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SEÑOR: THE MANAGERIAL CAREER OF AL LOPEZ

By WES SINGLETARY



Al Lopez Monument - Al Lopez Park, Tampa, Fla.

In his autobiography, *Veeck-As in Wreck*, Bill Veeck declared, "If Al Lopez has a weakness as a manager, and I said if, it is that he is too decent ... Al was completely relaxed. In that cool, calm way of his he squeezed every possible drop of talent out of his team"¹

This quote in many ways sums up the managerial career of Al Lopez. While known throughout baseball as a living refutation of Leo Durocher's axiom, "Nice

guys finish last,"² Lopez would none the less scratch and claw for every strategic advantage and in the end usually found a way to win.

Lopez had exemplified these attributes since childhood and had evidenced them throughout his tenure as a player. In a playing career that spanned eighteen years in the National League and one in the American, Lopez was nothing if not competitive and hungry for victory. Durability and respect typified his career as he established the record for most games caught in a career at 1,918, a record which held up for many years. Yet in spite of his own desire, he was on a first division club only nine times with most of those teams finishing no better than fourth. The 1944 Pittsburgh Pirates gave him his highest finish placing second that year. It was also the Pirate organization that gave him his first opportunity to manage at the professional level by naming him skipper of their American Association affiliate in Indianapolis. Passion for the game, desire, heart, a demand for respect... these are qualities that Al Lopez initially brought with him to Indianapolis for the start of the 1948 season.

Al spent three highly successful years at Indianapolis, winning the American Association pennant in his maiden season, 1948, and following it with two second place finishes in 1949 and 1950.³ While at Indianapolis, Lopez, for a short time, acquired the services of his long-time teammate, roommate and friend Tony Cuccinello, as a coach. According to Lopez,

Cuccinello had always been "the type of player you could win a pennant with ... Tony was a good ballplayer. He was a pretty good hitter; Fine on double plays. Didn't have a great arm or great speed. If he had great speed he would have been a Hall of Famer."⁴ These were qualities which Al hoped Cuccinello could pass along to the players as coach.

Upon receiving the managing Job in Indianapolis, Lopez explained to the owner of the team that he would need a coach for those occasions in which he might be thrown out of a ballgame or when he may have to step in and catch a game himself. Lopez recalls,

"I wanted a coach because I was going to have to catch some, I caught about 50 games at Indianapolis. Then the Cincinnati Club comes over and asks me if they can have permission to talk with Tony about going back up to the big leagues as a player and I said that if he can go back to the big leagues, I wouldn't stand in his way. So he went to Cincinnati."⁵

Cuccinello later returned to assist Lopez after the latter began managing at Cleveland and subsequently began a long relation as Al's right hand man.

In November, 1949, Bill Veeck and his partners sold the Cleveland Indians to a syndicate of local businessmen headed by an insurance executive named Ellis Ryan. Hank Greenberg, the former Detroit Tiger slugger who had most recently been the farm director for Cleveland (and in such capacity had developed an instructional baseball facility in Marianna, Florida), was installed as the General Manager. Having no great regard for the leadership qualities of then manager, Lou Boudreau, Greenberg wanted someone as manager that "he could work

with".⁶ Al Lopez was that someone and following the 1950 season, Greenberg hired him to take over in Cleveland.

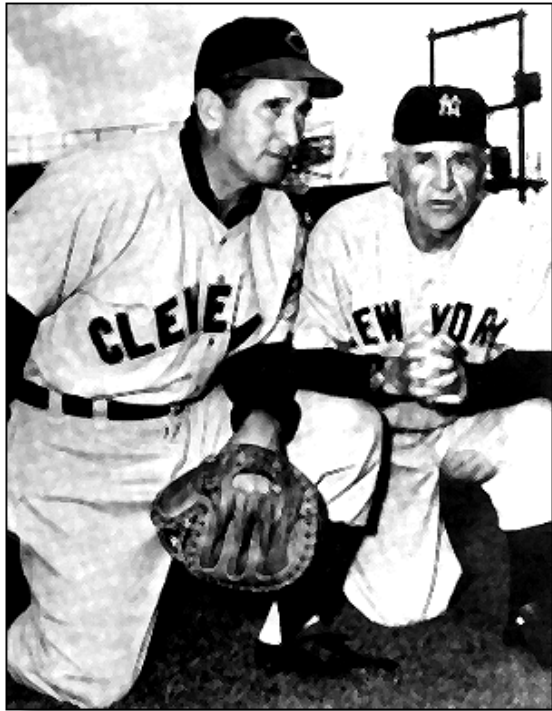
Greenberg remembers believing that the decision to replace Boudreau with Lopez would be unpopular because of the length of time Boudreau had spent in Cleveland and the player-manager's overwhelming popularity. Also, the press had already been reporting that Boudreau was going to be re-signed for another season and Greenberg felt that they may feel slighted when their sources proved incorrect.⁷

On the night of the signing, Greenberg secretly flew Lopez into Cleveland and took him to the "Wigwam", Cleveland Stadium's dining room for the press and employees of the club. In his autobiography Greenberg recalled that,

"Reporters had come from the surrounding cities and were gathered around conversing when out walked At Lopez from the men's room into the huge dining room. I said, 'Gentlemen, here's your next manager of the Cleveland Indians, Mr. At Lopez.' Well, you could have knocked the writers over with a feather. They felt they had been outsmarted even though it was they who had gone out on the limb to announce Boudreau as our manager."⁸

Greenberg further explains,

"Fortunately for me, At Lopez had played for the Cleveland Indians in 1946 and was a veteran ballplayer with a great personality and great disposition. He had been friends with all the writers, and they had enormous respect for him. So while



Al Lopez, manager of the Cleveland Indians with old friend, Casey Stengel.

they disliked me for having pulled a fast one on them, they still respected my decision. They heaped praise on the choice of Lopez becoming the new manager but took their embarrassment out on me for getting rid of a great hero in Lou Boudreau."⁹

Thus, amid some controversy, began the big league managerial career of At Lopez.

