

BASEBALL'S ENDANGERED INSIDE THE SPECIES CRAFT OF SCOUTING

Lee Lowenfish

BY THOSE WHO LIVED IT



Baseball's Endangered Species

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Set in Minion Pro by L. Auten.

To every baseball scout who wrote down what players could do,
not what they couldn't do.

And to Kevin Kerrane, author of *Dollar Sign on the Muscle*,
who has set an almost impossibly high bar in this field.

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INTRODUCTION

Nothing is like the sound of a bat hitting a ball in a way that has never quite been heard before. Nothing is like the sound of a baseball exploding into a catcher's mitt that has never quite been heard before. The search for new and unique talent has motivated baseball scouts for well over a century. Greg Morhardt, the scout who signed multiple MVP-winner Mike Trout for the Los Angeles Angels of Anaheim, once poetically expressed the essence of the hunt: "I look for dogs who play checkers. . . . We're looking for the unique."¹ Eyesight and hearing are two of the most precious senses the Creator has given to human beings, and baseball scouts have learned to sharpen these senses. Sure, they have been aided by radar guns and stop watches, but the eyes and ears of the best scouts have been developed to extraordinary lengths by the trial and error of countless trips to watch ballgames all over America and, increasingly, all parts of the world.

Sadly, the first two decades of the twenty-first century have not been kind to traditional baseball scouts. Michael Lewis's best-selling book *Moneyball*, published in 2003, contributed to a wave of more than a hundred scout firings.² Lewis came under the spell of Oakland Athletics general manager Billy Beane and his statistically oriented assistants who insisted that their new statistics and interest in "undervalued assets" could replace old-fashioned scouting. When the movie *Moneyball* came out eight years later, another wave of dismissals followed. By the end of the second decade of the twenty-first century, there was no longer a Major League Baseball Scouting Bureau or an

MLB-sponsored scout school. The practice of eyes-ears advance scouting of Major League teams during the season has all but vanished.

The Washington Nationals' surprise triumph over the Houston Astros in the 2019 World Series brought special delight to traditional baseball scouts because Nats general manager Mike Rizzo, himself a former scout and the son of longtime scout Phil Rizzo, surrounded himself with several advance scouts throughout the regular season and playoffs. On the other hand, the Astros, one of the most analytically inclined of the thirty Major League teams, eliminated virtually all of their traditional scouts. This development was as ignominious as the revelation of their high-tech and low-tech sign-stealing operation during the 2017 season.

It remains to be seen whether "eyes and ears" scouts will make a comeback in the foreseeable future. An enormous amount of money and publicity has poured into the so-called advanced-metrics revolution in baseball. A growing number of organizations believe that you can better scout amateur players through high-tech video and other new measuring devices. In their 2019 book, *The MVP Machine: How Baseball's New Nonconformists Are Using Data to Build Better Players*, authors Ben Lindbergh and Travis Sawchik write glowingly of this new development. They take issue with *Moneyball*, claiming it didn't go far enough in its dismissal of traditional scouting and player development. They endorsed what Jerry Dipoto, a former Major League pitcher and currently general manager of the Seattle Mariners, called "better ball." Dipoto boasted, "We're moving at a hyperpace compared to the pre-historic crawl of the saber revolution."³ Brian Bannister, a pioneer in high-tech photography of the pitching motion and son of former Major League pitcher Floyd Bannister, predicted that his work would change the future of scouting projections. "Maintaining breaking balls is a full-time job now," he said solemnly. The Yankees, the authors reported, now have well over a hundred members in their Player Development department. They were all working toward making players learn new techniques, and if they don't show capacity in this area, they are being weeded out.

It seems likely that the analytic wave is only starting. In his 2019 book, *Scouting and Scoring: How We Know What We Know about Baseball*, Christopher J. Phillips proclaimed, "Amateur scouting is a scientific practice of

evaluating bodies.”⁴ At a time when tensions between owners and players led to a ninety-nine day “defensive lockout” that almost cost a huge chunk of the 2022 season, both sides have found a rare common ground that allows for measuring devices to be placed in players to measure heartbeat, muscle twitch fibers, and other important areas of player physiology.

