant that the reserve clause now became a subject of mandatory bargaining in the next contract. According to Leonard Koppett, no player, “other than Spalding and Ruth, changed the baseball history as much as Curt Flood.”

1973

A new Basic Agreement is signed in February. Thanks to the Flood case, owners accept binding, either-or, salary arbitration and the 5-10 rule (a ten year veteran who had spent the last five years with the same club could veto a trade). Salary arbitration is accepted by the owners as the lesser of two evils to negotiating a change in the reserve clause.

A radical change in the game, the designated hitter rule is adopted by the American League (but not by the National league). This broke the bond of common rules for the two leagues attained in 1903.

1974

In October, the Cleveland Indians announce that Frank Robinson has been hired to manage the club. He becomes the first African-American to manage a major league team.

Arbitrator Peter Seitz rules that star pitcher Jim “Catfish” Hunter of the Oakland A’s is a free agent after owner Charley Finley violates his contract by failing to make a required payment to an annuities fund set up for Hunter. Hunter then signs a five year deal with the Yankees worth $3.2 million.

1975

Pitcher Andy Messersmith of the Dodgers does not sign a contract for the 1975 season and plays out his option year after the club renewed his contract for that year. The Players Association files a grievance asking that Messersmith be declared a free agent. After hearings late that fall, Arbitrator Peter Seitz rules that the reserve clause language of one year meant of renewal and that Messersmith was a free agent. The players had finally found a way to escape from the reserve clause. All they had to do was not sign a contract with their current club, play out their option club, and then they would free to negotiate with any other owners immediately fire Peter Seitz.

1976

The owners go to court to try to overturn Messersmith ruling. Federal District Court Judge John Oliver upholds Seitz. Once the owners signed the first collective bargaining agreement, he said, they became subject to the
labor-management laws, which favor arbitration of all labor disputes. And the arbitration process used in this case was the one the owners agreed to in the 1970 Basic Agreement. The owners then appeal to the eighth U.S. Circuit Court of appeals, which upholds Judge Oliver.

Having lost in court, the owners lock the players out of spring training until a new system can be devised.

The free agency issue moves to the bargaining table, and a new Basic Agreement is agreed to in March allowing the training camps to open and the 1976 season to begin on time. Under the new agreement, which will run to 1979, players can become free agents after their 6th year of major league service (and then not again for another five years). This was another brilliant move by the economist Miller who understood that a limited supply of free agents each year would drive salaries higher.

Players not eligible for free agency could go to salary arbitration. A free agent would have the right to negotiate with no more than 12 of the 24 clubs, who would go through a free agent draft procedure to list the players they wanted to deal with. In other provisions of the new Basic Agreement, he minimum salary went up to $19,000 ($21,000 in two years), and the pension plan funding was increased as well.

1977 The American League expands for the third time with a new franchise in Seattle, called the Mariners, and the creation of the Toronto Blue Jays. Now the AL has 14 teams and the NL still 12.

1979 The average salary has increased to $120,000, six times what it was when Miller took over as Executive Director of the Players Association. The limited supply of free agents was working for the players.

1980 The 1976 Basic Agreement expired at the end of 1979. Negotiations for the new contract begin in early 1980. The owners want to reassert control over player movement. The device they focus on is free agent “compensation” from the club that signed him in the form of a player of comparable value. The current compensation is only an amateur draft pick (a raw rookie).

As the talks drag on, the players plan to strike. In May the two sides reach a new four year agreement. The compensation issue will be put off a year, and owners. The minimum salary goes up to $30,000 ($35,000 in 1983). The pension fund is increased. Players become eligible for salary arbitration after two years and agency. Once again, the players have made tremendous gains.

1981 The free agent compensation study group does not come to any agreement. In February, the owners announce the implementation of their free agent compensation plan: direct compensation from the team that signs a free agent in the form of a player of comparable value. The players will not accept this plan and announce a strike date of May
29. On May 7, the players file an unfair labor-practice charge with the National Labor Relations Board. The NLRB seeks a temporary restraining order to postpone the strike and put off the compensation issue until 1982. On June 6, while waiting for the judge to rule on the restraining order, Miller offers a compromise: the creation of a free agent “pool” from all the clubs from which teams that lose a free agent may select a player. The owners say no. On June 10, the judge refuses to issue the restraining order. On June 12, the players go on strike. The strike lasts until August when the owners strike insurance runs out. Play resumes on August 10 with the All-Star game. On the key question of compensation, the clubs accept the pool arrangement Miller had proposed back in June. Each team can protect 26 players from their 40 man roster. The rest go into a pool that a club losing a free agent can select from.

The owners decide on a split season to finish out the 1981 season.

1982
Marvin Miller retires.

1983
Donald Fehr becomes Executive Director of the Players Association.

1984
Peter Ueberroth becomes the new commissioner.

1985
The 1980 Basic Agreement expired at the end of 1984. Negotiations on the new contract get under way. The owners open their books to the Players Association to prove their claim of financial crisis. Most believe the books are cooked and made up of phony figures.

In August, a two day strike occurs. Ueberroth intervenes and a new five year Basic Agreement is signed. The pension is increased. The minimum salary goes from $40,000 to $60,000. Eligibility for salary arbitration goes up from two years to three years. The compensation pool is eliminated and replaced with an amateur draft pick.