"A major league manager is like a lion tamer. Danger can come from any quarter. Victory and defeat hang on fractions of inches and split-second decisions. He dare not wait one pitch too long to lift a pitcher. He must order a steal at exactly the right instant. Moving a fielder three feet as the count on the batter changes may save or lose the ball game. Every play and every pitch is a crisis."¹⁰

At Lopez spent six crisis filled seasons in Cleveland, and during that time the Indians never won fewer than 88 out of 154 games. The Indians had slouched into fourth place in 1950, however, in the six years that followed, they finished second five times and captured the pennant in 1954.¹¹

Lopez always believed that a manager had to adapt his style to his material. In Cleveland the material was powerful but lacked speed. He recalls,

"I didn't have too much speed on the (Cleveland) club, we usually only stole around thirty bases, but we did have guys who could hit the ball out of the park; Vic Wertz, At Rosen, and Larry Doby. So our game was to hold the other side with our good pitching and wait for somebody to sock one out."¹²

(This was a practice of tried and true method later made popular by Earl Weaver and his Baltimore Orioles of the late 1960's and early 1970's.)

This Cleveland Indian squad combined pitching and power hitting in a manner that few teams had ever equaled. The pitching rotation of Bob Lemon, Early Wynn, Mike Garcia, Bob Feller and Art Houtteman is what many believe, the best pitching staff in big league history. The fact that three of the hurlers (Lemon, Feller, Wynn) are now in the Hall of Fame lends Justifiable credence to the claim. Add to this, the above mentioned power hitters and defensive whiz catcher Jim Hegan and the Indians composed a formidable lineup.

The ace of the staff, Bob Lemon had once been a third baseman and later an outfielder. However, in 1947, Lopez then a player with

Cleveland, had been asked to spend some time with Lemon to help him make the switch to pitching. Bob Feller, in his autobiography, *Now Pitching Bob Feller*, remembered that Lemon had what baseball people consider "a live arm," one with the strength to throw hard and to put movement on the ball, but he needed help.

Feller writes:

"Lopez told him to concentrate on two pitches, his curve and sinker, and to work hard at throwing them for strikes. Lopez was teaching him what every pitcher learns early in his career, that pitching is like real estate, the three most important things are location, location and location.... Lopez told Lemon to keep throwing the curve and sinker and to not even look to At behind the plate for any signals. The instruction was right on the money, and when cashed in with three straight 20 win seasons right after that, you had to think that Lopez, who helped Lemon so much although he had no experience as a coach or manager, was destined for greater things." ¹³

Lopez recalls that he felt like Lemon would have a long pitching career but that it was cut short on account of the way he threw the sinker; his best pitch. "He came up with chips in his elbow. It was the way he threw the ball. He threw it in a manner where it jerked the hell out of your arm and caused the chips." ¹⁴

Tony Cuccinello was once quoted as believing that,

"Over the years, Lopez had developed an almost subcutaneous sensitivity to pitchers and their frail-

ties. 'Many times I've seen him start a relief pitcher warming up in the bullpen when the starter seemed to be going along fine, then all of the sudden - bang! bang! bang! -- a couple of hits and the starter is out of there.'"¹⁵

One of the pitchers that Lopez had to use "kid gloves" with, so to speak, was the often volatile but extremely effective Early Wynn. Lopez laughingly remembers his relationship with Wynn and recalls that the pitcher wasn't as ornery as the press often made him seem.

"Early was a real competitor. Won twenty some-odd games every year. How could you not like him? But he was a competitor and you know, this one time, he was arguing with an umpire and I went out there to take him out. I had a rule that even if you were pitching like a dog, I am going to go out there in a nice way and ask you for the ball, pat you on the back and you could go in. If you had something to argue about, wait until we get back in the clubhouse. When I go out there it's not to show you up so don't show me up.

"So this one day Early was arguing with the umpire when I came out there and he threw the ball at me hitting me in the stomach. It was more of a flip/ toss but the press played it up. I said give me the goddamned ball and don't be throwing it at me. After the game he came and apologized to me. I said, Early, I know how you feel but the people upstairs, the fans and media, they see that and think your mad at me. I told him don't get mad at me,

get mad at the guys who are hitting."
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Lopez tells another story about Wynn in that,

"One day Early had been having a bad day and I had gone out to talk with him. In that league if you went out to talk with your pitcher, then the second time he had to come out. Well, Early was in trouble and arguing with the umpire and he sees me coming and just lets the umpire have it. The umpire told him that if he kept it up that he would be gone. Early said, 'What do you think Lopez is coming out here for, to bring me a ham sandwich?'"¹⁷

However talented the Indians may have been, only one team could win an American League pennant and since 1949 that team had been the New York Yankees. Led by Casey Stengel, the Yankees, whose scouting system continually produced performers that took the measure of their American League counterparts, won all but two pennants in the years from 1949 until 1964.