Baseball always has room for new information and insights. When Branch Rickey was once asked by scout Leon Hamilton how much of baseball he really knew, he replied, “I question whether I know fifty-five percent of baseball.”⁵ He was eager to learn more about the fascinating and often confounding game. As am I. Like Rickey, I don’t belong to an old guard that refuses to reexamine old shibboleths. But I do firmly believe that it is time for a reexamination of the *Moneyball* and better-ball crazes. The pages that follow will present the counterargument that traditional baseball scouting has much value that should not be discarded. There is plenty of wisdom in the old scouting adage “God gave you two ears and two eyes and only one mouth,” so it helps to use sight and sound more than one’s own voice. Another memorable old scout saying is “Those who can, evaluate; those who can’t, measure.”

In the pages ahead, you will visit some of the great personages in the history of traditional scouting. You will discover that it is not a requirement to have been an exceptional player or any kind of Major Leaguer but that it does help to have some familiarity playing the game at a high level to sense the climate of intense competition. In an interview with the late P. J. Dragseth for her indispensable book *Eye for Talent: Conversations with Baseball Scouts*, Cincinnati Reds scout Julian Mock said he used to ask prospective scouts five questions:

Do you really love this game?

Are you willing to work harder than you have ever worked in your life?

Are you willing to learn?

Are you able to have fun and laugh at least once every day?

Will you never forget where you came from?⁶

Mock himself never played beyond Auburn University in Alabama, but in a phone interview before he died in 2018, he told me the two questions he posed to any high school player faced with the choice of turning pro or

continuing his education: “Are you going to college *to* play ball?” If the answer was yes, Mock advised turning pro immediately. “Are you going to college *and* play ball?” If the answer was yes, Mock advised continuing with schooling.

Older scouts possess such great wisdom that the missed opportunity of younger players and scouts to learn from them is a tragedy. The late Jerry Krause, who made his name as a Chicago Bulls executive in the age of Michael Jordan, loved baseball even more. He told me categorically that he never saw an older scout get worse. Houston Astros manager Dusty Baker has compared veteran scouts to the blues musicians who passed down their tradition over the generations. He laments that so many committed veteran scouts have lost their jobs and thus the opportunity to pass on their knowledge to future generations of players. I have written this book to make sure that their voices from past and present will not be wholly lost. I invite you to savor these tales of a great game seen from the perspective of the diamond detectives who have made their life’s work by replenishing baseball with good players and good people.

Baseball's Endangered Species

Prologue

George Robert “Birdie” Tebbetts was proud to be called a baseball lifer—it was all he ever wanted to be. He was born on November 12, 1912, in Burlington, Vermont, but grew up in Nashua, New Hampshire, where his father, Charles Tebbetts, a clerk for the Swift and Company grocery and meat company, had been transferred. Charles died when Birdie was only three, but Birdie was nurtured by an older brother and many uncles on his mother’s side of the family. At an early age, he became mascot and then batboy for the Nashua Millionaires, a top-flight semipro team made up of former pro players and leading collegians. Team owner Francis Parnell Murphy, president of the Thom McAn Shoe Company and later the governor of New Hampshire, became a second father to Birdie, who never lacked for shoes and paternal guidance. One of Birdie’s first heroes was Millionaires catcher Clyde Sukeforth, who was on the cusp of his career as a baseball lifer (and the man who introduced Jackie Robinson to Branch Rickey in the first meeting of the two, a couple weeks after the end of World War II). Tebbetts became so adept at mastering Sukeforth’s moves behind the plate that he warmed up pitchers before the game. The Millionaires sent out a press release that stated, “Come and see the twelve-year-old catcher!”¹

At Nashua High School, Tebbetts developed into one of the top catching prospects in the nation while also starring as a football quarterback. The Detroit Tigers won his services when they promised Birdie’s widowed mother, Elizabeth Ryan Tebbetts, that he could finish college before he started his pro career. Graduating from Providence College in 1934 with a major in philos-

ophy, he reached the Majors in 1937. He enjoyed a fourteen-year career with the Tigers, Red Sox, and Indians and was selected four times to the American League All-Star team.

