

## Wrigley Field at 100



By Dennis Wierzbicki, USA TODAY Sports

**Field of dreams:** The home of the Cubs, which hasn't hosted a World Series game since 1945, is best known for its ivy-covered outfield walls, hand-turned scoreboard and daytime baseball.

# Friendly Confines still a baseball mecca

## Fans' love affair with iconic Cubs' home like no other

By Joe Mock  
BaseballParks.com

*The point of Wrigley Field is to display baseball games. ... And just as a frame can serve, or be inappropriate for, a particular painting, ballparks can display ball games well or poorly. ... Wrigley Field is lovelier than the baseball often played on the field.*

— George Will, *A Nice Little Place on the North Side: Wrigley Field at One Hundred*

CHICAGO — As the sport celebrates the 100th birthday of one of its great cathedrals — the construction of which the Chicago Cubs

originally fought at every turn — its rich history is the talk of baseball.

But why does it seem as if the glorious aspects of this famous venue outnumber the accomplishments of its tenants? Even more perplexing: Why do Cub fans continue to fill its grandstand and bleachers as the memory of the team's last appearance in the World Series in 1945 has long since faded?

As Stuart Shea, author of *Wrigley Field: The Long Life and Contentious Times of the Friendly Confines*, puts it, Wrigley is “a place where good memories are created and bad memories are ameliorated.”

As Shea points out, the team's

failings seem to be easier to absorb when you're sitting in such a gorgeous, stately venue.

Like Shea, Pulitzer-Prize-winning writer George Will is one of a number of noteworthy authors who have penned books on Wrigley to coincide with the 100th anniversary of its opening, which occurred April 23, 1914. Will told USA TODAY Sports that he is a Cubs fan for life because “I have a nagging fear that if I ever stopped following them, they'd start winning.”

Indeed, the play of the Cubs over the years can be characterized as ugly more often than not. After sporadic stints of success, the Cubs have suffered through unparalleled futility. From 1948 through 2013, the team went 4,871-5,564 (.467).

Despite this, the love affair between the fan base and the team's venue is unrivaled in sports — and

that love affair, according to Will, has played a key role in the team's poor on-field performance.

Calling *A Nice Little Place on the North Side* a “business book, about a business model that failed,” Will notes the loyalty of the fans and their enthusiasm for coming to Wrigley for the experience of the venue meant they weren't all that demanding about wins and losses.

If “attendance might've varied more directly and more dramatically with the success on the field, it would've provided a much more powerful incentive to improve what was going on on the field,” Will said.

### Outlasting upstart franchise

The most dominant squads in the franchise's history played in the first decade of the 20th century, when the Cubs called West Side

Grounds home. The teams in 1906 through 1910 had the best five-season winning percentage in Major League Baseball history (.693). Before moving into Wrigley in 1916, the team won a stunning 465 more games than it lost (1,219-754) starting in 1903.

It hasn't gone so well since.

During the final seasons at crumbling West Side Grounds, the Cubs and organized baseball fought to keep the upstart Federal League from basing a franchise on the city's growing, untapped North Side.

Ed Hartig, who for 20 years has acted as the Cubs' unofficial team historian, said the National League even had “an ingenious plan” to have an agent acquire a slice of the property that had been selected for the Federal League venue in an attempt to thwart the plan to construct a park at the corner of Clark





File photo by Chicago History Museum via AP

**Days gone by:** Fans line up outside Weeghman Park, home of the Chicago Whales, in 1914. The Whales were replaced as the ballpark's home team by the Cubs in 1916, and Weeghman Park was renamed Wrigley Field in 1927.



1955 AP photo

**Mr. Cub:** Ernie Banks won back-to-back MVP awards (1958-59) for the Cubs but never got to play in a postseason game.

and Addison.

When the agent failed to buy the land in time, construction began on the park that for two years served as the home of the Chicago Whales. The team won the Federal League championship in 1915, just in time to see the league fold.

Whales owner Charlie Weeghman quickly put together a group of investors who bought controlling interest of the Cubs. They moved

the team into the palace built for the Whales, thus starting the longest running relationship between an NL team and its ballpark, topped only by the Boston Red Sox's use of Fenway Park since 1912.

The stadium went by Weeghman Park until 1920, when the team started pushing the name Cubs Park — a name now attached to the team's new spring training facility in Mesa, Ariz. During the late 1920s,

### Cubs to party like it's 1914

The Chicago Cubs are throwing a 100th birthday party for Wrigley Field on April 23, a century after the Chicago Federals opened the stadium against the Kansas City Packers.

The Cubs will wear Federals throw-back uniforms, and the Arizona Diamondbacks will wear the Federal League uniforms of the Kansas City team.

"The sights and sounds at the ballpark that day will reflect the ballpark experience from a century ago, including music, graphics and even elements of the game broadcast," the team said in a statement.

Among other plans:

- The first 30,000 fans will get a replica 1914 Chicago Federals jersey and the first 10,000 fans will receive a birthday cupcake.