In 1958, *Life Magazine* published an article written by Marshall Smith entitled "A Plot to Whip the Yanks", that accurately portrayed the doggedness and frustration with which Lopez pursued the Yankees. Smith writes that:

"For as long as most people can remember, a Yanqui desperado named Casey Stengel has been shooting up the American League and getting away with the swag. Catching him seems almost impossible. Not only does he know all the tricks and the short cuts, but his equipment is superb. He has pow-

erful guns capable of firing accurate, murderous shots that make an enemy helpless. He also has the horses, the finest, strongest, swiftest horses that money can buy. If any of his guns falls to shoot straight, he has others cached away in carefully protected arsenals. If any of his magnificent horses gives out, he has others hidden in the canebrakes, waiting for his whistle. With all limitless resources and daring, the Yanqui should feel completely safe from pursuit ... But he does not. Every time he looks over his shoulder he sees the same relentless, inescapable figure ... He is always there, always following. This pursuer is not a glamorous hero but a doleful, threadbare man wearing- a big sombrero ... Alfonso Ramon Lopez never gives up."¹⁸

The Lopez led Indians were the American League bridesmaids in 1951, 1952 and 1953 with 93, 93 and 92 wins respectively.¹⁹

Cleveland third-baseman, Al Rosen, put together a tremendous season in 1953 with a league leading 43 homeruns and 145 runs batted in. He just missed out on winning the triple crown when he finished a percentage point behind Mickey Vernon of Washington, with a .336 batting average to Vernon's .337.²⁰

Lopez fondly describes Rosen as a great fellow and a nice guy to have had on the team. Lopez recalls that the 1953 batting race came down to the last game of the season and in one particular at bat, Rosen missed first-base and was called out by the umpire. The lost hit proved to be the difference. "The umpire said that he didn't hit first base ... if he had hit the bag, he would have been called safe."²¹

Lopez' first three years in Cleveland would not have been considered a bad start by most managers. For Lopez however, second place was just that and he became even more determined to beat the Yankees and believed that 1954 could prove the trick. Yet, Casey Stengel, who felt nothing but contempt for the rest of the American League after winning five straight championships, was every bit as confident that the Yankees would take home another crown and made no secret about it. "If I don't win the pennant this year," remarked a boastful Stengel, in the spring of 1954 and despite the obvious Cleveland threat, "they oughta commence firing the manager."²²

When told by a reporter that Lopez said he could beat Stengel, Casey replied, "Did the Mexican say that? Well, you tell the Señor, unless my team gets hit by a truck and my brain rots, he ain't gonna win because the Yankees are."²³

Both Cleveland and the Yankees got off to a fast start that season. However, the Indians remained hot while New York cooled just a bit. On September 12th the two teams faced off in a crucial late season doubleheader with Stengel still clinging to the hope that his team would catch them. His hopes were dashed however, as the tribe won both contests and were never challenged again.²⁴

The Indians paced by their vaunted pitching staff and Larry Doby's league leading 32 homeruns, won 111 games that season, the best record in baseball history, and were showered with a parade across Euclid Avenue in downtown Cleveland "while the lake breezes blew through the open convertibles filled with happy Indians".²⁵

The Yankees would up the campaign with an outstanding 103 victories, ironically the

most ever under Stengel. "Years later, on quiet summer nights, Stengel would sit at some hotel bar and talk about his 1954 Yankees. He would try and explain how a team could win 103 games and not win the pennant. Then he would say, 'We had a splendid season, but the Señor beat me and you could look it up.'"²⁶

After losing seven straight World Series, the National League wanted nothing more than to smash the American League's dominance of the fall classic and to unlock the stranglehold that the junior circuit held on the championship.

The New York Giants, led by fiery Leo Durocher, had finished fifth in 1953. But, in 1954 they had been transformed into a pennant winning club, buoyed by the return of Willie Mays from the Army and the acquisition of Southpaw Johnny Antonelli from the Braves in a winter deal for outfielder Bobby Thomson.²⁷

Sal "The Barber" Maglie, whose moniker came about because of his propensity to give batters a close shave, started the "lidlifter" for the Giants against Bob Lemon. Maglie fell behind 2-0, in the first inning when Cleveland Outfielder At Smith was nicked by a pitched ball, second-baseman Bobby Avila singled and Vic Wertz tripled.²⁸

The Giants tied the score in the third on singles by Whitey Lockman and Alvin Dark, Don Mueller's forceout, a walk to Mays and a single by third-baseman Hank Thompson.²⁹

The game stayed locked at 2-2 into the eighth inning, when with two men on, Vic Wertz sent a towering drive to the deepest region of the Polo Grounds. With his back to the plate, Willie Mays sprinting full throttle as the ball came in directly over his head,



Al Lopez managed the Chicago White Sox to an American League pennant in 1959. Shown on right is Nelson Fox, second base star.

