

**“There comes a time in every man’s life,
and I’ve had plenty of them.”**

— Casey Stengel

KEY CHAPTERS IN CASEY’S LIFE

AT BAT, IN THE FIELD, THE DUGOUT, THE NATION’S HEART

1910-12: Born in 1890 in Kansas City, Missouri, Charles Dillon Stengel, nicknamed “Dutch,” excels in sports. His father is a successful insurance salesman and his son has a happy childhood, playing sandlot baseball and leading Central High School’s baseball team to the state championship.

To save money for dental school, Stengel plays minor-league baseball in 1910 and 1911 as a left-handed throwing and batting outfielder, first with the Kansas City Blues of the American Association. At 5-foot-11 and 175 pounds, he is fast if not physically overpowering. A popular baseball poem at the time is “Casey At the Bat,” that, plus the initials of his hometown, eventually garner him a new moniker.

Casey finds his courses at Western Dental College in Kansas City problematic with the dearth of left-handed instruments. The Brooklyn Robins (later the Dodgers) show him a different career path, drafting him and sending him to the Montgomery, Alabama, a club in the Southern Association. He develops a reputation for eccentricity. In the outfield one game, he hides in a shallow hole covered by a lid, and suddenly pops out in time to catch a fly ball. A decent batter and talented base stealer, Casey is called up by Brooklyn late in the season. In his first game, he smacks four singles and steals two bases.

1918: In six seasons with the Dodgers, Casey proves a competent, if unspectacular player. He is traded to the Pittsburgh Pirates in 1918. The U.S. enters World War I and he enlists in the U.S. Navy, where he spends the remainder of the war running the Brooklyn Navy Yard’s baseball team.

The following season, Brooklyn fans taunt the former Dodger mercilessly in a game after Casey whiffs twice and fails to run down a long fly ball that drives in three runs. On his way to the dugout after the sixth inning, Casey spies a teammate holding a stunned sparrow in the bullpen. Casey gently tucks the bird under his cap. When he comes to bat in the top of the seventh, he tips his cap to the booing crowd ... and the recovered bird flies out. Jeers turn to cheers, and even the plate umpire laughs. (They realized Casey has subtly “flipped the bird” at his detractors.)

1923: Having been traded to the Philadelphia Phillies, Casey catches a break when the top-flight New York Giants pick him up in 1921. The great manager, John McGraw, recognizes Casey’s fine baseball mind and keeps him close by on the bench, mentoring him in the finer points of diamond strategy. The two often sit up all night long at McGraw’s home, discussing the strategy and tactics of the inner game.

The Giants win the World Series in 1921 and 1922. The sport is more of a national craze than ever, thanks to the popularization of radio, which brings play-by-play broadcasts into living rooms and workplaces across the country.

In 1923, Casey smacks the first World Series home run in Yankee Stadium. The inside-the-park clout in Game 1 brings Casey sliding into the plate to the cheers of Manhattanites and dismay of the Bronx faithful in their brand-new “House that Ruth Built.” Casey’s bag-rounder breaks a 4-4 tie and gives the defending champions a 5-4 victory over their borough rivals. Two games later, he hits another game-winning dinger, but The Babe and company take the subway series in the sixth game and establish their perch atop the baseball world.

Little could anyone know at the time, but Casey will end up a key part of Yankee history — managing them to 10 American League pennants and seven World Series victories (including a record five in a row) in a historic 12-year stretch that will begin 26 years hence.



The Giants trade Casey in the off-season to the lowly Boston Bees, despite his Series heroics. He says years later: "It's lucky I didn't hit three home runs in three games, or McGraw would have traded me to the Three-I League."

1925: Casey's playing career is over after 14 seasons, cut short due to chronic injuries. The previous year he married Edna Lawson, giving her his 1921 World Series championship medal (and keeping his 1922 ring for himself). Teammates Irish and Bob Meusel's wives had brought Edna to a 1923 baseball game hoping to introduce them. Casey "spotted" Edna during the game. When Casey was pulled for a defensive replacement, he showered quickly, and went into the box seat section reserved for the players' wives for a proper introduction. The East/West Coast romance resulted in marriage and a honeymoon trip to England to play an exhibition game in front of the King in 1924. While Casey was no longer with the Giants, McGraw still wanted his World Series star on that trip.

Casey turns to managing — taking a three-title job with the Worcester, Massachusetts, Panthers of the lowly Eastern League. Casey is president-player-manager. He befriends George Weiss, the 24-year-old, cocky owner of the New Haven Profs in the Eastern League.

After the season, Casey is offered a job with the Toledo, Ohio, Mud Hens of the American Association, a stronger minor league. To free himself to take the job, he releases himself as Worcester's outfielder, fires himself as manager, and resigns as president. In this way, the Mud Hens don't have to pay the Panthers compensation for Casey leaving.

