Generations:  
Baseball on  
U.S. Postage Stamps

by Robert A. Moss

Baseball is generational; a game played in three dimensions, whose fourth dimension is time. To the aficionado, the mythos of time past, the reality of time present, and the hopes of times to come unite in the best of games, crossing generations, joining parents with children, bridging past and present.

The Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, New York is replete with the game’s relics: bats, gloves, baseballs, and uniforms, valuable less for themselves than for the events and players they recall. Postage stamps cannot equal their evocative power, but a memorable moment captured, or a bygone hero freshly remembered, can conjure up dormant images, ignite our imagination, and open a lane to the past.

Counting from our first commemorative baseball stamp, the Baseball Centennial issue of 1939 with its portrayal of a sand-lot pickup ballgame, the United States has issued sixty stamps devoted to individual players and various aspects of the game. We classify these issues as either generic, celebrating an aspect of baseball not involving a particular player, or specific, devoted to an individual, most often a player.

Generic Baseball Stamps


The first U.S. baseball stamp appeared in 1939 under the aegis of James Farley, Postmaster General in the cabinet of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, and a lifelong baseball fan. The stamp was issued in conjunction

You gotta be a man to play baseball for a living, but you gotta have a lot of little boy in you, too.

— Roy Campanella
with the dedication of the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown and the “Centennial of Baseball.” There is no doubt that the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum was dedicated in 1939, but the contention that the game of baseball was “invented” in 1839 by Abner Doubleday in Cooperstown is a pious myth that has been convincingly debunked.

The tale was promulgated in 1908 by the Mills Commission, a committee formed at the initiative of sporting goods magnate Albert Spalding. However, modern research demonstrates that baseball evolved over many years from various English and American precursors such as cricket, rounders, town ball, and stool ball. Abner Doubleday played no role in this process. In fact, as far back as 1791 an ordinance in Pittsfield, Massachusetts prohibited the playing of “base ball” or “any game or games with a ball” within a distance of eighty yards “for the preservation of the windows in the new Meeting House.” Of course, we don’t know how this “base ball” was played; many variants were used in the Northeast over several generations.

The evolution of the modern game is easier to follow than the game’s origin, and can be traced in part to rules devised by the Knickerbocker Club in New York in 1845. In 1846 the Knickerbockers played a game against the New York Nine at the Elysian Fields in Hoboken, New Jersey, which is often cited as the first organized game between two clubs.

An “incidental” baseball stamp, issued in 1969, is July Fourth. It reproduces a painting by the American folk artist Grandma Moses (Anna Mary Robertson, 1860–1961). Close inspection of this rural town scene reveals a baseball game with spectators in the stamp’s center. There is unspoken history here, for challenge matches between town teams were precursors of the professional rivalries that characterize the contemporary game.

Indeed, in 1969 the Post Office also issued a stamp in honor of the centennial of professional baseball. Once again, however, the dating and anointing of the centennial are ambiguous. It is true that the 1869 Cincinnati Red Stockings were a professional team, with a payroll of $9,300 and players recruited from teams in Washington, New York, and Philadelphia — as well as Indiana and Ohio. That year the Red Stockings undertook a road trip that covered “nearly twelve thousand miles from Boston to San Francisco and seemingly all points in between, playing at least sixty-four games and losing not a single one.” In fact, counting the final eight games of 1868 and the first twenty-four games of 1870, the Red Stockings won eighty-nine games in a row before losing 8–7 in extra innings to the Brooklyn Atlantics in June 1870.

Nevertheless, there were teams before the Red Stockings who paid some of their players, charged admission, and went on tours. In 1859 an English cricket team toured the United States and, in imitation, the Brooklyn Excelsior (baseball) Club
toured a number of eastern cities in 1860, including Albany, Troy, Buffalo, Philadelphia, Washington, and Baltimore. The Civil War diminished baseball clubs and reduced touring, but after peace returned in 1865, baseball expanded and traveling teams proliferated, including a tour by the Washington Nationals in 1867. Thus, the Cincinnati Red Stockings were not the first professional team, although they were perhaps the most thoroughly and openly professional of the early baseball teams.

