



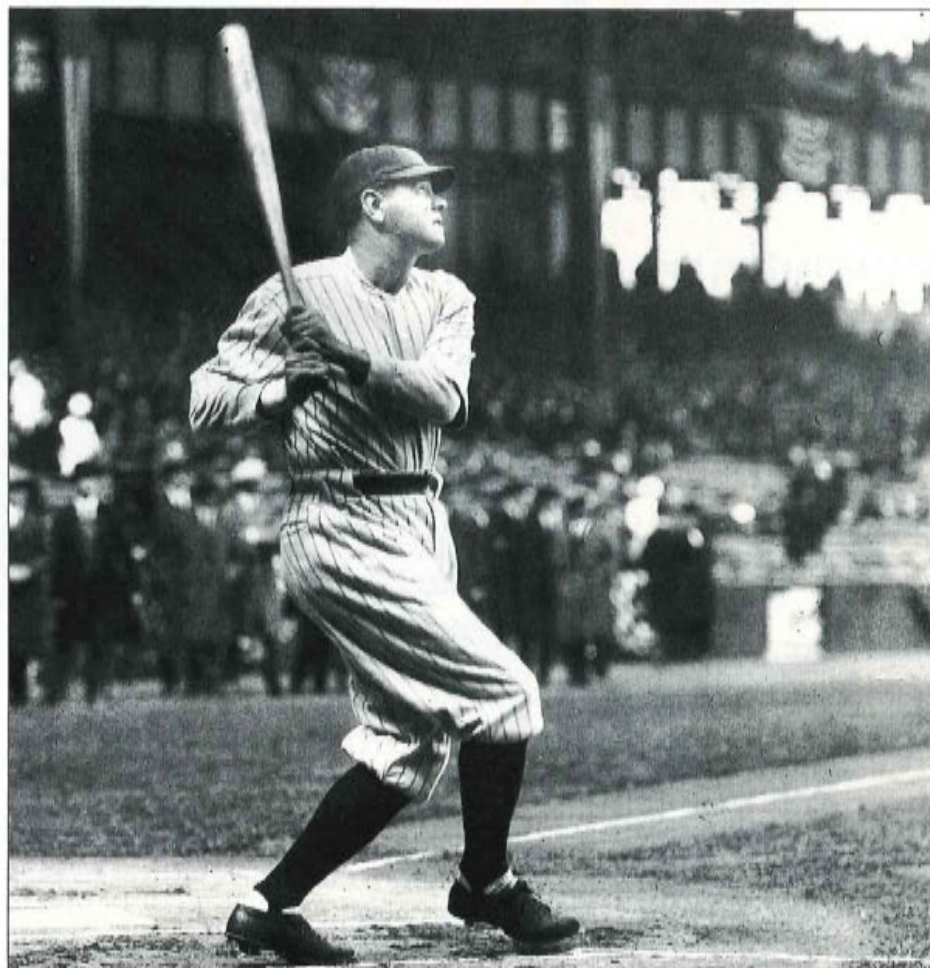
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S&L Conference Curriculum Available

This spring, *Sports & the Law* sponsors an exciting student conference entitled "Broadcast Views: How Does Sports Television Impact Young People?" Approximately 500 Los Angeles high school students will meet to discuss television sports programming and its effect on young viewers. If you would like a copy of S&L's simulation activity on this topic, contact Andy Schwich, S&L Program Director, at Constitutional Rights Foundation.



In 1923, Babe Ruth slugs one over the fence in the opening game at Yankee Stadium, "The House that Ruth Built." (Bettmann Archives)

U.S. History

Babe Ruth: The Incorrigible* Hero

Although he retired from baseball more than 60 years ago, most people know his name. Many call him the game's greatest hero. The power of his batting changed baseball forever. In the 21 years of his major league career (1914-1935), he delighted nearly everyone who watched him pitch no-hitters and slug home runs. He loved children. He often used his power as a celebrity to help underprivileged children. Young people were his greatest fans. They looked up to him and followed him everywhere.

* incorrigible: incapable of being reformed; delinquent; unmanageable; unruly.
— Webster's Collegiate Dictionary

At the same time, he showed up late for games, cursed at umpires, broke every training rule in the book, ate and drank too much, and talked louder than anyone else in baseball. But fans and players alike loved and admired this man too much to care about his bad habits and *incorrigible* behavior. When he behaved badly—on or off the field—the newspapers and the radio looked the other way.