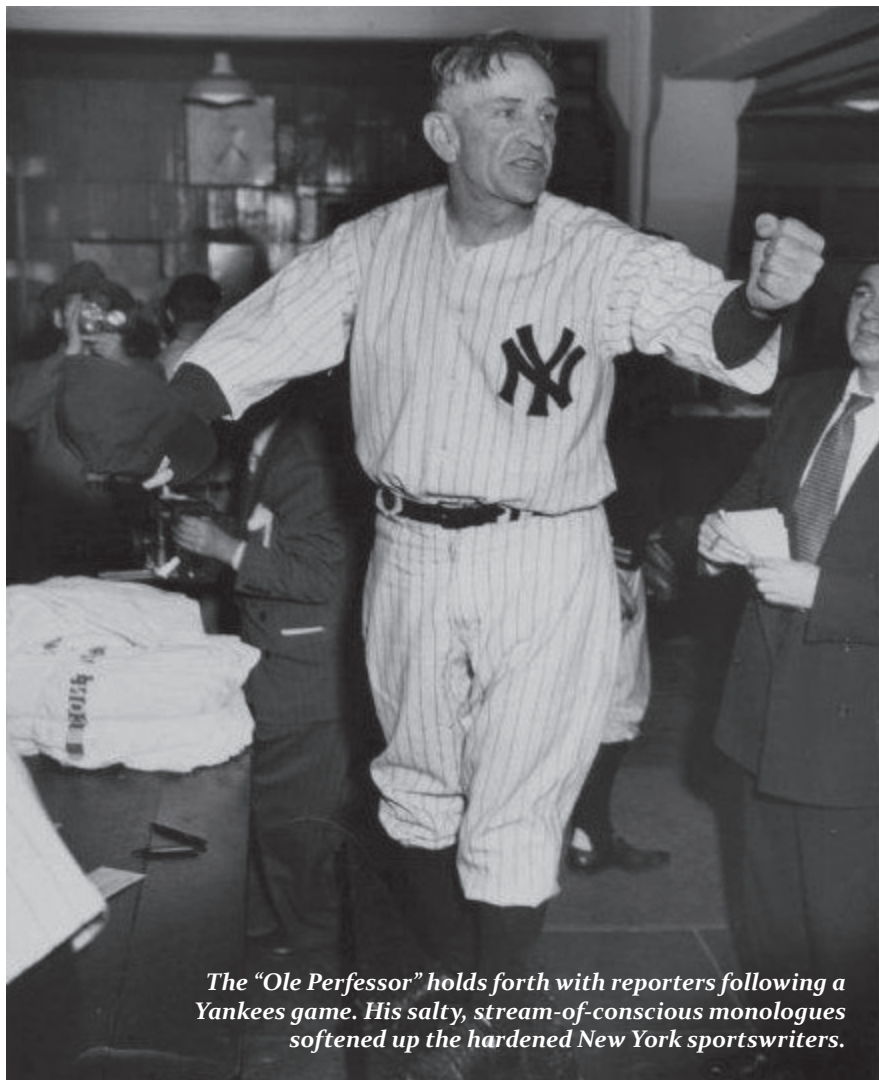
Casey leads the Mud Hens to their league's pennant in 1927. The franchise later folds.

1934: Casey has taken a coaching job with the Brooklyn Dodgers in 1932. Two years later, he's promoted to manager. An aggressive skipper, he often argues for a night game to be called because of darkness (when his team is ahead, of course). One time when an umpire refuses, Stengel uses a flashlight to signal to his bullpen for a relief pitcher. The ump tosses him from the game.

A true entertainer, Casey uses daffy ploys to charm reporters and entertain fans who'd otherwise decry the Dodgers' inept performances. He protests continuing a rain-soaked game by coaching in the third-base box beneath an umbrella. He stages races between his players and bets on the outcomes with newsmen.

Casey's Dodgers suffer losing seasons three years running. His next managerial stint lasts six years with the Boston Braves (formerly the Bees). Again, his squads compile dismal win-loss marks, in part because of a lack of on-field talent. But failure is teaching Casey valuable lessons for eventual success. He views every loss as an opportunity to learn something more. One day, his leg is badly broken from being hit by a cab in Boston, leaving him badly crippled. He'll be damned if he'll limp onto the sacred diamond. He spends exhausting hours rehabilitating his leg, walking backward up and down hills. But his managerial career is doomed in Boston.

1944: Casey is hired as manager of the Milwaukee Brewers of the American Association — over the objections of the club's owner, Bill Veeck, who can't stop the move since he is serving with the Marines in the South Pacific. Casey, finally blessed with good players, leads the Brewers to the league crown. His career as a bench general is on the upswing . . . until a blowup with Veeck lands him jobless again.