He finished his career with exactly one thousand hits and respectable statistics for a catcher: .270 batting average, .341 on-base percentage, .358 slugging average, 38 home runs, 459 runs batted in, 389 walks, and 261 strikeouts. He caught stealing 39 percent of base runners. In 1956 he was voted National League Manager of the Year after leading the Cincinnati Reds to a close third-place finish, the first time they had won over ninety games since their back-to-back pennants in 1939 and 1940. After managerial jobs in Milwaukee and Cleveland, a serious heart condition hastened the end to his Major League managerial career after 1966—he retired with a 781-744 record.

Tebbetts's involvement in baseball was far from over. Always eager to help young players improve their game, he managed the 1967 Marion (Virginia) Mets in the Appalachian League to a second-place finish, ten games above .500. "Being the best means starting at the very bottom," he explained.² He devoted the rest of his baseball life to evaluating talent for several organizations, including the Mets, Yankees, Indians, Orioles, and Atlanta Braves. Some sportswriters liked to call him a "super scout," but he wasn't interested in names or titles. If one insisted, he preferred the term *evaluator*. He believed that sizing up a young talent and *projecting* his future was baseball's most challenging and ultimately most rewarding job. He knew that in the best organizations, scouting and player development must be on the same page. Backbiting meant disaster. If scouts groused, "Why are you not developing the tools of my player?" and the player developers shot back, "What did you see in this guy in the first place?" a team could not possibly contend, let alone win a pennant and a championship.

Birdie Tebbetts relished thinking outside the box. When playing, he invented lighter catching gear, an idea that caught on among many of his contemporaries.³ He encouraged players to adopt nicknames to make them more approachable to fans. (His own "Birdie" came when an aunt thought her bright-eyed, red-haired little nephew's chirping cradle sounds reminded her of a bird.) He believed many players who were not stars might profit from being traded every four years so they would not become too set in their

ways. He suggested that front-office baseball people would also be wise to consider shifting jobs every decade. Although a local hero when he played for the 1947–50 Red Sox, he hastened his trade to Cleveland when he told a banquet audience that the team's disappointing 1950 season was because of undisciplined pitchers who behaved like "juvenile delinquents" and "moronic malcontents."⁴

Tebbetts occasionally mused about creating a Hall of Fame for the "Almost Great," and he may have been talking tongue-in-cheek. However, when he started in 1980 to serve on the Baseball Hall of Fame's Veterans Committee, he was very serious when he proposed that scouts become eligible for the Hall. He knew the objections. Scouts were used to serving behind-the-scenes and didn't like to draw attention to themselves. There were many levels of scouting—the area scout, the scouting supervisor, the signing scout, the associate scout—so it might be impossible to separate the scout that first spotted a player from the man that eventually signed him.

Tebbetts wasn't satisfied with the excuses. He insisted that scouts were essential to the well-being and sustained excellence of the game. "Scouts have given so much to baseball," he said. "There isn't anybody in baseball more closely connected to the game. Baseball can't function without the ballplayers, and scouts are the ones who go out and get them."⁵ They were willing to pay the price of nomadic travel and disrupted domestic life in their search for prime talent, in the game that was the hardest in sports because failure was a constant companion.

No transcripts are available of what was discussed in the Veterans Committee, but Birdie would occasionally mention to sportswriters some of the people who he felt were worthy of enshrinement. Hugh Alexander was one. Once a speedy outfielder from Oklahoma who regularly ran the hundred-yard dash in under ten seconds, he seemed destined for stardom with the Cleveland Indians until a horrible off-season accident in 1937 cost him his left hand when it was caught in a water pump on an oil rig. In an act of genuine paternalism, Cyril C. "Cy" Slapnicka, Cleveland's virtual one-man scouting staff, began to instruct the twenty-one-year-old in the elements of evaluation. Alexander quickly rewarded Cleveland by wooing pitcher Allie Reynolds away from basketball at Oklahoma A & M. After a few years

in Cleveland, Reynolds came into his own as a stalwart starter and reliever for the Yankees' 1949–53 dynasty. Alexander later signed outfielder Dale Mitchell, who played for the 1948 Indians World Series winners and the 1954 pennant winners. When working for the Los Angeles Dodgers, Alexander was instrumental in signing three-quarters of the Dodgers' three-time pennant-winning infield of the 1970s: Steve Garvey, Davey Lopes, and Bill Russell.⁶ Alexander also brought his rare evaluative skills to the Phillies and the Cubs.