made a tremendous stab and catch of the 460 foot wallop, then turned and threw the ball while falling down and subsequently thwarted the Indian's rally.³⁰

Lopez remembers "The Catch" as,

“a great play, no question about it. But, I think Willie overran the ball a little bit. He let it get over his head which is the most difficult kind to catch. He made a great play; but he was coming from this angle and then the ball just got over him and he had to catch up. Then he fell down on the ground while making the throw and that made the catch seem all the more sensational.”³¹

The smash came off Don Liddle, who had just replaced Maglie. Marv Grissom, an American League castoff, then took the mound and went the rest of the way for New York. With one out in the tenth, Willie Mays walked for the second time and promptly stole second. Hank Thompson, who according to Lopez had a great series³², drew an intentional pass setting the stage for pinch-hitter Dusty Rhodes. Rhodes, seldom used but hitting a career high .341 that season³³, batting in place of Monty Irvin, sent Lemon's first pitch into the rightfield

corner section of the stands for a 260 foot "Chinese Homer" that secured the victory.³⁴

The second game found Johnny Antonelli taking the mound for the Giants against 23 game winner Early Wynn. The Indians got off to a bang when leadoff batter At Smith hit Antonelli's first pitch for a homerun. Antonelli yielded seven more "safeties" and walked six but stopped every Indian threat.³⁵

In the fifth, Wynn walked Willie Mays and gave up a single to Hank Thompson. Dusty Rhodes then stepped to the plate again for Irvin and dropped a "Texas League" single into short center, scoring Mays with the tying run. After Davey Williams "fanned" for the first out, Wes Westrum walked. Antonelli then grounded to Avila, forcing Westrum at second, but Thompson scored the Giants go-ahead run. Rhodes, who went into leftfield, iced the 3-1 victory with a powerful homer in the seventh, his second of the series.³⁶

Lopez remembers that game as a heartbreaker and one that Bob Feller remembers as having made Lopez feel as though his back were against the wall.³⁷ Lopez recalls that his team just could not get a break.

"First man up, At Smith, hits a homerun. I think, gee that's great. But we just, what's his name, Hegan hit a ball in the Polo Grounds that everybody thought was top tier. But the wind was blowing in that day and Monty Irvin ended up making the catch. Irvin told Hegan that the ball couldn't have missed the stands by an inch. It would have been a homerun with three men on. Not an inch, he said. 'I gave up on it, lost it.' The upper tier in the Polo Grounds used to jut out toward the field and

Irvin said that the ball was up near the stands and started coming out and came down barely missing the stands."³⁸

Bob Feller claims that the loss of that second game might have changed Lopez' pitching strategy for the rest of the series. He believes that Lopez, rather than pitch Feller, who had gone 13-3 that year, in either the third or fourth game, chose to pitch 19 game winner Mike Garcia in the third game and come back with Lemon in the fourth.³⁹

In any event, Feller, who finished his War-interrupted career with 266 wins and is considered to be one of the very best pitchers of all time, did not pitch an inning during that series. "I've never been quite sure why Lopez didn't use me in that series", Feller said in his autobiography.

"I've never asked him myself, even though I have seen him a thousand times since. Leo Durocher, the Giants manager at the time, said that he has often wondered the same thing. Lopez never said anything about it [to me]. He could just tell me he thought that Lemon had a better chance to win in the fourth game and I would accept that. To the best of my knowledge, Al has never given his reason to anyone."⁴⁰

Feller though had a hunch that Al didn't think he (Feller) could win in the series.

"In those later years, Lopez seemed to think I was doing it with mirrors. He didn't seem convinced of my ability. He had trouble believing that I could get people out because I didn't have the blazing fastball anymore. It almost seemed that he couldn't wait to take me out if I gave

up a couple of hits. He'd almost beat the ball back to the mound."⁴¹

Feller's hunch proved correct. When recently asked why Feller wasn't used in the 1954 World Series Lopez frankly gave his reason that, "He wasn't that good of a pitcher anymore. If he had still been great I would have been pitching him more regular than for him to just go 13-3. Art Houtteman won 15 that season, I could have used him."⁴²

Shifting to Cleveland, the Giants won the third game 6-2, behind the four hit hurling of Reuben Gomez and Hoyt Wilhelm. New York scored a run off Mike Garcia in the first inning on two singles and an error, and routed Garcia, the "Big Bear", with a three run attack in the third. After two singles and an intentional walk loaded the bases, Dusty Rhodes, who was having a career series, rapped another pinch-single on the first pitch to bring home two more runs. Davey Williams, the Giants second-baseman, then laid down a squeeze bunt to tally the final score.⁴³

The Giants mopped up in the fourth game 7-4, to become only the second National League club to sweep a World Series. Bob Lemon, whom Lopez was pitching on three days rest, was routed in the fifth inning and Hal Newhouser failed in relief as the Giants took a 7-0 lead and never looked back.⁴⁴

The 1954 series was, to that point, the most lucrative in history for the players, who shared in a record pool of \$881,763.72. The attendance of 251,507 also set a new record for a four game series.⁴⁵

While Cleveland's three and four hitters, Larry Doby and Al Rosen combined for an anemic .194 batting average with 0 runs batted in, and the big three of Lemon, Wynn and Garcia posted earned run averages of