Recognition of Olympic Baseball was afforded by an issue of 1992. Although exhibition and demonstration baseball had been played at the Olympic games for some time, it was first given medal status at the 1992 Barcelona Olympics, where Cuba won the gold medal. The United States took the gold in baseball only once, in the 2000 Sydney games; Cuba won three times and South Korea once. The players have been required to be amateurs and this has excluded the most gifted U.S. athletes. Sadly, the Olympic baseball stamp seems to have been issued prematurely; the International Olympic Committee voted to drop baseball (and softball) from the 2012 London Olympics (and thereafter), perhaps because the best baseball players worldwide are professionals and do not participate in the Olympics.

Two icons of baseball folklore also have been honored with a postage stamp: Mighty Casey of “Casey at the Bat” and the rousing “Take Me Out to the Ballgame.” The Mighty Casey stamp is one of four stamps in the Folk Heroes issue (the other three are Paul Bunyan, John Henry, and Pecos Bill), and recalls Ernest Lawrence Thayer's mock heroic baseball poem, first published in The San Francisco Examiner in 1888. The poem was popularized through stage readings by William DeWolf Hopper, who estimated that he performed it "thousands" of times in the decade following its publication, including a performance in one of the first "talkies," made in 1922. The story of the Mudville Nine and their fearsome slugger Casey is now an ineradicable component of baseball lore, and its denouement, Casey's dramatic strikeout, reminds us that even the most dominant athlete cannot succeed every time. "There is no joy in Mudville" has become a common refrain for the gloom that is too often the lot of home team fans. (Readers with Internet access may enjoy listening to a 1909 recording of “Casey” by Hopper at www.youtube.com/watch?v=1G2HN_1DRUo or at www.baseball-almanac.com/poetry/po_case.shtml.)

“Take Me Out to the Ballgame,” written by Jack Norworth and Albert Von Tilzer in 1908, has become the anthem of baseball, sung during the seventh inning stretch at most major league ballparks. The original song concerns Katie Casey (Mighty Casey's daughter?) who asks her boyfriend to take her out to the ballgame. The song's verses are ignored today, but its catchy chorus appears to be a permanent addition to baseball culture. The stamp features a portrait of a ballplayer drawn in the style of early twentieth-century baseball trading cards and celebrates the centennial of the song. Indeed, the musical notation on the stamp renders the first six notes of the chorus.

There is also a baseball entry in the set of four stamps devoted to youth team sports issued in 2000 (the other three sports are soccer, basketball, and football).

A se-tenant pair represents a tribute to Negro League Baseball issued in 2010. Together, the two stamps comprise a single ballfield panorama featuring a close play at home plate, with the umpire signaling “Safe.” Superimposed on the right-hand stamp is a portrait of Rube Foster (1879–1930), regarded as the “father” of the Negro Leagues. With the complete exclusion of African Americans from organized baseball after 1890, black players formed their own professional teams. Andrew "Rube" Foster, who began as a pitcher with the Cuban Z-Giants, joined the (Chicago)
Leland Giants in 1907 as manager, building his team into a dominant force in black baseball. Later, he was instrumental in the 1920 founding of the Negro National League, of which he was named president.

In-fighting among competing owners led to short-lived clubs and rival leagues, but Negro League baseball flourished through the mid-1940s. Its demise began with the integration of major league baseball engineered by the Brooklyn Dodgers’ visionary president Branch Rickey, who signed Jackie Robinson from the Kansas City Monarchs in 1945 to play with Montreal, the Dodgers’ triple-A International League farm team. After a phenomenal 1946 season at Montreal, Robinson broke the major league color line with Brooklyn in 1947, winning Rookie of the Year honors. Thereafter, the most talented black players were recruited from Negro League teams, greatly enriching major league baseball and ultimately dooming the Negro Leagues. Unforgettable stars such as Larry Doby, Roy Campanella, Monte Irvin, Willie Mays, Satchel Paige, Ernie Banks, Hank Aaron, and Don Newcombe got their starts in black baseball, but achieved fame in the major leagues after Robinson’s pioneering campaign.