Another scout whom Tebbetts suggested was Michigan native John Aloysius "Wish" Egan, who was 0-2 for the 1902 Tigers and compiled an 8-26 record with the Cardinals during the next two seasons. He developed into an outstanding scout for Detroit and was the boss of area scout Jean Dubuc, who won 72 of his 85 Major League victories for the Tigers. Dubuc was the scout who signed Birdie for the Tigers. Tebbetts understood that the first connections one makes in the insular and harshly competitive world of pro baseball were often the deepest. He learned that from Egan, who was instrumental in the acquisition of three future Hall of Famers: southpaw Hal Newhouser, whom he observed and tutored from the age of fifteen; pitcher and future United States senator Jim Bunning; and third baseman George Kell, who, on Egan's urging, came to Detroit in a trade with the Philadelphia Athletics. He also signed outfielder Hoot Evers, who later himself became a scout and player developer.⁷

Near the end of his decade of pleading the cause of scouts, Tebbetts gave a remarkable interview to *Boston Herald* writer Michael Globetti. "What a shame that you're not allowed to put in a guy who's been at his job fifty years, who's brought kids in from the mountains, from the jungle, from places nobody's ever heard of," he said. "They are way under publicized but to my way of thinking a scout has to mean more to the game of baseball than anyone else." He added a remarkable detail. "When I was coming up, there was a custom in the major leagues that the first time a player got to the World Series, he paid the way for the scout who signed him to see him play."⁸

Tebbetts never succeeded in getting the Hall of Fame's board of directors to approve his idea, and, in declining health, he left the committee by the end of the 1980s. Like most baseball insiders with a long career in the game,

Tebbetts was always careful about publicly voicing criticism of longtime colleagues, which could offend them. It wasn't until three years after his death in 1999 that portions of the diary Tebbetts kept throughout his career were published as *Birdie: Confessions of a Baseball Nomad*, edited and selected by his cousin James Morrison. The book contained many memorable observations. "While the games go on above ground, the earth is always trembling beneath," he wrote, a reference to the politics that inevitably permeated the baseball business.⁹

He was confident enough about his own evaluating abilities to write down Tebbetts's Golden Rules of Scouting:

You must first "remember who told you" about a certain player.

You must "be open to a change of mind. Ballplayers can improve or decline suddenly and remarkably."

"Your evaluation of a player must be a tightly held secret and is solely owned by your employer."

"Seldom confirm, never deny, always distinguish."¹⁰

The names of two scouts *always* came up when Tebbetts discussed enshrinement in Cooperstown: Charley Barrett of the St. Louis Cardinals and Paul Krichell of the New York Yankees. Barrett was Branch Rickey's first and most beloved scout who was tirelessly on the road searching for raw talent when the Cardinals made a success of the farm system after World War I. Although Tebbetts spent his Major League playing time in the American League and National Leaguer Barrett died in 1939 as Birdie's career was just beginning, Birdie knew that the Rickey-Barrett method of finding strong arms and swift feet, and developing the other tools by instruction, was a major breakthrough. "Baseball is exactly what Branch Rickey said it was: a race between a man and a ball," as Tebbetts quoted the baseball mastermind.¹¹

Tebbetts also argued that no Hall of Fame would be complete without the inclusion of Paul Krichell. From 1921 up to his death in 1957, Krichell's judgment on talent was a major factor in the Yankees winning an astonishing twenty-two pennants and seventeen World Series.

Tebbetts also treasured special personal memories of Krichell, "the first scout who ever showed up [at] my door. . . . Me, a high-school senior in

Nashua, N.H.," he remembered to Michael Globetti. "Can you imagine how unbelievable that must have been? Let me tell you, it was something."¹²

Birdie Tebbetts never tired of saluting "the great fraternity [of] free agent scouts, who get on the road and grind it out, who go from sandlot to sandlot."¹³ In part one of this journey with baseball's diamond detectives, I return to the early twentieth century and a chance meeting on a dusty baseball diamond that will change the course of baseball history.