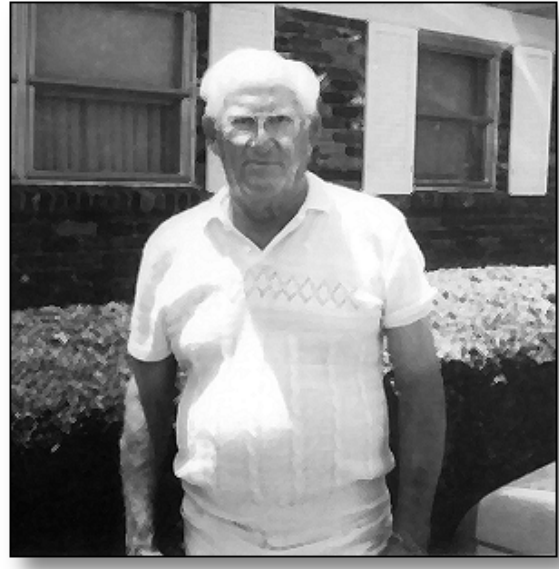
6.75, 3.86 and 5.40 respectively, Vic Wertz gave Lopez reason to smile by batting .500 and becoming the only Cleveland batsman to hit safely in all four games. This was in addition to the tape measure blast that Mays secured.⁴⁶

On the series Al painfully explains,

"Let me say this about the 1954 World Series. We won 111 games that year. Still a record. I don't think we lost over two games in a row the entire season. We never had a slump all year. There hasn't been any club that ever played ball that didn't have a slump during the season and I think that is what happened to us; we hit a slump at the World Series. I could feel the club was slacking a little bit toward the end of the year. Things were not going the way they should. The last three or four days of the season we had already clinched and that may have hurt us. I still think that on account of our pitching, we were the best team but the best team didn't win."⁴⁷

The remainder of Al's career in Cleveland was much the same, as his teams finished second to the Yankees in 1955 and 1956. Referring to Lopez' penchant for finishing second, Casey Stengel opined, "The big knock you hear about Al is that he has an outstanding record of finishing second. One great ballplayer could make him recognized as a great manager."⁴⁸ Hank Greenberg chimed in that "Lopez has finished second because he has had second place material."⁴⁹

Lopez, once commenting in *Sports Illustrated*, gave his opinion of the continued second place finishes. "I'm not a failure, but I don't feel that I have accomplished what I've wanted. I want to



Al Lopez, June 1992

win. I keep saying that the Yankees can be had because I keep thinking they can, and I want my guys to believe they can win. I want to finish first!"⁵⁰

What Lopez left unsaid was that, for the most part, his players had never measured up to New York's. At Cleveland, he had pitching and power but lacked speed and had an inconsistent defense. Later at Chicago, he greatly improved an undistinguished pitching staff, had speed and fielding, but never had power and the hitting was indifferent.⁵¹

After six seasons with the Indians, Al, provoked in part by the media and low attendance figures, came to the conclusion that the Cleveland fans were becoming tired of seeing their club finish second under him, so he left the helm voluntarily and gave them to finish sixth under someone else.⁵²

The Chicago White Sox, then controlled by former Cleveland owner, Bill Veeck, promptly hired Lopez to manage in Chicago. "He left one club that couldn't beat the

Yankees," remarked one reporter, "to join another club that can't beat the Yankees."⁵³

Immediately Al began to skillfully tailor the White Sox and their strategy to the vast acreage of Cominsky Park. He built the club on speed and alertness, on flawless pitching, yet with little power hitting to back it up. Virtually the antithesis of the club he won with in Cleveland in 1954, Al opined that you had to build your club according to your park. "After all", he said, "you play 77 games at home."⁵⁴

A religious man, Lopez never believed it fair to appeal for divine help to win ball games. "If I pray and the other guy prays, what's the Lord going to do?" Lopez asks. A big league manager endures the agony alone.⁵⁵ Alone on a baseball diamond and yet studiously aware of the events unfolding before him, Al developed his own set of stratagems to combat the often superior forces that he found mounted against him. Lopez believed that a manager could best contribute two things to a club. He could inspire his players and he could do a good job of handling the pitchers. The big concern is, can the manager handle the personnel? He remarks, "The manager has to be up every day and keep those guys in the best frame of mind, keep them from getting down on themselves, and he has to keep the pitchers fresh and strong."⁵⁶

While often viewed as stern, Lopez was never an advocate of clubhouse meetings or of fines. "What's the sense of lecturing or fining players?" he once said.

"They're adults. If they won't play our way, let them play their own way, someplace else. Pep talks are O.K. in football when you have to get a club up for only a handful of games, but you can't get a club up for

162. Most of the players don't listen to what you say in a meeting anyway."⁵⁷

Lopez traditionally had three rules he wanted his players to obey:

"Outfielders must always throw to the cutoff man rather than to a specific base, no player should ever hesitate rounding first on a single when a teammate is trying to score from second and everybody must keep the curfew. 'I don't believe in being too tough,' Al says. 'If you're going to start fining for missing signs - bunts, steals - you've got a tight ballplayer.'"⁵⁸

Bill Veeck once said that Al Lopez was at his best with a club that acted and played as intelligent professionals should. "Al's not the type to get along with screwballs," Veeck stated.⁵⁹