From 1998 to 2000, the USPS issued ten sheets of stamps celebrating memorable events and personalities of the twentieth century. Each Celebrate the Century sheet contained fifteen stamps and was devoted to a specific decade, beginning with the 1900s and ending with the 1990s. Of the resulting 150 stamps, seven were devoted to baseball; four of these were generic, three others recalling Babe Ruth, Jackie Robinson, and Roger Maris will be described below.

The first baseball stamp in the Celebrate the Century series commemorates the first World Series, played in 1903 between the Pittsburgh Pirates of the National League and the Boston Americans of the American League. The best five of nine games series was won by Boston, rallying from a 3-1 deficit to win the final four games. Cy Young won two games and lost one for Boston, while Honus Wagner under-performed for Pittsburgh. The series originated in a challenge issued by Barney Dreyfuss, owner of the Pirates; it was not arranged by the competing leagues. In fact, the upstart American League, formed in 1901, had been raiding the older National League for star players, and the resulting feud was only settled in 1903 with the formation of the National Commission to preside over major league baseball. Note the 1900s style uniform on the representative ballplayer.

Full disclosure: Having grown up an ardent Dodgers fan in Brooklyn, the next two stamps illustrated carry a very personal significance. The “Shot Heard Round the World” refers to the home run hit by Bobby Thomson to win the 1951 National League pennant, Scott 3187c, issued 1999.
League pennant. Although the Dodgers had been 13½ games ahead of the New York Giants as late as August 11, their lead shrank continually when the Giants went on an incredible hot streak, ending the season on September 20 tied with the Dodgers for first place. A three-game playoff ensued and the teams split the first two games, precipitating a winner-take-all deciding contest. The Dodgers led 4-1 going into the bottom of the ninth at the Polo Grounds, but the Giants rallied, cutting the score to 4-2 and bringing up Bobby Thomson with two men on and one out. The Dodgers brought in Ralph Branca to face Thomson; the rest is history — Thomson hit the “shot heard round the world,” the most famous “walk-off” homer in baseball history, worth three runs and bringing the Giants a 5-4 victory and the pennant. Our family physician, who was making house calls in his automobile while listening to the play-by-play on the radio, plowed into a telephone pole. I know just how he felt!

In the 1950s, the Yankees dominated the American League while the Dodgers dominated the National League. As a result, they met four times in the World Series: 1952, 1953, 1955, and 1956. (They also met three times in the 1940s: 1941, 1947, and 1949.) The Celebrate the Century 1950s stamp features pins representing each team and a 15-cent New York City subway token, which recalls that these Yankee-Dodger contests were “subway series” games, with fans using the subway to commute between the Bronx and Brooklyn.

The games were hotly contested, and four of the series went the full seven games, but the Dodgers won only in 1955. Every time they lost, Dodgers fans recited their historic mantra: “Wait ‘till next year!” When they finally won in 1955, the New York newspapers proclaimed “This is Next Year.” When they lost in 1956, the wags rubbed it in with “Wait ‘till last year.” Fans who grew up in the fifties, when New York was “the capital of baseball,” have remembered those World Series all their lives.4

The 1990s Celebrate the Century series included a stamp recognizing “New Baseball Records.” After the baseball strike of 1994 wiped out the latter part of the regular season and the entire post season, baseball fans were in a sour mood, and 1995 attendance duly suffered. However, a remarkable confluence of important new records recaptured the fans’ interest and restored baseball’s hold on the collective imagination.


Finally, the 1998 season featured a race between Mark McGwire of the St. Louis Cardinals and Sammy Sosa of the Chicago Cubs to break Roger Maris’ 1961 record of sixty-one home runs in a single season. The McGwire-Sosa race was avidly followed on national television and, in the end, both players bettered Maris’ mark, with McGwire hitting seventy homers and Sosa sixty-six. In retrospect, however, their remarkable achievements have been darkened by the likelihood that both players used performance-enhancing drugs.