His name was Babe Ruth and he wasn't always a hero.

"I swing big, with everything I've got. I hit big or I miss big."

—Babe Ruth

"I think my mother hated me."

George Herman Ruth was born on Baltimore's waterfront. Life was hard. Only one of George's seven brothers and sisters survived childhood. At five, little George was stealing from local stores. At seven, he was chewing tobacco and skipping school. George's father beat him savagely, but the stubborn boy refused to change his ways. His parents gave up; their son was *incorrigible*. They sent him off to an orphanage. Every Christmas, George waited for his family to visit. They never came. "I think my mother hated me," Ruth once said. But George Ruth could hit a baseball farther than anybody at the orphanage. Soon, George was playing with boys much older than himself. In 1913, George walked out of the orphanage to join the Baltimore Orioles.

"Who is this Baby Ruth, and what does she do?"

—George Bernard Shaw,
British philosopher and writer

For 12 years, George Ruth had rarely been allowed out of the orphanage. Now, everything was exciting to him. He wanted to go everywhere, see everything, talk to everybody. The young ball player could hardly believe that people were paying him money to play the game he loved. Because of his

child-like enthusiasm, Ruth's teammates began to call him "Baby," then "the Babe." The name stuck.

The Babe was traded to the Boston Red Sox in 1914. Although Ruth was the Red Sox's best pitcher and heaviest hitter, he was often late for practice and missed the early innings of more than one game. No one seemed to care. Why should they? In 1919, he clobbered 29 balls over the wall, racking up more home runs than any other player in the game.

Ruth, the Radio, and The Roaring Twenties

In November of 1918, Germany surrendered and World War I was over. American soldiers came home from the war to find plenty of jobs. People had money to spend. Many Americans left farms and small towns to find work and a new life in the nation's fast-growing cities. People shouted for change. They were hungry for anything new: new music, new dances, new lifestyles. This outspoken enthusiasm for life gave the 1920s its name—the Roaring Twenties. Babe Ruth was a part of this era. He was loud and ill-mannered, but he was also free-spirited and good-hearted. People loved him for his mistakes as well as his victories. "I swing big, with everything I've got," he used to say. "I hit big or I miss big."

In 1920, the Boston Red Sox sold the Babe to the Yankees. New York welcomed Ruth with open arms. The Yankees doubled his salary. Babe paid them back by doubling his home runs that season. During his first season with the Yankees, more than 1 million fans paid to watch the him crank out a record-breaking 54 homers.

The radio helped create the image of Babe Ruth as a hero. During the Babe's rise to fame, the radio was rapidly growing in popularity. Big league ball games were being broadcast everywhere and everybody was listening. No other player got as much attention from sports writers and radio commentators. They loved him. They competed to come up with new names for the championship slugger. The Babe was known as The Bambino, the Sultan of Swat, the Maharajah of Mash, the Batterer...

The House that Ruth Built

In 1923, the Yankees opened the season in the biggest, grandest ball park ever built—Yankee

Stadium. Before the opening game, Babe told newspapermen that he would give "a year of his life" if he could hit a home run on opening day at Yankee Stadium.

As Ruth stepped into the batter's box, the slugger knew he was on trial. Seventy-four thousand fans crammed the new stadium. Millions more listened on the radio. Ruth swung at the very first pitch. He connected. The ball flew over the right field wall into the bleachers. The crowd rose to its feet. Grinning, the Babe jogged around the bases to the greatest ovation any baseball player had ever received. From that day on, Yankee Stadium became known as "The House that Ruth Built."

"Sixty, count 'Em! Sixty!"

But even heroes have their Achilles heel, or weak point. When the Bambino, then 31, reported for spring training in 1925, he was overweight and drinking heavily. Ruth collapsed and had to be hospitalized before the season began. When he returned to the lineup, the Yankees were in seventh place, and not even the Babe could bail them out.

Over the next two seasons, Ruth's batting average plummeted. Disappointed fans began to boo when the Babe stepped up to bat. But a young Yankee named Lou Gehrig pushed Ruth to set a new record in 1927. Ruth and Gehrig could not have been more different. Ruth was a showman, always on parade. Gehrig was, quiet, hard-working, "not a headline guy." But both men could belt a baseball.



