

OUR CENTURY

1954

AT A GLANCE

Indians win 111 games, face Giants in World Series

Al Lopez's Indians lost six of their first nine games, but then they did better — a lot better. They won a major league record 111 games, eight more than the Yankees, who had won the last five pennants. The largest paid crowd ever to see a baseball game, 86,563, watched the Indians take a doubleheader from the Yankees on Sept. 12.

Second baseman Bob Avila won the batting title with an average of .341 and Larry Doby led the league in home runs with 32. Bob Lemon and Early Wynn won 23 games each to tie for the league lead, while Mike Garcia won 19 and Bob Feller 13. The Indians went into the World Series heavily favored over the National League champion New York Giants.

In the first game, the Indians were undone by the dimensions of the 81-year-old Polo Grounds in New York — 470 feet to center field, 257 feet to right. In the eighth inning, Vic Wertz hit a line drive 460 feet to center. It would have been a long home run in any other park, but Willie Mays somehow made the catch running at full speed with his back to the plate. With two on in the Giants' 10th inning, little-used Dusty Rhodes hit a fly ball 260 feet down the right field line. It would have been an easy out in any other park, but it was a homer that gave the Giants a 5-2 win.

It was as though the wind had been taken out of the Tribe's sails. They lost the second game, 3-1, and then came home to lose 5-2 and 7-4. Russell Schneider's "Cleveland Indians Encyclopedia" records Lopez's reaction: "We were due for a slump."

Although the Yankees won 114 games in the 162-game season of 1998, the 1954 Indians' winning percentage of .721, set when the season was 154 games, remains the record.



PLAIN DEALER FILE

Roberto Avila holds his son, Bobby, as Al Rosen signs a baseball for him in 1954.

The World Series delayed the Browns' home game against the Detroit Lions until the end of the season, a week before the same two teams would be to meet for the championship. The Lions won the title game "preview," 14-10. Cleveland fans were downcast. Paul Brown wore a secret smile.

The following week, the Browns whopped the Lions, 56-10. Otto Graham, who had announced that he would retire after the season, threw for three touchdowns and ran for three; his 18 points were a title game record, as were Lou Groza's eight extra points. Besides glory, the victory gave the Browns players a whopping \$2,478.56 each, at the time a record for winning shares.

The victory eased the sting of losses to the Lions in the two previous title games and almost erased the disappointment of the World Series. Two of the city's three professional teams had won championships. Earlier in the year, the Barons had won the American Hockey League's Calder Cup for the second straight time behind Jackie Gordon's 102 points and the acrobatic goaltending of Emile "The Cat" Francis.

At least Big Snow II didn't present the problem of stalled vehicles blocking streetcars. Streetcars had reached the end of the line on Jan. 24, when the last one, a Bridge-Madison car, rumbled into the carbarn.

In the closest statewide election in history, Republican George Bender, who represented the western suburbs in Congress, defeated former Mayor Thomas Burke by 3,000 votes in the race for U.S. Senate. Another former mayor, Frank Lausche, won his fifth term as governor.

Pictures taken by a concealed Cleveland Press photographer showed a stream of police visitors to a house at 3821 Prospect Ave., identified as a brothel run by "Papa Joe" Cremati. Seventeen police were fired or suspended, but won a court ruling for their reinstatement.

The hot war in Korea was over, but Americans worried about the Soviet Union, which now had its own atomic bomb. On June 14, business and traffic halted for 10 minutes as a part of a defense drill in Cleveland and 40 other major cities.

Cathedral Latin defeated Holy Name, 13-0, before 33,146 in The Plain Dealer Charity Game for the city's high school football championship.

Sheppard saga begins



PLAIN DEALER FILE PHOTOS

The other woman: In the photo at left, Susan Hayes, seated at right, smiles as Police Chief George Storey (back to camera) answers reporters' questions during the Sam Sheppard trial in July 1954. Above, Hayes enters court in August 1954.

Clevelanders awake July 5 to news of Bay Village slaying

By Fred McGunagle

Clevelanders slept late on the holiday Monday of July 5. When they opened their doors to pick up their newspaper — all three had printed morning holiday editions — they got an eyeeful.

"BAY DOCTOR'S WIFE IS MURDERED; Beaten, He Tells of Fight With Intruder," said The Plain Dealer. "DOCTOR'S WIFE MURDERED IN BAY; Drug Thieves Suspected in Bludgeoning," said the Press. "FIND TOOTH CHIPS UNDER BODY OF BAY DOCTOR'S SLAIN WIFE; Grappled With Brutal Slayer, Physician Says," the News said.

The murder of Marilyn Sheppard would be the play story in virtually every edition for the rest of July. At first, the stories focused on the tragedy of the 31-year-old wife, mother and Sunday school teacher and of her husband Sam, 30, who, with his father and two brothers, operated Bay View Hospital in Bay Village.

But attention quickly turned to the strange story Dr. Sam told police: After entertaining guests on Saturday night, he had fallen asleep watching television in their lakefront home and his wife had gone to bed. He awoke to hear her calling and ran upstairs.

He saw "a form with a light garment" and was struck from behind. When he came to, his wife was covered with blood. She had no pulse. Hearing a noise, he ran downstairs and saw "a form progressing rapidly

toward the lake" — one with dark, bushy hair and a white shirt.

He chased the form down to the beach, where he grappled with the intruder until he again lost consciousness. When he came to, he wandered around in a daze, for how long he didn't know. Then a phone number came to his mind and he called his neighbor, Bay Village Mayor Spencer Houk: "For God's sake, Spen, get over here! I think they've killed Marilyn."

Houk hurried over with his wife, Esther, and called police. It was 5:57 a.m. The July 4 dawn was breaking.