In 2001 the USPS issued a sheet of twenty stamps featuring ten of Baseball’s Legendary Playing Fields. Fenway Park in Boston (1912) and Wrigley Field in Chicago (1914) are the
only two of these parks that are still in use and, like many of the early twentieth-century ballparks, they are original, idiosyncratic, and charming: Fenway with its 37-foot high “Green Monster” left field wall, and Wrigley with its ivy-covered outfield walls and unpredictable winds. The other eight venues have, alas, vanished. Among these, three represented New York City baseball in the fifties at the height of its dominance of the game: Ebbets Field in Brooklyn (Brooklyn Dodgers, 1913–1957), the (fourth) Polo Grounds (New York Giants, 1911–1957), and Yankee Stadium (New York Yankees, 1923–2008).

Ebbets Field with its rotunda, intimate dimensions, passionate fans, and inimitable team occupies a permanent place in baseball lore. As the site of Jackie Robinson’s debut and the integration of major league baseball (1947), Ebbets also was a proving ground for American civil rights. None of these virtues saved it from the wreckers when the Dodgers deserted Brooklyn after the 1957 season for the lucre of Los Angeles. The simultaneous and collusive move of the New York Giants to San Francisco shuttered the Polo Grounds (site of Bobby Thomson’s epic homer), with its distinctive horseshoe shape and near-infinite center field where Willie Mays outran many long drives. The Polo Grounds was resuscitated briefly as the first home of the New York Mets (1962–1963), before being razed in 1964.

The original Yankee Stadium, “the House that Ruth Built,” opened in 1923. Before that, the Yankees shared the Polo Grounds with the Giants (1913–1922), but Babe Ruth hit so many home runs down the short right-field line (258 feet) that the Yankees began to outdraw the Giants, and moved to their palatial eponymous stadium in 1923. A new Yankee Stadium opened in 2009, replacing the original but retaining many design elements for the sake of continuity.

The wooden ballparks of the early 1900s often burned down. Shibe Park (later Connie Mack Stadium) in Philadelphia was the first concrete and steel venue (1909–1970) and served both the Philadelphia Phillies and the Philadelphia Athletics. It set the tone for such successors as Ebbets Field and Fenway Park. Comiskey Park (1910–1990) was the home of the Chicago White Sox. Also a “modern” concrete and steel edifice, it was the site of the “Black Sox” scandal of 1919, when eight White Sox players connived to throw games to the Cincinnati Reds during the World Series for money offered by New York gamblers.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Scott No. (Year)</th>
<th>Principal Team</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Years Active</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ty Cobb</td>
<td>3408d (2000)</td>
<td>Tigers</td>
<td>Center Field/Right Field</td>
<td>1905–1928</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joe DiMaggio</td>
<td>4697 (2012)</td>
<td>Yankees</td>
<td>Center Field</td>
<td>1936–1951</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tris Speaker</td>
<td>3408l (2000)</td>
<td>Red Sox, Indians</td>
<td>Center Field</td>
<td>1907–1928</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cy Young</td>
<td>3408m (2000)</td>
<td>Indians, Red Sox</td>
<td>Pitcher</td>
<td>1890–1911</td>
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The final three venues in the set are Tiger Stadium (Detroit Tigers, 1912–1999), Crosley Field (Cincinnati Reds, 1912–1970), and Forbes Field (Pittsburgh Pirates, 1909–1971). Tiger Stadium (earlier Briggs Stadium and Navin Field) was the scene of the many triumphs of Ty Cobb and Hank Greenberg. Crosley Field hosted the first night game (1935) and the Cincinnati Reds, under Larry MacPhail, hired Red Barber in 1934 to broadcast their games on the radio. When MacPhail moved on to the Brooklyn Dodgers in 1939, he brought Barber along with him. Barber and his southern locutions (“sittin’ in the catbird seat”) became renowned in Brooklyn and to radio listeners everywhere the signal would reach. On a hot summer’s day, long before the air conditioner era, one could walk along a Brooklyn street catching Barber’s call from every open window on the block, while not missing a play. Lastly, Forbes Field in Pittsburgh was the arena for the great Pirate teams of Honus Wagner, Pie Traynor, Roberto Clemente, and Willie Stargell.