At this point an old friend, George Weiss, is an executive busy developing the Yankees' farm system. He gives Casey the reins of the Yankees' minor-league affiliate Kansas City Blues for the 1945 season. Then Casey looks west, to opportunities to be had in sunny, growing California. He promises the owners of the Oakland Oaks of the AAA-level Pacific Coast League that he will bring them a championship within three years. He works indefatigably for this goal, showing up in his office early on mornings after late-night games, preparing lineups, poring over rosters. This is still several decades before the advent of personal computers, but Casey's mind stores vast pieces of information about players and teams. Yankees co-owner, Del Webb, happens by the Oaks ballpark on a Saturday morning and witnesses Casey working on drills with kids from the neighborhood, out of his sheer love of baseball. This deeply impresses Webb with Casey's utter commitment to the game.

1948: The Oaks win a phenomenal 114 games and the league title. Casey now is the toast of baseball fans up and down the West Coast, including in Hollywood. He drives a Cadillac convertible given him by the city of Oakland in gratitude for leading the Oaks to the title. It feels like a career pinnacle. His wife urges him to retire. He's 58.

1949-60: The Yankees brass sees Casey as a prime candidate to take over in the greatest of baseball towns: New York. By this time his old pal, George Weiss, is the Yanks' general manager. Casey tells Edna he just has to accept the Yanks' offer. Baseball writers scoff at the hiring, still viewing Casey as a once-clowning ball player who'd gone on to become a mediocre manager at the major-league level. But Casey inherits a team with top talent, observing: "There is less wrong with this team than any team I have ever managed."

His first season in pinstripes, his squad suffers a series of injuries, yet Casey craftily skips them to the American League pennant on the final day of the season, and then to World Series triumph over the cross-town Dodgers. His Yanks go on to win the Series each of the next four seasons (a record streak). In all, the Bronx Bombers capture seven World Series and 10 American League pennants in a 12-year span. Casey's slick tactics — including platooning right-handed and left-handed batters, pinch-hitting early for pitchers when an advantage opens up, putting good batters in early and pulling them for good fielders late — build him a reputation as one of the smartest managers ever. An innovative motivator, he'll ride stars when they are doing well and praise players when they are slumping. He also doesn't shy from confronting old guarders such as Joe DiMaggio.

Casey keeps an eagle eye on his players off the field. He maintains a nightly perch at the hotel bar when the team is on the road. Two of his famous quotes about carousing players are: "Being with a woman all night never hurt no professional baseball player. It's staying up all night looking for a woman that does him in"; and, "We are in such a slump that even the ones that aren't drinkin' aren't hittin'." Well aware of his strained relations with DiMaggio and other players, he quips: "The secret of managing is to keep the guys who hate you away from the guys who are undecided."

Casey's salty, stream-of-consciousness monologues and witticisms about baseball history and strategy have the callous New York press corps eating out of his hand. They call him "The Ole Perfessor," and dub his rambling, if informative, speech "Stengelese." He refers to them as "my writers." He becomes as famous as his superstars such as Mickey Mantle and Yogi Berra. His hawk-nosed face appears on many national magazine covers.

Casey's zany streak still surfaces. In 1960, Comiskey Park in Chicago debuts, featuring an "exploding scoreboard" that shoots off fireworks whenever a White Sox player homers. During the Yankees' second series in Comiskey, the Yankees ignite and wave sparklers in their dugout after Clete Boyer homers for them.

1957: Casey and a group of business leaders in Glendale, California, organize a new bank, and Casey is named Vice-President of Glendale National Bank.

1960: The underdog Pittsburgh Pirates beat the Yankees in seven games in the World Series, and the defiance of younger Yankees against their 70-year-old manager is evident in attitudes and comments. Critics point at several questionable managerial moves, including Casey having held out pitching ace Whitey Ford until Game Three (the statistics- and intuition-guided Casey made his decision because Ford was dominant at home); and his early-inning pulling of young, light-hitting third basemen Clete Boyer for a pinch hitter.