Earl Battey, who once played for Al in Chicago recalled,

"He's the nicest guy in the world, but he rules with an iron hand. Lopez had a temper, but I never realized it until he got mad at Vic Power [a large, powerful man with flamboyant tendencies] one day and started taking off his glasses. Lopez gives you the impression he doesn't pay any attention to you, yet he's always watching. When you are warming up pitchers he might be way on the other side of the field, but he might notice you were catching the pitcher the wrong way and come to tell you. He is not a taskmaster, but he expects certain things from his players and gets them."⁶⁰

Jerry Holtzman, who once covered the White Sox for the Chicago Sun-Times, didn't think that Lopez was the easiest manager to play for. "For the guy who is putting out every day, there is evidently no problem, but ballplayers don't put out every day, and that's when they run into trouble with Lopez."⁶¹

Smart and fast ballplayers are what Lopez desired the most. "I'm speed conscious. Speed and arm, these are the basics. I like a running club. You win games by scoring runs and speed is what gets them."⁶² It is not surprising then, when recently asked which team he most enjoys watching today, Al responded by answering the St. Louis Cardinals, a team that is tailored for running on the hard, artificial surface of Busch Stadium.⁶³

When queried as to which of his former managers most influenced his coaching style, Lopez responded that his style was more an amalgamation of all that he learned during a playing career served under six Hall of Fame managers (Wilbert Robinson, Max Carey, Casey Stengel, Frankie Frisch, Bill McKechnie and Lou Boudreau).

In any event, these assessments expose a persona that thrived on winning and could not tolerate those individuals whose drive to succeed was less than his own. Lopez was more than willing to treat his players as the professionals they were provided that they reciprocated by being professional and worked toward the aim of a successful organization. In no instance did a team better characterize this driven Lopez work ethic than the club he created in Chicago.

The Chicago White Sox under Al Lopez was a team whose entire success was built on the then anachronistic theory that baseball is played primarily with a ball and not a bat.

The White Sox could not hit but they could squeeze an astounding number of runs out of their opponents mistakes - walks, hit batsmen, dropped third strikes, passed balls, wild pitches and balks mixed in with an occasional stolen base or sacrifice fly. An Aparicio double (named for the swift Chicago base thief) became renowned throughout the league as a walk and a stolen base.⁶⁴

After finishing third for five consecutive seasons, the 1957 White Sox, in Lopez inaugural year at the helm, won 90 games and crept up a notch to the customary Lopez roost of second place. The following season was little different as the "Pale Hoes" eked out 82 victories in another runner-up campaign.⁶⁵

Toward the end of the 1958 season Lopez announced that he would return as manager of the Chicago White Sox in 1959. There had been some speculation that he might retire because of his continued frustration over the apparent invincibility of the New York Yankees. On announcing his decision to stay Lopez said, "I wouldn't have taken the job if I didn't feel the club had a chance to win the pennant ... I'm not in this thing for the money. Fortunately, I'm pretty well fixed. But I love baseball and I think we have a good chance of winning this thing."⁶⁶

This was however a familiar Lopez battle cry and the majority of experts, turning a deaf ear to it, proceeded to choose the New York Yankees in their preseason polls. Yet seemingly immune to such speculation, the 1959, "Go-Go Sox", adhering strictly to the percentage baseball techniques of their skipper won the American League pennant for the first time in forty years (the last being won by the 1919 Chicago "Black Sox") and in doing so astounded the baseball world.

In 1959, Stengel's Yankees stumbled out of the blocks never getting started and by the beginning of August it was apparent to all concerned that the league championship would be resolved between Cleveland and Chicago. In late August the White Sox swept a four game series with the Indians and were never again headed. Chicago, ironically, clinched the pennant in Cleveland on September 22 with a 4-2 victory over Lopez' old team.⁶⁷

During the prior forty years, a period in which every other major league team had won at least one pennant, and the Yankees 24, the White Sox had become more than a religion for the hopeless; they were what has been aptly described as a form of "self-flagellation."⁶⁸

Yet 1959 was different. The team earned its "Go-Go" moniker with "jackrabbit" lineup that stole 113 bases, an astonishing number in those years and nearly three times the league average. It was built upon the Lopez-stressed fundamentals of speed, pitching and defense. The double play combination of Luis Aparicio at shortstop and Nelson Fox at second-base was as sure handed as any in baseball. Each led the league at his position in putouts, assists and fielding average. Aparicio stole 56 bases; Fox batted .306.⁶⁹

Lopez recently recalled a funny story about "Nellie" Fox:

"Fox originally came up with the Athletics. In those days all of the owners were baseball men and knew each other. Connie Mack of the Philadelphia Athletics had brought Fox up from the minors. Mack had Fox playing first base, which was a mistake. Fox had no power, so Mr.

