

The 1944 "St. Louis" Series



With 2004 drawing to a close, we also close the door on our celebration of the 60th anniversary of the 1944 American League champion St. Louis Browns. Although every good Brownie fan knows the sad outcome of the "St. Louis" Series, baseball writer Michael Aubrecht recaps the action one more time... for posterity!

The ongoing war between the Allies and Axis powers certainly had an impact on Major League Baseball, but never like it did in 1944. Many of the game's best players were called away for tours of duty and the result was a seriously depleted pool of talent. During an interview with the *St. Louis Dispatch* Marty Marion of the Cardinals (and later the Browns) reflected on the '44 season stating, "Common sense had to tell you the competition wasn't as good as it was before, but as a player, you don't notice that sort of thing at all. We just played the game like that was it. We never mentioned the War. You put out nine players, we put out nine players, and we played."

The top team in the American League that year was the St. Louis Browns who collectively batted .252 in route to their only pennant. They only had one .300 hitter in outfielder Mike

Kreevich (who barely made it at .301); one man with 20 home runs, shortstop Vern Stephens (who hit exactly 20); and one player over the 85 RBI mark, Stephens, who knocked in 109 runs. On the mound, the Browns boasted Nelson Potter and Jack Kramer who combined for a mediocre 36 victories. Despite running a close race for the pennant, the Browns attendance was very poor. Only 6,172 fans witnessed their sweep of a doubleheader against the New York Yankees (thanks to outfielder Chet Laabs drilling two final-day homers) on September 29th. The following day, attendance doubled to an slightly-less-embarrassing 12,982 as Dennis Galehouse went the distance, winning 2-0 for his ninth victory of the year. Amazingly, just two days later, the Browns were tied with the Detroit Tigers and boasted their first sellout in over 20 years as 37,815 packed Sportsman's Park to watch their "forgotten"

team clinch the pennant on the final day of the season. The victory, combined with Detroit's loss to Washington, enabled St. Louis to finish one game ahead of the Tigers in the American League. Across town, the other Major League team from St. Louis was doing business as usual. In making off with their third straight National League pennant (leading by 14-1/2 games over Pittsburgh), manager Billy Southworth's Cardinals had won 105 games and ran their 3-year victory total to 316.

Like Chicago, New York and St. Louis before them, the "Gateway City" was electrified with the excitement of what was billed as the "St. Louis Showdown." Surprisingly, it was the 8-time National League champion Cardinals who were tenants of the American League's downtrodden Browns in Sportsman's Park which would be the venue for the entire contest. Perhaps as an answer to the lack of pre-game respect they had received in the papers, Luke Sewell's American League titleists came out swinging against their heavily favored rivals for the 2-1 opening victory. Denny Galehouse out-pitched Series vet Mort Cooper, and George McQuinn hit a clutch, 4th-inning, 2-run homer that decided Game 1. Unfortunately, the blast would prove to be the Browns' only homer in World Series history.

The Cards answered back in Game 2 with Blix Donnelly's stellar relief pitching that tallied no runs, two hits and seven strikeouts in four innings. Ken O'Dea came up big as well with a run-scoring pinch single in the 11th for the 3-2 victory. The underdogs prevailed again in Game 3 as Jack Kramer pitched a 7-hitter and struck out 10 batters on the way to a 6-2 Browns triumph. With the Americans ahead two games to one, the more experienced Nationals proceeded to show

what it takes to play in the big show.

Sig Jakucki, the 35-year-old who had won 13 for the '44 Browns after being away from baseball for five years, lasted only three innings in Game 4, a contest in which Cards lefthander Harry Brecheen, 16-5 in the regular season, kept the American Leaguers off stride. Stan Musial finished the job with a 2-run homer for the 5-1 win. The following day, Cooper, who was coming off of a 22-win season, beat Galehouse with a 7-hit, 2-0 shutout. In the Cardinals' 1942-1943-1944 stranglehold on the National League championship, Cooper had won 65 games and thrown 23 shutouts. For Game 6, it was Max Lanier and Ted Walks — who both had 17 wins and shared a 2.65 ERA — that wrote the final chapter to the Brown's "Cinderella season" with a 3-1 victory that wrapped up the Cardinals' second Series title in three years. It was the eighth appearance in 19 seasons for the World Champions, while it was the first — and last — Fall Classic in the Browns' 52-year history.

Musial later summed up the contest stating, "The funny thing about that World Series, the fans were rooting for the Browns, and it kind of surprised me because we drew more fans than the Browns during the season. The fans were rooting for the underdog, and I was surprised about that, but after you analyze the situation in St. Louis, the Browns in the old days had good clubs. They had great players like George Sisler and Kenny Williams, and the fans who were there were older fans, older men, old-time Brownie fans. But it was a tough series." **Michael Aubrecht** ■

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The photo at left is from Don Gutteridge's book, *Don Gutteridge in Words and Pictures*. This is how he described the scene: "We were up 2 games to 1 heading into Game 4 of the 1944 World Series here on October 7, 1944. The Cardinals were pitching Harry Brecheen who had a great year winning 16 games and losing only 5 with a 2.85 ERA. Harry struck me out in the first inning, but I made nice contact here in the bottom of the 3rd inning knocking a single over Emil Verban's head at second base. That's Cardinal first baseman George Fallon to my right as I rounded first base. I touched up Brecheen for another single — this time to left field — in the fifth inning."