- Cubs legends are expected to take their former positions on the field for the pregame ceremonies (listed in alphabetical order): Ernie Banks (shortstop), Glenn Beckert (second baseman), Andre Dawson (right fielder), Ryan Dempster (pitcher), Bobby Dernier (center fielder), Randy Hundley (catcher), Fergie Jenkins (pitcher), Gary Matthews (left fielder), Milt Pappas (pitcher), Lee Smith (pitcher), Billy Williams (left fielder) and Kerry Wood (pitcher). Past owners will be recognized. The Cubs also will honor the Bears, who played at Wrigley for 50 years.

- Photos and video tributes will play on the right-field video board, and greeters and grounds crews will wear clothing modeled from 100 years ago.

- Classic food items will be on sale, including a Reuben sandwich and breaded pork chop sandwich. Classic cocktails include a 1910s Weeghman Park Old Fashioned served in souvenir glasses.

- Harry Caray's wife, Dutchie, will lead the seventh-inning stretch.

the team's star was Hack Wilson, winner of four home run titles and holder of the MLB record for RBI in a season (191, in 1930).

In time for the 1927 season, the team renamed the park in honor of owner William Wrigley and greatly expanded seating. The result: the first NL team to top 1 million in attendance.

Wrigley's son P.K. became the owner of the team in 1932, and he made no secret that the experience of coming to Wrigley Field was more important to him than whether the team won.

### Early 20th century success

While the team won the NL pennant in its third season at Wrigley, it is a run of four NL crowns in 10 seasons (1929 through 1938) that represents the high-water mark for the team during its Wrigley years.

The 1932 club faced the mighty New York Yankees in the World Series, and what the matchup lacked in drama (New York won in a sweep) it made up for in folklore.

In Game 3, Wrigley's overflow crowd and the Cubs players in the dugout howled with every pitch to Babe Ruth. After a gesture (at the bleachers? At the home dugout? At the pitcher?), "The Bambino" blasted one of the longest homers — and most debated as a "called shot" — in the ballpark's history.

The Cubs' next shining star was catcher Gabby Hartnett. He hit the "Homer in the Gloamin'," a blast into Wrigley's lightless dusk that won a crucial game against the Pittsburgh Pirates in 1938 and propelled his team to the pennant.

Sam Pathy, author of the comprehensive *Wrigley Field Year by Year: A Century at the Friendly Confines*, called that game "the best singular Cub event in the park's first 50 years."

The 1945 season saw many of the game's stars serving their country during World War II. It also saw the Cubs play in the Fall Classic ... with no trips since. As was the case with the previous six World Series in which the Cubs participated, the American League team won — the Detroit Tigers in seven games.

### Rapid decline and heartbreak

Wrigley Field saw its share of star players in the 1950s and 1960s — usually in the visitors' uniforms. One exception was arguably the most popular Cub of all time, Ernie Banks, who won two home run titles and two MVPs but appeared in no postseason games during his Hall of Fame career. Mr. Cub hit his 500th home run, at Wrigley, on May 12, 1970.

The 1960s were a particularly brutal decade at Wrigley, as the team had a pair of 103-loss seasons and a for-the-ages collapse at the end of the 1969 season. And the fans noticed.

"Attendance fell far behind the rest of the league," said Pathy, adding, "Wrigley Field was not considered a great place to watch baseball in the 1960s."

The team won two division titles in the 1980s, and night baseball finally arrived. On the magical date of 8/8/88, lights illuminated Wrigley Field for the first time, only to have the game rained out in the fourth inning.

A wild-card berth came to the Friendly Confines in 1998, and three division titles in the following decade, but everyone remembers 2003.

The date was Oct. 14, 2003, Game 6 of the NL Championship Series. The Cubs held a three-run lead on the Florida Marlins with five outs to go to bring the first World Series to Wrigley since 1945.

That's when fan Steve Bartman deflected a pop foul from Cubs left fielder Moises Alou — and the game quickly unraveled for the home team. The Cubs ended up losing in inglorious fashion 8-3 and lost the next night to the Marlins in Game 7.

Many turned their disappointment into hatred toward the fan in the green turtleneck wearing headphones involved in the Alou play.

"Bartman did nothing wrong," Will recalls. "(He) was surrounded by fans trying to do the same thing." The reaction of the fans "was really quite ugly."

### Foundation for a winner?

The current owners have assembled impressive talent in the front office, and that suggests on-field success is a priority.

Hartig, however, disagrees with Will that Wrigley Field is to blame for the poor showing in the standings over the years.

"You can trace the Cubs' failings to ... very poor (front office) decisions that put them 10 years behind (other teams)," Hartig said. "And there aren't 16 teams anymore. There are 30, and it's a lot harder to win a World Series today than before expansion."

Cubs fans just hope they don't have to wait another century for Wrigley's first World Series championship.

Mock authored the "In the Ballpark" countdown in Sports Weekly last year, ranking Wrigley Field No. 1. He operates BaseballParks.com, an affiliate of USA TODAY Sports Digital Properties.