Mack put him on waivers. Back then the waiver price for a ballplayer was \$15,000 or something like that and Clark Griffith of Washington, claimed him. So, Mr. Mack, doing Griffith what he thought was a favor, called him on the phone and said, 'Mr. Griffith, I see where you claimed this young man Fox.' Griffith replied, 'Mr. Mack, I need players. I'll claim a guy with one arm or one leg.' Mack says, 'Mr. Griffith, you are throwing your money away. He is not worth \$15,000.' So Griffith withdrew the waiver claim and Mack kept him. Well Fox is on the Athletics and Chicago has got a guy by the name of Joe Tipton, this screwball catcher. Tipton is not getting along with the White Sox manager, Jack Onslow, so Chicago wants to get rid of him. They call Mack and Mr. Mack says, 'I'll give you Fox for him.' Chicago took him just like that and shipped Tipton the hell out of there, without even attempting to find out anything about Fox."⁷⁰

Lopez continues,

"It turned out to be a great trade for the White Sox. By God, Fox came over there and between Joe Gordon helping him on his fielding (Fox was converted to secondbase), and making the double plays and stuff like that and Roger Cramer teaching him to use that thick handled heavy bat (which had been the Cramer model when Cramer was with the Athletics) to try and hit the ball all over, they made him a good ballplayer."⁷¹

The anchor of Lopez' White Sox pitching staff was the tough veteran Early Wynn, who won 22 games in his 19th big-league season. His supporting cast consisted of Bob Shaw, Billy Pierce and Dick Donovan, with Gerry Staley and Turk Lown working out of the bullpen.⁷²

William Furlong, a Chicago sports columnist speaking for many amazed onlookers, described this team as, "a raffish array of peripatetic ballplayers who have moved from club to club with the mournful frequency of derelicts changing flophouses, if with somewhat greater style."⁷³

Another skeptical Chicago wag had gone so far as to decry early in the season that if Lopez could win the pennant with this team he wouldn't simply be manager of the year but manager of all-time.⁷⁴

Chicago's success surprised many doubters that season, but not their irrepressible, "manager of all-time", who after all, had expected it.

Their opposition in the 1959 World Series was the Los Angeles Dodgers. Having moved to Los Angeles from Brooklyn two years prior⁷⁵, the Dodgers boasted a strong lineup featuring Brooklyn holdovers Gil Hodges, Carl Furillo and "Duke" Snider and young pitchers Don Drysdale, Johnny Podres and Sandy Koufax.⁷⁶

Walter Alston, the Dodger manager, decided to open the series with journeyman pitcher Roger Craig. Alston doubtless would have preferred to use Don Drysdale or Johnny Podres, but his staff had been worn thin under the pressure of the National League pennant race. The Dodgers, in fact, had been shuttling back and forth across the country on almost a daily basis. They had closed out the regular season at home, flown to

Milwaukee that same night for a league playoff game against the Braves, then back to Los Angeles a day later, and now, with just one day off, they were in Chicago for the start of the Series.⁷⁷

The late season strain may have exacted its toll, for it was a listless crew in Dodger blue that took the field in Comiskey Park. Craig was simply ineffective. He could not get out of the third inning as the White Sox built a 9-0 lead, then added two more runs in the fourth. Ted Kluszewski, the powerful first-baseman who had come to Chicago from Pittsburgh in mid-season, led the attack with a pair of two-run homers. Dodger bats, meanwhile, offered no response. Early Wynn and Gerry Staley shut them out on eight hits for an 11-0 decision.⁷⁸

"A club with less spirit and desire might have been discouraged by the walloping, but the Dodgers fought back to win the second game, 4-3."⁷⁹ The White Sox again had jumped out to a 2-0 lead in the first inning, this time off Johnny Podres. The Dodgers then broke out of their slumber when Charlie Neal homered off Bob Shaw in the fifth inning.⁸⁰ In the sixth, with two out, Chuck Essegian batted for Podres and came through with a home run to tie the score at 2 apiece. Jim Gilliam followed with a walk and Charlie Neal belted his second homer of the game to put the Dodgers ahead.⁸¹

Larry Sherry, an obscure, 24 year-old righthander, making his first relief appearance of the Series, had his back to the wall in the eighth as Kluszewski and Sherm Lollar singled for the Sox. Earl Torgeson was then put in to run for Kluszewski. Al Smith followed with a double to deep left-center, scoring Torgeson, but Lollar was

nailed at the plate on Wally Moon's throw to Maury Wills and the shortstop's relay to catcher, Johnny Roseboro.⁸² Sherry, then going the rest of the way, sealed it up for the Los Angeles. The rest of the Series belonged to him.⁸³

Back in Los Angeles, after an open date for travel, the Dodgers quickly and efficiently seized control. With Don Drysdale and Dick Donovan locked in scoreless combat, Carl Furillo broke the tie in the seventh with a two-run, pinch-hit single. Larry Sherry, growing seemingly stronger as the series went on, earned his second straight save, this time in relief of Don Drysdale, who was credited with the 3-1 victory.⁸⁴

Roger Craig and Early Wynn, mound opponents in the opener, faced each other again to start game four. The Dodgers chased Wynn in the third inning, scoring four runs with two outs. Although in frequent trouble, Craig staved off the White Sox until the seventh, when with a run in, two on and two out, Sherm Lollar launched a home-run that tied the score.⁸⁵

In the eighth however, Larry Sherry took the mound again for the Dodgers and held on for the win as Gil Hodges blasted a Gerry Staley pitch just to the right of the screen in left-center field and sealed the 4-3 victory.⁸⁶

In game five, on the verge of elimination, the White Sox fought back courageously to gain a 1-0 victory in a contest that was highlighted by the maneuvering of Managers Lopez and Alston. The only run of the game was scored off Sandy Koufax in the fourth inning when Nelson Fox singled, took third on a single by centerfielder Jim Landis and came home when Sherm Lollar grounded into a double play.⁸⁷