**Specific Baseball Stamps**

There have been thirty-seven issues featuring baseball players, but we must remember that the USPS does not portray living individuals on stamps, so that great players like Sandy Koufax, Willie Mays, and Stan Musial are absent. The
postal gallery of all-stars is skewed toward earlier generations and the players who inhabit the tall corn in *Field of Dreams*. Table I lists the thirty baseball players who have appeared on U.S. stamps.

While there isn’t space to comment on all of them, I would like to mention some of these outstanding stars. In particular, Honus Wagner, Tris Speaker, George Sisler, Walter Johnson, Eddie Collins, and Cy Young were among the first inductees of the Baseball Hall of Fame. Then there are Josh Gibson, the great slugging catcher, and Satchel Paige, the nonpareil pitcher, whose careers were largely confined to the Negro Leagues. For them, and for so many others, integration of major league baseball came too late. Bill Veeck did bring Paige to Cleveland in mid-1948, and the 42-year-old “rookie” compiled a 6-1 record with a 2.48 Earned Run Average (ERA), helping the Indians win the American League pennant. In his twenty-two years as a pitcher in the Negro League, Paige acquired impressive stats such as sixty-four consecutive scoreless innings, twenty-one straight wins, and a remarkable 31-4 record in 1933. He played in the majors for only six years before retiring at age 47. Joe DiMaggio called him “the best and fastest pitcher I’ve ever faced.” These players all appear on the twenty-stamp Legends of Baseball sheet issued in 2000.

The individuals listed in Table I are mainly position players; only six of the thirty are pitchers. Still, it’s not a bad rotation with Dizzy Dean (150 wins-83 losses), Lefty Grove (300-141), Walter Johnson (417-279), Christy Mathewson (373-188), Satchel Paige, and Cy Young (511-316). Perhaps the USPS might consider a block of four of other “Marvelous Moundsmen,” featuring, for example, Warren Spahn (363-245) Carl Hubbell (253-154), Bob Feller (266-162), and Don Drysdale (209-166). Appropriate, too, would be a commemorative in honor of Branch Rickey (1881–1965), the driving force behind the integration of major league baseball, and the creator of its farm team system.

Five individuals have been honored with more than one postage stamp: Jackie Robinson, Babe Ruth, Lou Gehrig, Roberto Clemente, and Jim Thorpe.

Jackie Robinson was the first modern (post-1900) African-American major league baseball player, joining the Brooklyn Dodgers in 1947 and winning Rookie of the Year honors. He endured verbal abuse, knockdown pitches, and attempted spikings, but
helped lead his team to the 1947 World Series. In 1949 he was the National League’s Most Valuable Player (MVP), as the Dodgers again won the pennant. He was the spirit and animating force of the great “Boys of Summer” Brooklyn teams who finally won the World Series in 1955. At bat, on the bases, and in the field, Robbie was excitement personified. He retired after the 1956 season. A six-time All-Star, he was inducted into the Hall of Fame in 1962. Over the years, the enormity of his impact on baseball, sports in general, and the wider dimensions of civil rights came to be generally appreciated. He was posthumously awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1984 and the Congressional Gold Medal in 2005. In 1997 Major League Baseball permanently retired Robinson’s number 42.

Babe Ruth was a superb pitcher for the Boston Red Sox, with a cumulative six-year record of 89-46 and a 2.19 ERA. He was undefeated in the World Series of 1916 and 1918, going 3-0 with an ERA of 0.87! Nevertheless, it is as a slugging outfielder for the Yankees (1920–1934) that he ushered in the modern baseball power game, with a .349 batting average and 659 home runs, including sixty in 1927, a record that stood until 1961. He became the most celebrated athlete of his era, changed the nature of the game, and attracted huge crowds first to the Polo Grounds and, after 1923, to Yankee Stadium. It does seem appropriate that Ruth appears on an individual commemorative, as part of the Celebrate the Century 1920s series, and as one of the players on the Legends of Baseball stamp sheet.

Lou Gehrig teamed with Babe Ruth in the Yankee’s fearsome offense. From 1925 through 1938, the “Iron Horse” played in 2,130 consecutive games, a record of durability that stood until 1995, when it was surpassed by Cal Ripken Jr. Gehrig’s batting statistics are extraordinary, leading the American League in runs scored four times, in home runs three times, and in Runs Batted In (RBIs) five times. In seven seasons he had 150 or more RBIs, in six seasons his batting average was .350 or better, and in five seasons he surpassed forty home runs. However, he is remembered as much for the manner of his death as for his splendid career.