1985
After the 1985 season the free agent market dries up suddenly. Most free agents don’t get any offers except from their own team. The clubs are acting collectively, that is, they are conspiring to ignore or limit free agent opportunities. The owners are in collusion, which the Basic Agreement forbids. This practice will continue in 1986 and 1987.

1986
The Players Association files a grievance against the owners charging collusion.

A. Bartlett Giamatti, the president of Yale, astonishes both the academic and sports worlds by accepting the presidency of the National League.

1988  Arbitrator George Nicolau also finds in favor of the players in the second collusion grievance from 1986-1987. In 1990, he will also find in favor of the players in the third collusion case from 1987-1988. Ultimately the bill for all three collusion years came to $280 million and “new look” free agency for a number of players.

1989  Bart Giamatti becomes the new commissioner of baseball.

Based on an investigation by Washington lawyer John Dowd (appointed by Commissioner Ueberroth), Giamatti bans all-time hits leader and current Cincinnati Reds manager Pete Rose from baseball for life because he had engaged “in a variety of acts that stained the game” (mostly gambling on baseball).

On September 1, Giamatti dies suddenly of a heart attack. Deputy Commissioner Francis T. (Fay) Vincent becomes the new commissioner.

1990  With a new Basic Agreement needing to be negotiated, the owners lock the players out of spring training. The owners want the players to agree to a pay for performance system and a payroll cap. The players want to reduce the time needed for salary arbitration from three years of service back to two. Commissioner Vincent intervenes and gets the owners to drop their plan. The camps open late and the season starts late but the full 162 year Agreement raises the minimum salary to $100,000 increases the pension contribution, and makes no changes in free agency. The Agreement can be reopened after three years by either side. The owners begin planning for a showdown with the players.

1992  In the first part of their planned showdown, the owners oust Fay Vincent from the commissioner’s office. Owner Bud Selig becomes the acting commissioner.

The owners notify the players that they intend to reopen the contract in 1993, but make no specific proposal.

Baltimore’s Camden Yards opens starting the trend toward retro ballparks.

1993  The National League expands to 14 teams with two new franchises: the Colorado Rockies (Denver) and the Florida Marlins (Miami).

1994  The owners approve a revenue sharing plan (called the Fort Lauderdale plan) that is linked to player acceptance of a salary cap.
Both the American and the National Leagues go to a three division format with a new round of postseason play involving the three division champions and a wild card team that has the best second place record. The winners of these best of five divisional playoff series go on to play in their respective League Championship Series.

In June, the owners decide it will take a 21-7 vote to approve any collective bargaining agreement. A minority of teams can now block an agreement.

On June 14, the owners finally present their proposal to the players. It calls for a salary cap and includes many take-backs in a 7 year agreement. The owners plan to declare an “impasse” in bargaining under federal labor law and impose their plan after the season if the players don’t come to an agreement by then.

To avoid the imposition of the owners salary cap proposal after the season, the players go on strike on August 12.

On September 14, the owners cancel the rest of the 1984 season, including the World Series. It is the first time since 1904 that the World Series has not been held. It is the first season in the history of professional baseball, going back to 1876, in which a season begun was not played through to some sort of conclusion that determined a “champion” (both the AL and NL had League Champions in 1904 even if there was no World Series).

After further talks break off, the owners declare impasse on December 23, impose the salary cap and eliminate salary arbitration.

On December 27, the Players Association files an unfair-labor-practice charge with the NLRB, seeking an injunction against what they claim is an illegal implementation of impasse and the salary cap.

1995

In February, the owners and players meet in Washington, D.C. for talks. President Clinton personally takes a hand in trying to resolve the dispute.

On March 2 the training camps open with all clubs, except Baltimore, using “replacement” players (strikebreakers or scabs according to the players).

On March 15 the NLRB issued its ruling that the owners had failed to bargain collectively in good faith. Later that month the NLRB sought an injunction in federal court against management’s use of any new regulations, and to reinstitute the terms of the expired Basic Agreement.
On March 29, the players vote to end their strike if the injunction is granted.

On March 31 Federal District Court Judge Sonia Sotomayor granted the injunction with strong words for the owners.

1995 On April 2 the owners ended the replacement plan and accepted the end of the strike.

The Federal Second Circuit Court of Appeals upholds the injunction.

After a late, three week, spring training, the 1995 season begins on April 25. A 144 game schedule is played and the World Series resumes.

The owners make no serious attempt at bargaining for the rest of the year.

1996 A new Basic Agreement is finally signed in December. It calls for a luxury tax on any team’s payroll that exceeds a stipulated amount, a revenue sharing formula, and an agreement for interleague play between the NL and the AL.

1997 Interleague play begins.

1998 Baseball expands again. The Arizona Diamondbacks enter the National League and the Tampa Bay Devil Rays come into the American League. The Milwaukee Brewers switch to the National League. This leaves the NL with 16 teams and the AL with 14.

Bud Selig becomes the official commissioner.

Mark McGuire breaks Roger Maris’ record by hitting 70 home runs. Sammy Sosa hits 66.

1999 Free Agent Kevin Brown signs a 7 year $105 million contract with the Dodgers.

2000 ????????????