PART 1

THE CARDINALS-YANKEES RIVALRY
THAT DOMINATES BASEBALL, 1919-1964

1

Charley Barrett and the Rise of Branch Rickey's Farm System

One afternoon during the 1904 baseball season, two opponents playing in the low Minors Class C South Texas League met for the first time on a baseball field in Dallas. There might have been a ten-year difference in age between Houston's veteran outfielder Charley Barrett and twenty-two-year-old Dallas rookie catcher Branch Rickey, but both men quickly realized they shared similar views and passions about the game of baseball. They loved speedy players with strong arms, and each was somewhat gifted in those areas. Barrett once stole fifty bases in a Minor League season, and Rickey was fast for a catcher. They shared one grave liability—neither could hit very well. Rickey would go on to enjoy a brief Major League career in parts of three seasons, hitting .239 and slugging .327 in 119 career games for the St. Louis Browns and New York Highlanders (soon called the Yankees). Barrett never rose out of the lower Minors in seven seasons, his batting average never reaching even .200.¹

They came from different backgrounds. Wesley Branch Rickey was born on December 20, 1881, in rural Scioto County in southern Ohio near Portsmouth. The middle of three brothers, he was raised on a farm in a family that had limited economic means and that took the Methodist religion seriously. By the time he graduated from Ohio Wesleyan University, Rickey loved all kinds of athletics, but he envisioned an ultimate career in law. Thanks to thorough research by Jim Sandoval, baseball enthusiasts have learned that Charles Francis Barrett was born on June 14, 1871, in St. Louis, Missouri, one of at least nine children. His father, a Catholic emigrant from Canada, did not earn much money as a fireman, and Charley dropped out of school at

the age fourteen to help his family. One of his jobs was as a night clerk for a messenger service that enabled him to play baseball in the daytime. In 1901, at the late age of thirty, he first entered the Minor Leagues.²

Branch Rickey loved Charlie Barrett's succinct description of the essence of the game: "to get on base and get home as fast as possible." They shared a genuine commitment to bringing talented players into the game regardless of their economic standing. The chance to work together building a team did not happen immediately. Barrett retired from professional playing in 1907, the same season that Rickey, catching for the Highlanders against the visiting Washington Senators, entered the record books by allowing thirteen stolen bases—it remains an embarrassing Major League record. Highlanders pitchers were not very good at holding runners on first base, but Rickey was also suffering from a sore arm that he aggravated while demonstrating throwing techniques while coaching the Ohio Wesleyan baseball team. A two-week visit to the spas in Hot Springs, Arkansas, a rejuvenating center that will reappear in this story, did not restore the snap to his throws.³

Before the term was invented, Branch Rickey was a multitasker. In addition to coaching football, basketball, and baseball at Ohio Wesleyan, he was taking night school law classes at Ohio State in Columbus. The fervent Methodist teetotaler even found time in 1908 to campaign for local Ohio Prohibition candidates and victorious Republican presidential candidate William Howard Taft. Early in 1909 Rickey's multitasking came to a crashing halt when he was diagnosed with tuberculosis. He needed several months of recuperation at the Trudeau Sanatorium in Saranac Lake, New York. When he was released, his doctor pleaded with him to slow down his working pace. Fat chance of that—in the fall of 1909, Rickey entered the University of Michigan law school. Because baseball remained inexorably in his blood, he applied for and won the job as Michigan baseball coach.

Meanwhile, back in St. Louis, Charley Barrett's pro playing career was over, but he remained a vital presence on the local amateur and semipro scene. He continued to play and coach in local games, keeping tabs on prospective talent, especially in the trolley leagues that attracted players from all over the St. Louis metropolitan area and parts of southern Illinois. He also found a new job as a salesman in a sporting goods store in downtown St. Louis.