The two teams headed back to Chicago to conclude the Series with the knowledge that, win or lose, their coffers were bulging. More than 92,000 had attended each game at the Los Angeles Coliseum: the crowd for the third game, 92,706, was the largest of all. Every World Series record for attendance and gate receipts was on its way to extinction, and only six games were needed to do it.⁸⁸

In the final game Larry Sherry once again proved to be the difference, pitching five and two thirds scoreless innings in relief of Podres to assure a 9-3 win. Sherry had finished all four of the Dodgers' winning games; he had won two and saved the other two. In all he pitched 12-213 innings, yielding only one run and eight hits, and was named the Series' Most Valuable Player.⁸⁹

When asked to recall the 1959 World Series, Lopez remembered it as another one of those World Series when the unexpected player rises to the occasion and carries his team to victory.

"That happens in the World Series. You watch the World Series and there are always one or two guys that you don't expect to do any trouble, you know, do the harm, and those are the guys that kill you. The stars never hurt you that much because, I guess, you concentrate more on those guys. We had never heard of that pitcher [Sherry]. We never heard of him and he came up there and by God he was striking everybody out. They had a guy by the name of Charlie Neal, second base, did a tremendous job. He hit everything (Neal batted .370 in the series). Roseboro, our report was that he had a strong arm but was a little erratic. We had a good running ball club.

Every time somebody tried to run, he made a perfect throw ... everytime.⁹⁰

Upon being asked if in hindsight, there was anything he thought that he might have done differently, Lopez responded, "Nothing. I always tried to give the best I had. Tried to work percentages and I don't think there was anything different that I could have done."⁹¹

While describing the 1959 White Sox, Lopez recalls that he had a great time managing them. "That club took managing and I enjoyed that. It took a lot of time to squeeze a run here and get a run there. We didn't have much power you know. Every game in Chicago you had to struggle to win. You had to play advantages and maneuver around to try and win it."⁹²

There was one instance that season when Al was called upon to make the kind of decision that isn't always noticed by casual observers of the game.

There was this pitcher, he wore these real thick glasses and for whatever reason he didn't like our centerfielder, Jim Landis. He used to knock poor Landis down everytime he faced him. What the hell was that pitcher's name?

"Anyway, we were in spring training and Landis came to bat against him and damn f he doesn't knock him down again. I say 'Holy Jesus', here Landis is on the ground and I go over to him and asked if he was alright, because it burned me up. It burns you up when they knock one of your players down during the regular season, but in spring training, my God. What the hell was the name of that goofy guy? I told Yogi (Berra, catcher for the Yankees), to tell him

that the next time he throws at Landis, I'm going to get somebody to throw at him, because pitchers hit in those days.

"I guess Yogi told him but then the season started and early on the Yankees came over to Chicago to play us and Casey brings him, Ryne Duren, in to pitch. Well the first time Landis comes up, Duren throws at him again. With a 7-1 lead! By God I called down to the bull-pen and I said get me someone down there, I want him drilled in the ribs. There were no volunteers except for this young Cuban boy name of Rodolfo Arias. He volunteered sure enough. I spoke to him in Spanish, because he couldn't speak English. He was a lefty and I had wanted a righthanded sinker ball pitcher because a sinker in the ribs hurts more. So I put him in and instructed him to make the first pitch outside so Duren wouldn't be suspicious.

"So Arias puts the first pitch outside, but the next one comes inside real tight and I guess it must have dawned on Duren because he looks over at me in the dugout. I said, 'Yeah, you goddamned right, we're gonna gettcha.' The next one hits Duren high on the hip bone and he yelled to Arias, 'You son of a bitch, wait until you come up.' But I said from the dugout, 'You aint gonna get him because I'm taking him out.'"⁹³

Lopez recalls that after the 1959 season he received a special honor in the form of a personal note from one of the all-time great ballplayers. "After the season was over Ty Cobb wrote me a real nice letter congratulating me on managing the way I

did, the old fashioned way. He claimed that was how they managed in the old days, scrap for a run, bunt, steal."⁹⁴

"This club", Lopez said, immediately following the 1959 World Series, "with only a little help, is good enough to win the pennant again."⁹⁵ Unfortunately for Lopez, help didn't arrive.

Over the next three seasons, White Sox fortunes steadily declined and they dropped to third, fourth and fifth place respectively. However, in 1963 and 1964, Lopez again spurred his troops to second place finishes by chasing the Yankees up to the wire before conceding the pennant.⁹⁶

After another second place finish in 1965, Lopez, deciding it was time to swap the pressures of baseball for the pleasures of golf and quiet Florida living, retired.⁹⁷

Upon his retirement, Lopez did remain with the White Sox in an administrative capacity, and even returned to the dugout briefly in 1968-69 with the White Sox sputtering. His stay however, was short-lived, and after posting a 178 start in 1969, he called it quits for good.⁹⁸

Having completed seventeen seasons as a big league pilot, the Señor, wrapped up his much admired career tied for ninth place on the all time winning percentage list with a .584 average and, in 1977, was enshrined in the Baseball Hall of Fame as a manager.⁹⁹

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Photos are from the author's collection.