



In times of war, the court of public opinion begins to coalesce. Should “non-essential” activities, such as sporting events, be postponed? Perhaps canceled?

We’ve seen brief postponements result from weather-related disasters, such as from a hurricane making landfall. When the country is on a war footing, however, the real debate is engaged: should the non-essential activity of professional sports take a hiatus?

This had been thoroughly discussed during World War I. Secretary of War Newton D. Baker had issued his “Work or Fight” edict, causing ripples of uncertainty throughout Baseball. However, American League president Ban Johnson reminded that during the Spanish-American War (1898), the National League did not suspend play.

While the threat and the battles of WWII had been ramping up for years, the U.S. was drawn into the mix when Japan bombed Pearl Harbor, in Hawaii, on December 7, 1941. In the days and weeks that followed, many of Baseball’s greatest players- including the Cleveland Indians’ Bob Feller- enlisted in the service. However, there were enough big leaguers still in the game

that it seemed little had changed.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt (whom had led some of Baseball's military drills, years earlier) was clearly in favor of the continuation of play, citing civilian morale. His stance trumped those of various other public officials, who made clear their view that the game was not "essential."

When his first player was drafted for World War II, Washington Senators owner Clark Griffith protested. He argued that neither the game, nor ballplayers' skills, could transfer to the war effort. He also spoke about the "social harm" that would befall society, were the game to be canceled. Griffith's opinions carried weight; he was publicly involved in patriotic activities such as in the sale of war bonds. As part of a compromise, Griffith had teams performing military drills prior to games- using bats as 'rifles.'

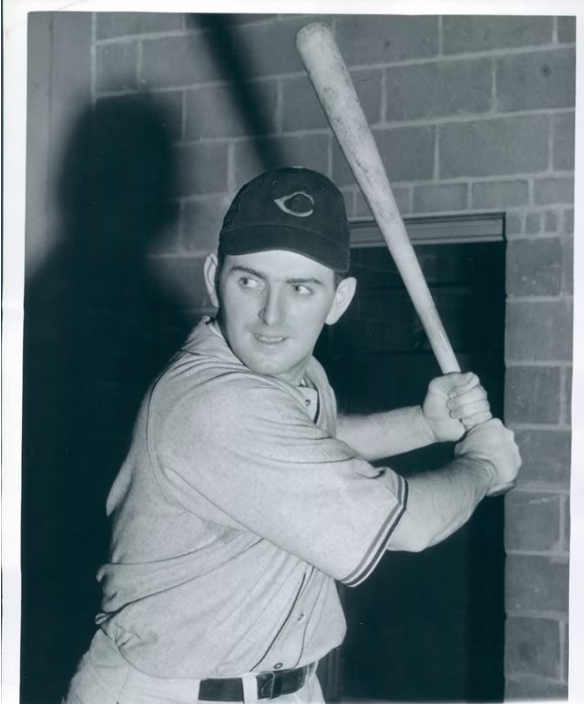
1944 was when the war caught up to Baseball. Well over half of the 1941 starting lineups were now gone. Cleveland owner Alva Bradley maintained that the season would not survive the attrition, saying if he couldn't field a professional quality team, he would close his doors.

Baseball commissioner Kenesaw Mountain Landis reined in spring training. National restrictions on travel was one reason, but Landis also wanted to avoid the public image of "athletes lolling about on the sands in some semitropical climate" while servicemen and civilians alike were carrying the burdens of war. He mandated that training would be north of the Mason Dixon line, and east of the Mississippi River. The Indians searched for a locale that boasted a large field house, for use as shelter from the weather. They chose Purdue University in Lafayette, Indiana- but it wasn't until they arrived that they learned they could

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Map of the Siegfried line

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