By 1939 he had lost his power, stamina, and wonderful coordination; in June of that year he was diagnosed at the Mayo Clinic with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, now commonly called “Lou Gehrig’s disease,” an incurable, progressive, and paralytic malady of the nervous system. Indeed, Gehrig died just two years later, in June 1941, aged 37. What history recalls most vividly, however, is his farewell speech, delivered on July 4, 1939 at Yankee Stadium, when he told the crowd:

Fans, for the past two weeks you have been reading about the bad break I got. Yet today I consider myself the luckiest man on the face of the earth.
It is difficult to imagine a more apposite example of Hemingway’s definition of courage as “grace under pressure.”

There is a similar melancholy resonance in the career of Roberto Clemente, the great Puerto Rican outfielder of the Pittsburgh Pirates, who also appears on both a commemorative stamp and in the Legends series. Clemente, the first Hispanic player to be elected to the Hall of Fame, played for the Pirates from 1955 to 1972. He was a fifteen time All-Star, won twelve Gold Gloves, led the National League in batting four times, and won MVP honors in 1966. He led the Pirates to World Series titles in 1960 and 1971.

Clemente was first signed by the Brooklyn Dodgers organization in 1954, and was on the roster of their triple-A farm team in Montreal when he was scouted by Clyde Sukeforth on behalf of Branch Rickey. Rickey had been forced out of Brooklyn by Walter O’Malley in 1950, and moved to Pittsburgh, taking coach Sukeforth with him. Rickey obtained Clemente for Pittsburgh on Sukeforth’s enthusiastic recommendation.

The delightful symmetry here is that the Sukeforth-Rickey tandem, which scouted and signed Jackie Robinson for the Dodgers in 1945, repeated the trick nine years later for the Pirates with Clemente. The sad resonance, however, is Clemente’s death in an airplane crash on the last day of 1972 while he was flying to Nicaragua on a relief mission, following a devastating earthquake in Managua.

Jim Thorpe has been honored with both a commemorative stamp and an appearance in the Celebrate the Century Baseball series, the USPS has issued two other sets of stamps devoted to baseball players. These are the 2006 Baseball Sluggers and the 2012 Baseball All-Stars. Each set includes four portraits of baseball greats. The Baseball Sluggers features Roy Campanella, Hank Greenberg, Mel Ott, and Mickey Mantle in designs that resemble baseball cards of the forties and fifties. There is a nice contrast here to the Legends series in which the designs evoke older baseball cards of the 1900s–1920s.

Roy Campanella was an early pioneer of integrated major league baseball, brought to the Brooklyn Dodgers by Branch Rickey only a year after the debut of Jackie Robinson. “Campy” was a peerless defensive catcher, a mainstay of the great “Boys of Summer” Dodger teams of the 1950s, a three-time National League MVP, and a redoubtable hitter who once held the single season home run record for a catcher (forty-one homers). His career was ended tragically by an automobile accident that left him a quadriplegic.

Hank Greenberg, one of two Jewish players in the Hall of Fame (the other is Sandy Koufax), experienced much anti-Semitic prejudice in the insular baseball world of 1930–1947. Playing mainly for the Detroit Tigers, “Hammerin’ Hank” was one of the greatest hitting first basemen, leading the American League in home runs and RBIs four times each, and twice named MVP. He hit fifty-eight homers in 1938, mounting a serious challenge to Babe Ruth’s record. He later said, “I came to feel that if I, as a Jew, hit a home run, I was hitting one against Hitler.” From December 1941 to mid-1945, Greenberg served in the Air Force. He returned to lead the Tigers to the American League pennant (and the World Series title), clinching the pennant with a grand slam home run in the ninth inning of the season’s final game.