One day early in 1909 Barrett walked into the office of St. Louis Browns owner Robert Hedges, trying to interest him in opening an auxiliary ticket office at the store. Barrett thought the timing was right. The Browns were coming off their first-ever winning season in 1908, finishing in fourth place, only seven games behind the pennant-winning Boston Red Sox, while setting an attendance record of over 650,000 fans.

Barrett felt that Hedges would be open to his new marketing idea, especially because Hedges was one of the first owners to add a double deck to his ballpark, a big factor in the record-setting attendance. He pioneered in the creation of Ladies' Day, when women were admitted at a discount if accompanied by a man. He refused to sell alcohol at the ballpark and hired security guards to cut down on fan rowdiness, which helped to keep fans coming back. As Mike Mitchell writes in his thorough *Mr. Rickey's Redbirds*, Hedges was "a baseball visionary, [who] instituted profit-sharing, took out life insurance policies for his players, and experimented with a massive circus-like tent to protect the field during rainstorms."⁴

Hedges listened respectfully to Barrett's proposal, but the idea did not interest him. However, he was impressed by Barrett's enthusiasm and knowledge of the local baseball scene. Hedges's eyes lit up when Barrett told him that in the upcoming season shortstop Art Fletcher from the Southern Illinois mine town of Collinsville should make the Majors with manager John McGraw's New York Giants. (Indeed, Fletcher did, lasting for twelve seasons and capping his career as a Yankees coach from 1929 through 1945.) Hedges listened as Barrett gave him scouting reports on promising, unsigned talent. By the end of the meeting, Charley Barrett was rewarded with something far more important than a ticket office in the sporting goods store. He was now a paid scout for the St. Louis Browns.⁵

In going to work for Robert Hedges, Charley Barrett was joining forces with a man whose career as an owner dated back to 1901. Ban Johnson, the organizer of the new American League, encouraged Hedges to buy the bankrupt Milwaukee franchise and move it to St. Louis. Hedges was a natural choice for the position, a native of rural Missouri and a self-made man who made his fortune in carriage manufacturing. He was wise enough at the dawn of the automobile age to sell his horse-and-buggy company for a good profit.

With the security from a new position as a J. P. Morgan banking associate, Hedges entered baseball as a savvy businessman willing to spend money to make money.⁶

Despite the good 1908 season at the gate, the Browns were still looking up at the Boston Red Sox, Cleveland, and Detroit in the standings. Purchases of excellent defensive shortstop Bobby Wallace and starting pitchers Harry Howell and eccentric but talented southpaw George “Rube” Waddell had not put the Browns over the top—far from it. They fell to seventh in 1909, twenty-eight games under .500 and thirty-five games behind the pennant-winning Detroit Tigers. Starting in 1910 through 1914, the Browns would follow their pre-1908 pattern, regularly competing with the Washington Senators for the worst record in the American League. Washington fans moaned, “First in war, first in peace, and last in the American League,” and equally disgruntled St. Louis fans sighed, “First in booze, first in shoes, and last in the American League.” Yet Robert Hedges remained confident that building slowly within was the proper method. “It is simply up to the club owners to purchase the raw material, place it properly and pluck it when the proper time comes,” he told the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*.⁷

Hiring Charley Barrett was a first step in that process, and the emerging baseball lifer embarked indefatigably on his new job, realizing that the search for future Major League talent was painstaking and characterized more by failure than success. Meanwhile, Robert Hedges had not forgotten the intense if light-hitting catcher who had played for the 1906 Browns, Branch Rickey; he wanted to bring him on board as his top baseball assistant. They had much in common as teetotalers and hard workers determined to succeed. As coach at the University of Michigan, Rickey brought the innovations of sliding pits, batting cages, and pitching strings. The latter was an ingenious device consisting of two poles with cords attached horizontally and vertically to help hurlers achieve better control.⁸

Rickey’s mesmerizing chalk talks to Wolverine players were garnering attention throughout the baseball world. Many of the Detroit Tigers on off-days journeyed the short distance to the Michigan campus in Ann Arbor to listen to his lectures. When Rickey wasn’t coaching and studying law, he made time to see amateur games throughout the state of Michigan and adja-

cent areas, gladly sending tips to Hedges. His ubiquitous presence prompted one sportswriter to dub Rickey the “Mysterious Stranger.” While watching games all over the Midwest, the Mysterious Stranger must have bumped into Charley Barrett on his prowl for talent for the Browns. Barrett soon became known as the “King of Weeds,” finding diamonds in the rough in the deepest bushes.⁹