# 13 moments to remember

Given the Chicago Cubs' luck, it seems fitting to list the top 13 events in Wrigley Field's 100-year history in chronological order:

## Oct. 3, 1915

The Chicago Whales won the Federal League title on the last day of the season. It was "the only Chicago baseball championship at Wrigley Field," observed author Sam Pathy. "Ironically, the euphoric day marked the last game in Federal League history."

## April 20, 1916

The Chicago Cubs played for the first time at the ballpark, beating the Cincinnati Reds 7-6 in 11 innings. Whales owner Charles Weeghman had purchased the Cubs and moved them into his ballpark.

## May 2, 1917

The only time in major league history two pitchers (the Cubs' Hippo Vaughn and Cincinnati's Jim Toney) hurled no-hitters through nine innings. The Reds scored on an unearned run off Vaughn in the 10th, and Toney retired the side in the bottom of the inning.

## Aug. 25, 1922

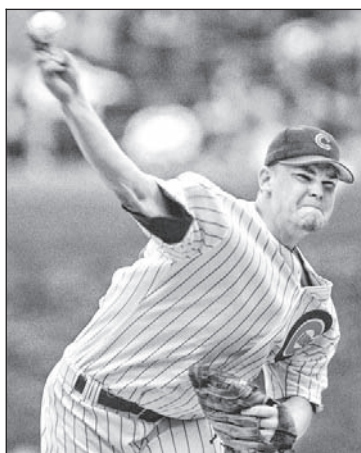
The Cubs (26) and Phillies (23) set the still-standing major league record for total runs in a game.

## Sept. 28, 1930

The Cubs' Hack Wilson knocked in his 191st run of the season, setting a major league record that still stands. At the time, it was thought to be his 190th, but research after Wilson's death uncovered an RBI wrongly attributed to a teammate. The closest anyone has come to the record is Lou Gehrig, who had 185 the following year.

## Oct. 1, 1932

Babe Ruth's "called shot" in Game 3 of the World Series. Many doubt "The Bambino" actually was pointing at Wrigley's bleachers seconds before launching a home run there, but there's no dispute the blast helped propel the New York Yankees to a sweep of the Cubs.



File photo by Richard A. Chapman, AP

**Best pitching performance ever?** Kerry Wood gave up one hit and struck out 20 Astros on May 6, 1998.

## Sept. 28, 1938

"The Homer in the Gloamin'," as Cubs player-manager Gabby Hartnett hit a game-winning blast as the game was about to be called because of darkness. The name is a reference to a 1911 love song called *Roamin' in the Gloamin'.* The win against the Pittsburgh Pirates completed a monumental comeback in the standings for the Cubs, who finished a sweep the next day and clinched the National League pennant days later. "The story has a little bit of everything," Cubs historian Ed Hartig told USA TODAY Sports. "It's got late-innings suspense, late in the season, a great comeback and a legendary ballplayer."

## Oct. 10, 1945

The Tigers knocked off the Cubs in Game 7 of the World Series 9-3. Wrigley hasn't seen a Fall Classic since. The Cubs lost three of the four games played at Wrigley.

## May 18, 1947

Jackie Robinson became the first African-American player in a major league game in Chicago, as the Dodgers beat the Cubs 4-2. The



File photo by John Swart, AP

**Go figure:** The first night game at Wrigley Field was held Aug. 8, 1988, though it was rained out after four innings.



File photo by John Zich, USA TODAY Sports

**Five outs away:** The Cubs were closing in on their first World Series since 1945 when Moises Alou and Steve Bartman got tangled up in the 2003 NLCS.

"46,572 paying customers ... were luckier than the 20,000 or so fans who milled around outside Wrigley Field, unable to get in," wrote George Will. "It was probably the largest concentration of African Americans in the history of the North Side up to that point."

## Oct. 1, 1969

In the 162nd game of the season, the Cubs fell to the New York Mets 6-5. It was their 18th loss in 30 days, as their 9½-game lead over the Mets on Aug. 19 turned into an eight-game deficit. History views it as one of the most significant collapses in pro sports.

## Aug. 8, 1988

The "8/8/88 game" was to be the first night game at Wrigley. It was postponed because of rain in the fourth inning, but the lights had arrived.

## May 6, 1998

In what Hartig calls one of the top two games in Wrigley's history, 20-year-old Kerry Wood allows only a single while striking out 20 Houston Astros in a 2-0 victory. Pathy points out that Bill James' "Game Score" system "ranked this as the greatest pitching performance in big-league history."

## Oct. 14, 2003

With the Cubs leading 3-0 and five outs from their first World Series in 58 years, Moises Alou fails to catch a ball hit just into the stands down the left-field line. Among the spectators attempting to snag the souvenir is loyal Cubs fan Steve Bartman. The team seemingly comes apart for the rest of the game, allowing the Florida Marlins to score eight unanswered runs. No pennant for the Cubs that year. The Cubs have reached the postseason twice since, getting swept in the NL Division Series in 2007 and '08.

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