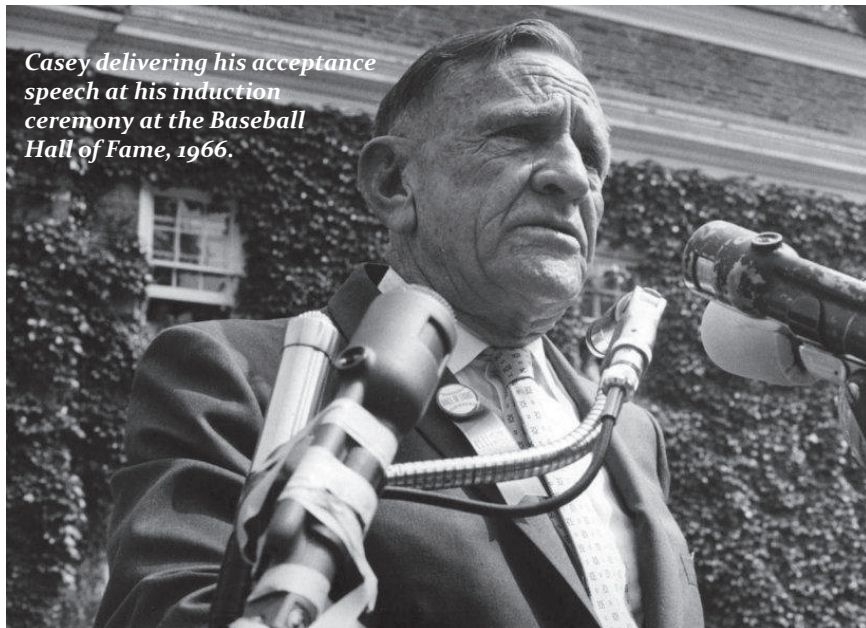
Ironically, similar cagey maneuvers had helped the Yanks win numerous games they otherwise might have lost during their dozen-year run of dominance. Pitcher Don Larsen later said: "I don't think anybody could have managed our club like Casey did. He made what some people call stupid moves, but about eight or nine out of 10 of them worked."

1962: The New York Mets are a National League expansion team debuting in 1962, sporting the orange colors of the Giants (who'd departed for San Francisco) and the blue of the Dodgers (who'd left for Los Angeles). Their roster is filled with mediocrities



and aged veterans left unprotected by their teams in the expansion draft. The Mets ownership talk Casey out of retirement to do what he could with the thin talent. His charisma and buoyant promotion of the lovable-loser Mets fill the stands and bring great revenue to the team, despite their horrible fortunes on the field (losing 120 games their inaugural season).

After each home game, Casey returns to his apartment at the Essex House hotel on Central Park South, then heads out the front entrance for a walk of several blocks — continually stopped by fans and autograph-seekers, schmoozing with them, recognizing that such public relations is a key part of his job. But it's not like he isn't trying hard to win ball games. Back home, he fills legal-size papers with hitting, pitching and fielding statistics, poring through them, plotting how to beat an opponent.



Casey delivering his acceptance speech at his induction ceremony at the Baseball Hall of Fame, 1966.

Casey skips the Mets for four years. They finish last each year, but Casey keeps the show lively. He tells the press: "I've been in this game a hundred years, but I see new ways to lose I never knew existed before." Referring to two of his rookies in 1965, he remarks: "See that fellow over there? He's 20 years old. In 10 years he has a chance to be a star. Now, that fellow over there, he's 20, too. In 10 years he has a chance to be 30."

Pitching great Warren Spahn, finishing his career with the "Amazin' Mets," had also played for Casey when he managed the Boston Braves, before his rise in stature as a manager. Spahn quips: "I'm probably the only guy who worked for Stengel before and after he was a genius."

Casey retires in August 1965, before the season is over, a month after breaking his hip while stepping out of a car. He will never suffer the indignity to himself, or the game he loves, by limping onto the sacred diamond. He continues as vice president of West Coast operations with the Mets, scouting and being visible as a part of the game's scene. The Mets retire his uniform's No. 37.

1966: Although the rules of the National Baseball Hall of Fame require that no one can be inducted until he has been retired for at least five years, or is deceased, the Veterans Committee, using what becomes known as "The Casey Stengel Rule," elect him to the hall only a year after his retirement as manager, citing his advanced age (76). Sport Magazine names Casey "Man of 20 Years 1946-1966."

1969: The "Miracle Mets" — a mere seven years after their inaugural season — take the World Series. Players vote to give a championship ring to Casey, the team's first manager.

1970: The New York Yankees retire Casey's No. 37.

1975: Casey's wife, Edna, is diagnosed with Alzheimer's Disease. Casey, heartbroken, walks two-and-a-half miles each way from his house to her nursing home to visit her. He succumbs to cancer on Sept. 29. Ever the patriot, he stood beside his hospital bed for the last national anthem he'd heard before his death. His wife passes away three years later, and is buried beside him in Glendale.

Casey left a large estate. Just as his shrewd managing made his baseball teams winners, his clever investing in oil and banking interests made him a millionaire.

1976: The Yankees dedicate a plaque in their stadium's Monument Park to Casey's memory. The plaque reads: "Brightened baseball for over 50 years; with spirit of eternal youth; Yankee manager 1949-1960 winning 10 pennants and 7 world championships including a record 5 consecutive, 1949-1953."

2009: An awards segment on the MLB Network names Casey "The Greatest Character of the Game." 🏆