Hedges discovered that bringing Branch Rickey into the Browns’ fold was not as easy as hiring Charley Barrett. Rickey turned down Hedges’s offer to become business manager of a Kansas City Minor League franchise that he was planning to buy. Rickey was glad to provide scouting reports, but after graduating from Michigan in the spring of 1912 with a law degree and three successful seasons as Wolverines coach under his belt, he headed to Boise, Idaho. He planned to start his law career with two Delta Tau Delta college fraternity brothers, and the mountain climate certainly looked more conducive to lasting health for a tuberculosis survivor. Rickey and his partners, however, rounded up very few clients.

In September 1912 Hedges finally made an offer that Rickey could not refuse. For a \$7,500 salary (\$226,000 in 2022 money)—far more than his virtually bankrupt law partnership was producing—Hedges offered him a job as executive assistant in charge of all baseball activities (the term *general manager* would not be used for another decade). Rickey could still finish a final year of coaching Michigan baseball in 1913 and report to the Browns when the season was over.

Rickey was thrilled with his new situation, not least that finally he would be working closely with Charley Barrett. At the Minor League Rule 5 Draft meetings in late 1912—in which veteran Minor League players not controlled by Major League teams were available—the Rickey-Barrett combination selected thirty players. Ten of them ultimately made the Major Leagues, notably pitcher William Henry “Bill” James, who would go 15-14 with a 2.85 ERA for the 1914 Browns.

When Rickey arrived in St. Louis in the late spring of 1913 with his wife and first child, he realized that a lot of work was needed to get the organization out of its chronic second-division status. He did not expect that near the end of the season he would also be named field manager because

the incumbent, hot-tempered George “Firebrand” Stovall, had worn out his welcome. He recently had been suspended for a week for spitting tobacco juice on an umpire and was suspected of secretly recruiting players for the Federal League, the deeply pocketed third-league challenge to the National and American Leagues. Hedges convinced Rickey to add the managerial job to his player acquisition and development duties.

Under Rickey’s dual leadership on and off the field, the Browns showed improvement in the standings in 1914, rising to fifth place but still eleven games under .500 and twenty-eight and a half games behind Connie Mack’s pennant-winning Philadelphia Athletics. One of the players on the team was fleet outfielder Burt Shotton from rural Brownhelm, Ohio, outside Cleveland, who started his pro career in 1908, a year before Charley Barrett joined the Browns. Nicknamed “Barney,” presumably because his speed reminded people of automobile racer Barney Oldfield, Shotton always sang the praises of Rickey’s leadership and his willingness to appeal to a player’s brain as well as his brawn.¹⁰ Shotton became a lifelong Rickey man, one of his Sunday managers when he took the Sabbath off as a day of rest and his Brooklyn Dodgers manager when Leo Durocher was suspended for the entire 1947 season. Shotton led Brooklyn to pennants in 1947 and 1949, although he lost both World Series to the Yankees.

Rickey’s second full season as Browns manager in 1915 was far less successful, as the team fell down to sixth place, twenty-eight games under .500 and thirty-nine and a half games behind the Boston Red Sox in Babe Ruth’s first full season as pitcher-outfielder. One momentous acquisition happened for the 1915 Browns when future Hall of Fame first baseman George Sisler arrived after his graduation from the University of Michigan, where he starred as both hitter and pitcher. Sisler’s arrival with the Browns was extremely controversial because Pittsburgh Pirates owner Barney Dreyfuss insisted Sisler was his property due to a contract Sisler signed while still in high school in Akron, Ohio. A powerful group of lawyers at Branch Rickey’s behest argued that Sisler was not of age when he signed the contract. When baseball’s ruling triumvirate, the National Commission (consisting of the two league presidents and Cincinnati Reds owner Garry Herrmann), ruled in favor of the Browns, Dreyfuss was immensely bitter. His discontent with baseball’s ruling structure