

The Cronin Papers (Part III)

Written by Maury Brown
Thursday, 31 August 2006 05:31

The Cronin Papers (Part III) -

Hornsby's Gambling, Landis, and the St. Louis Cardinals

*The Cronin Papers are a collection of personal documents of Joe Cronin's graciously donated by his grandson, Chris Hayward. **Clicking on any of the thumbnail images within any of the series will display a high resolution version.***

Past installments have been:

- Part 1: [The Mays/Chapman Incident](#)
- Part 2: [Branch Rickey, Expansion Cities Call, Piersall, and President Kennedy](#)

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[In Part II of the Cronin Papers](#) , it was the end of the '50s and moving into the '60's...

Today, we start in December of 1932, Kenesaw "Mountain" Landis is commissioner, and it's but a few scant years after the Black Sox scandal.

A 36 year-old Rogers Hornsby is entering his 18th season as a player and manager in Major League Baseball. He's also turned into someone that loves to bet on the horses.

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As early as 1928, Hornsby had been in trouble in baseball due to gambling. That year, Charlie Stoneham announces that, "in the best interest of the team" he is trading Hornsby to the Braves. Stoneham had not liked Hornsby's style as a player/manager and thought that he was welching on bets. At the time, Hornsby had been sued by a gambler in December of the year prior in a civil case, but Hornsby had been found not liable.

On November 7, 1928 the Cubs acquire Hornsby from the Braves for \$200,000. He will play for the Cubs till 1932.

After two years of heel and ankle injuries that limit him to 42 games in 1930, 100 games in 1931, and 19 games in '32, on August 2, 1932, Hornsby is fired as manager of the Chicago Cubs. They will go on to win the NL Pennant, losing to the Yankees in 4 straight games -- in the '32 World Series.

On August 13, 1932, Commissioner Landis charges Hornsby of fraudulently "borrowing" money from Cubs players. Papers in Chicago claim that Hornsby had obtained money from players, either loaned to him to bet on horse races, or to share in joint ventures. When Hornsby is fined, the players want refunds. Hornsby wants a lump sum payoff by the Cubs, who refuse. Landis holds several hearings, and as he doesn't punish anyone, it is taken as exoneration.

On September 22, the day after the Cubs clinch the NL Pennant, the Cubs announce the World Series shares, and snub Hornsby. Hornsby appeals to Judge Landis, arguing that he was an active player for two-thirds of the season, and deserved a full share. Landis turns him down.

On October 14, Landis rejects Hornsby's appeal for a share of the Cubs' World Series money.

Which leads us up to the following documents.

Hornsby has been out of work since the Cubs fired him. Now, the St. Louis Cardinals are showing an interest in Hornsby, if only for one year. As this contract is only for one year, it falls within the infamous Rule 3(a) which states that no club will make a contract containing a

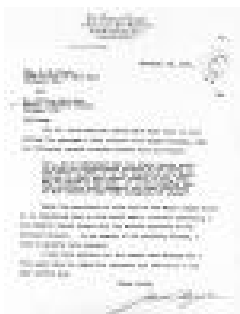
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non-reserve clause without written approval from what was then called the Advisory Council within MLB.

That Council was comprised of American League President William Harridge, National League President John Heydler, and Commissioner Landis.

The following letter outlines the one-year non-reserve contract for Hornsby dated November 28, 1932 from John Heydler, and his approval of the contract.



The following day, Landis digs further into Hornsby over gambling in a letter back to Heydler.

He refuses to vote in favor of the contract unless he gets a statement "from this player setting forth his activities, if any, during the years 1931-1932, in connection with race-track betting. I desire this statement, to include precisely what activities, if any, were, and whether or not, as a result or growing out of such activities, the player is now in anybody's debt, and, if so, to whom and how much."



Landis writes Heydler regarding the fact that Hornsby has refused to meet and address the concerns that Landis has over gambling, stating, "Mr. Hornsby declined to answer respecting the subject of that investigation.

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Needless to say, Sam Breadon of the Cardinals is not pleased. A portion of a letter to Landis is quoted within this correspondence, part of which reads, "i do not see why he should ask Hornsby regarding his gambling unless the same question and statement is required from every official and player connected with baseball."

Landis still refuses to vote on the contract until Hornsby addresses whether he has any gambling debt.



At this point, Hornsby gives in and talks to Landis. What was said in conversation between Hornsby and Landis is unknown, but whatever the contents of that conversation was, Landis was satisfied.

The following letter, which appears to be dated December 28, 1932, clears Hornsby in the eyes of Landis. As the commissioner states, "the player called on me today, and, after my interview with him, I have to advise you that the contract referred to above may be approved."



A letter dated the same day by AL President Harridge approves the contract

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Landis passes the news of Harridge's vote to National League President John Heydler

~~Chicago Daily News, August 24, 1906. Harridge's vote to National League President John Heydler.~~