Mel Ott (“Master Melvin”) was a superb hitter for the New York Giants. With 511 home runs, he was the first National League player to surpass 500 homers, and he was a
twelve-time All-Star. Mickey Mantle was the power center of the Yankees for eighteen years, and a worthy successor to Joe DiMaggio in center field. He won baseball's Triple Crown in 1956, leading the American League in batting average, home runs, and RBIs. A three-time MVP and twenty-time All-Star, he played in twelve World Series with the Yankees and holds Series career records for home runs, RBIs, runs, walks, and total bases. In 1961 Mantle and his fellow Yankee outfielder, Roger Maris, mounted a sustained attack on Babe Ruth's single season home run record. Maris, who appears in the Celebrate the Century 1960s set of stamps, broke the record with sixty-one homers; Mantle (who was injured) finished the season with fifty-four round-trippers.

The most recent baseball issue by the USPS, Baseball All-Stars, features Ted Williams, Larry Doby, Willie Stargell, and Joe DiMaggio. The stamp design shows the individual players in batting position, but the backgrounds are uniformly dark, as if a night game were in progress.

Ted Williams, perhaps the greatest pure hitter of modern baseball, was the last player to bat over .400 in a season (.406 in 1941). Williams led the American League in batting six times, won the Triple Crown twice, was voted MVP twice, and was selected for the All-Star team nineteen times. He served in both World War II and in Korea as a Marine pilot. Some of Williams' attributes can be found in the character of Roy Hobbs in The Natural, Bernard Malamud's 1952 novel. Williams' expressed desire to have people see him and say "there goes the greatest hitter who ever lived," is echoed by Hobbs and, in the 1984 film version, Robert Redford, as Hobbs, wears jersey No. 9 in honor of Williams. Hobbs, like the real-life Williams, hits a home run his last time at bat. For Williams this occurred September 28, 1960 at the end of a 21-year career.

Joe DiMaggio was both a consummate center fielder and a superb hitter. His 1941 record of hitting safely in fifty-six consecutive games still stands and, in the opinion of many experts, is unlikely to be broken in our era of specialty relief pitchers and overpowering closers. "The Yankee Clipper" was an All-Star in each of his thirteen seasons with the Yankees, and was a three-time MVP. During his years with the club (1936–1951), the Yankees won ten pennants and nine World Series. DiMaggio was succeeded as the Yankee's center fielder by Mickey Mantle.

Willie Stargell was the heart and soul of the Pittsburgh Pirates World Series championship teams of 1971 and 1979. He played his entire 21-year career with the Pirates, compiling 2,232 hits and 475 home runs. One of the greatest power hitters in baseball history, he was known for his soaring, long-distance home runs, at one time holding the records for the longest home run in nearly half of the National League ballparks. In a 1979 game in Montreal, Stargell hit the ball so far that the seat where it finally landed was painted gold in honor of his feat. Stargell died on the opening day of the Pirate's new home at PNC Park; a twelve-foot bronze statue of "Pops" now greets people arriving for ballgames.

Larry Doby was the first African American to play in the American League, debuting with the Cleveland Indians in 1947. Branch Rickey initially had scouted Doby for the Dodgers but recommended him to Bill Veeck of the Indians, desiring to see the American League integrated. Doby was a fine center fielder, a seven-time All-Star, and twice the American League home run leader. He helped Cleveland to the World Series title in 1948, and to an American League championship in 1954, in both cases interrupting runs of Yankee championships.

Conclusion

Baseball is entering its third century. The game and its participants have greatly changed since their beginning in the mists of American history, but baseball plays out in our memory as well as on the diamond. Its elegiac quality is no-
where better captured than in Bart Giamatti’s wonderful essay “The Green Fields of the Mind”:

It breaks your heart. It is designed to break your heart. The game begins in the spring, when everything else begins again, and it blossoms in the summer, filling the afternoons and evenings, and then as soon as the chill rains come, it stops and leaves you to face the fall alone. You count on it, rely on it to buffer the passage of time, to keep the memory of sunshine and high skies alive, and then just when the days are all twilight, when you need it most, it stops.6

How fitting then that U.S. postage stamps, which have done so much to record the American experience, should also recall the American game, helping us recapture the glories of vanished summers.

Note

Endnotes
3. Ibid., page 145.
4. See, for example, Doris Kearns Goodwin, Wait Till Next Year (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997).

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