Yankee teammates Lou Gehrig and Babe Ruth engaged in a home run duel in 1927. Ruth finally won the battle and set a new record with his sixtieth homer of the season. (Bettmann Archives)

Ruth and Gehrig began a home run duel. The fans kept track by radio and the newspapers. By late summer, Ruth had pulled ahead of the younger player. In the final game of the season, he had 59 home runs to his credit. Could the Babe break his own record before the season ended? Ruth connected on the third pitch. The boys in the bleachers scrambled to collect the record-breaking home run. The Babe was delighted. "Sixty, count 'em! Sixty!"** he shouted after the game. Babe Ruth was a hero again.

"I had a better year than he did."

On October 29, 1929, the stock market collapsed. The nation's economy

began to fall into a deep Depression. One out of every four American wage earners lost their job. Homeless people roamed the countryside, looking for work. The Roaring Twenties had run out of steam.

The Depression era hit baseball hard. Attendance at ball games fell sharply. One sportswriter reported, "People seemed to be hiding. They would not even come out to see Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig. They simply did not have the money to waste on baseball games or amusements."

In 1930, just three months after the stock market crash, Babe Ruth signed a one-year contract for \$80,000. He was making more money than President Herbert Hoover. Many people blamed President Hoover for the nation's economic problems. When a reporter asked Ruth if he thought it

** Roger Maris finally broke Babe Ruth's home run record in the last game of the 1961 season.

was alright for a ball player to collect a bigger salary than the president, Ruth replied, "Why not? I had a better year than he did."

"I've seen everything now, Babe."

In the 1930s, Babe Ruth continued to delight the fans with his heavy hitting, extravagant habits and his enthusiasm for the game. But even heroes can't guarantee attendance when the fans don't have any money. And Babe's great moments were coming less often. Ruth's health was failing him. As his batting average dropped, he took one pay cut, then another. He was ready to retire.

The Babe's final moment of greatness came in 1935 when he hit three home runs in a single game against the Pittsburgh Pirates. The final homer was the first ball to ever be hit out of the Pirates' stadium. The Pirates' pitcher described the moment. "He got hold of that ball and hit it clear out of the ball park. It was the longest cockeyed ball I ever saw in my life. I tipped my hat, sort of to say, 'I've seen everything now, Babe.' That was the last home run he ever hit." That home run was

the Babe's 714th.*** A week later, Babe Ruth retired from baseball.

Babe Ruth may not have been a perfect role model. By the end of his career, his performance as an athlete was not great. But people still consider Babe Ruth a hero because he was an outstanding baseball player who loved the game and gave it everything he had.

For Discussion:

1. What does "incorrigible" mean? Describe it in your own words. How does it apply to Babe Ruth?
2. Look up *hero* in the dictionary. What does it mean?
3. Why was Babe Ruth considered a hero?
4. Do you think Babe Ruth was a hero? Was he a good role model? Discuss.
5. Name some modern athletes that you consider to be heroes. Are they good role models? Discuss.

*** Hank Aaron broke Babe Ruth's total home run record in 1974.

Were the 1927 Yankees "the Greatest"?

Math

Many baseball fans have argued that the 1927 Yankees were the greatest team in baseball history. Use the chart below to help you compare the 1927 Yankees to other great baseball teams.



Questions

1. Which team won the most games in one season? The fewest?
2. Which team lost the fewest games in one season? The most?
3. Which team had the highest winning percentage in one season?
4. Which team finished the most games ahead in one season?
5. Based on these statistics, which team was the greatest of all-time?
6. Can any one team be considered "the greatest"? Why or why not? Discuss.

YEAR	TEAM	WON	LOST	PCT.	GA	WS
1927	New York (AL)	110	44	71%	19	Won
1961	New York (AL)	109	53		8	Won
1969	Baltimore (AL)	109	53		19	Lost
1973	Oakland (AL)	94	68		6	Won
1975	Cincinnati (NL)	108	54		20	Won
1988	Oakland (AL)	104	58		13	Lost

GA = Games Ahead (in final standings)
 WS = World Series results
 AL = American League
 NL = National League