Cleveland detectives, called in to help the four-man Bay department, immediately were skeptical. What had happened in the hours between Marilyn's death and the call to police? How could the Sheppards' son, "Chip," remain asleep in the next room? Why could police not find fingerprints or evidence of a break-in? And where was the T-shirt Dr. Sam had on when their guests left? He could say only, "I don't know."

Sheppard would not take a lie-detector test. Police complained that his brothers were preventing them from questioning him further. The Press took up the complaint in editorials by Editor Louis B. Seltzer — first "Finger of Suspicion" and then, on July 21, "Why No Inquest? Do It Now, Dr. Gerber." Coroner Samuel Gerber called an inquest the same afternoon.

Normandy Elementary School was packed to the doors for four days of hearings and of Page One headlines. At one point, Sheppard's lawyer, Wil-

liam Corrigan, tried to insert some material into the record and got into an argument with Gerber. The headline in the next morning's Plain Dealer: "CORRIGAN EJECTED AMID CHEERS."

Sheppard could have asserted his Fifth Amendment rights, but he testified. The Plain Dealer reported the key exchange, when Gerber asked about a former Bay View nurse named Susan Hayes. Sheppard admitted seeing her on a recent trip to Los Angeles but denied a sexual relationship. Gerber asked: "You did not sleep in the same bedroom four nights in a row?"

"No," he replied.

It was that afternoon's headlines that sealed Sheppard's fate. "SUSAN HAYES ADMITS AFFAIR, FLIES TO CITY," said the Press. Stories and pictures of "brown-eyed Susan Hayes" filled 80 percent of the next morning's Plain Dealer. The next day's Press said, "DOCTOR LIES, SUSAN CHARGES; TELLS OF GIFTS, MARRIAGE."

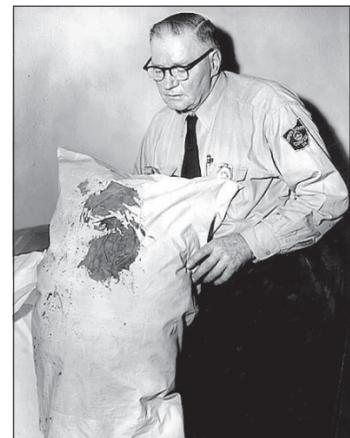
County prosecutors demanded that Bay Village authorities arrest Sheppard. By now, the pressure had gotten to Mayor Houk, whose full-time job was running a meat market across from City Hall. He was in bed under sedation. The Page One Press editorial of July 30 would go into history: "Quit Stalling, Bring Him In." Sheppard was arrested that evening at his father's home.

Corrigan hired a former deputy coroner, Dr. Anthony Kazlauckas, as his scientific expert to examine the Sheppard home, which had been sealed by police. Then he changed his mind. That would haunt him at the trial.

The case went to court Oct. 18 before Judge Edward Blythin, the former Cleveland mayor. Reporters from around the country descended on the cramped courtroom. To accommodate them, Blythin set up a press table close by the trial table.

The jury was picked without either side exhausting its challenges. As usual in major trials, the jurors' names were in the papers, meaning they would be deluged with advice. Blythin refused to sequester the jury when testimony began Nov. 4 and turned down Corrigan's repeated demands that he take stronger steps to keep jurors from seeing media reports.

The most damning testimony came



A bloodied pillow is entered into evidence during the Sam Sheppard trial.

from Gerber — holding up Marilyn's pillow, he said, "In this bloodstain I could make out the imprint of a surgical instrument" — and from Susan Hayes: "Q. Did you occupy the same room. A. Yes. Q. The same bed? A. Yes."

Corrigan did not press Gerber about the weapon as F. Lee Bailey would do in Sheppard's retrial 12 years later, when Gerber was forced to say he had never been able to find an instrument that matched the shape.

On the stand, Sheppard repeated his account of the murder night and vigorously denied killing his wife. Medical experts testified that Sheppard risked paralysis if he inflicted his injuries on himself. But Corrigan lacked a scientific expert to counter the testimony of the police scientific unit and coroner's aides.

The jurors finally were sequestered in a hotel, but were allowed to receive unmonitored calls. Their first vote was evenly divided, six favoring acquittal. It took 18 ballots over five days — until Dec. 21 — to agree on a verdict: guilty of second-degree murder.

Over Corrigan's objection, Blythin immediately passed sentence: life in prison. Clevelanders settled back — the Sheppard case was over.

Or so they thought.

McGunagle is a Cleveland freelance writer. This account is based in part on his 45-year history of the Sheppard case on the Internet at: <http://www.crimelibrary.com>.



Defense attorney William Corrigan, left, and Sam Sheppard.

LOOKING AT A YEAR

Jan. 14: Baseball great Joe DiMaggio marries actress Marilyn Monroe.

March 12: In a legendary television commentary, Edward R. Murrow issues a scathing attack on red-baiting Sen. Joseph McCarthy.

March 25: Frank Sinatra wins an

Oscar for his role in "From Here to Eternity."

April 12: Bill Haley and the Comets record "Rock Around the Clock."

May 17: The Supreme Court, in its landmark decision Brown vs. the Board of Education, strikes down the

doctrine of "separate but equal."

May 6: England's Roger Bannister becomes the first to run a mile in less than 4 minutes.

July 27: Great Britain ends its 72-year occupation of Egypt.

Dec. 2: The Senate votes 67-22 to

condemn McCarthy for conduct unbecoming a senator.

Died: Supreme Court Justice and chief U.S. prosecutor at the Nuremberg war trials, Robert Jackson; French painter Henri Matisse; American photographer Robert Capa.