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Divided They Fall: The Pacific Coast League's Failed Attempt to Turn Major

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Divided They Fall:
The Pacific Coast League's Failed Attempt to Turn Major

A Senior Thesis

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for Graduation
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By

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Abstract

For over fifty years the Pacific Coast League was considered the highest level of organized baseball west of the Mississippi River. As the population of the West grew in the 1940s and 1950s, the Coast League attempted to use their geographic isolation and large population base as assets in an attempt to join the American and National Leagues as a third Major League. This paper details how the Coast League members' inability to agree on a strategy for League growth led to the collapse of the powerhouse that was the PCL.

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Introduction

From the earliest days of the twentieth century, professional baseball has served as equal parts entertainment and business. The largest piece of both the entertainment and business aspects of the sport is represented by the two Major Leagues, the American and National Leagues, but neither league is capable of operating in a vacuum. In order to develop the talent necessary to put on the show to entertain the masses, a great deal of time, expense and effort must go into the development of the future Major League players. The teams of the two Major Leagues have always considered the cost in terms of man hours and in dollars spent to be too high to incur on their own. Thus the minor league system was developed in a symbiotic relationship with the Majors.

Traditionally, young players would be identified by minor league teams and signed to contracts by the minor league team. At some point, if the player continued to develop into a productive ballplayer, one of two things generally happened. A larger minor league team would agree to purchase the player's contract from his original team for a larger price than he was originally signed for, allowing the first team to recoup their cost, and allowing the player to advance to a higher level of competition. This would allow the player to continue to develop until his contract was either purchased by a Major League team or his value reached his peak in the minor leagues and he was left to finish his career playing for various minor league organizations as they were interested.

Alternatively, a minor league team could refuse to sell off a player to larger leagues and teams until the player was declared eligible for the Major League draft, wherein a minor league player could be selected by a Major League team who would then purchase his contract from his minor league team for a fraction of what it would generally cost if he were sold prior to being

eligible for the draft. This system was codified in an agreement between the various minor leagues and the two Major Leagues called the National Agreement in 1903.¹ The agreement ensured that the Major Leagues got the best talent available without having to scout all of it themselves, while the minor leagues were able to be loaned players under Major League control who were not quite ready to play in the Major Leagues.

The arrangement worked for both sides as the minor league teams were unlikely to be able to afford to keep the best players in the country playing in the small cities and towns where they were located, and Major Leagues teams were just as unlikely to be able to scout every amateur team that played in the small towns across the country. This system was colloquially known as organized baseball. The biggest challenge to the system occurred when a minor league believed it had the capability to retain its own players and the return of the loaned players from the major was not of equal value.

One of the largest challenges to this system was mounted by the Pacific Coast League (PCL) during the 1940s and 1950s. The PCL was in a unique position compared to the other minor leagues of the mid-twentieth century, as they enjoyed geographic separation from the rest of the professional baseball world and therefore had a large population of baseball fans all to themselves. Although the country's population was expanding westward at a rapid pace, the American and National Leagues had failed to match the shifting population trends, meaning that no Major League teams were located west of the Mississippi River. As a result PCL clubs were able to develop their own unique fan bases while other minor league clubs typically had to accept fans who had divided loyalties between the local minor league and the nearest Major League teams. By the 1940s, the PCL was made up of eight teams in seven cities representing all three

¹ "General History: The History & Function of Minor League Baseball," 2014, http://www.milb.com/milb/history/general_history.jsp.

of the Pacific Coast states, namely, the Los Angeles Angels, the Hollywood Stars, the San Diego Padres, the San Francisco Seals, the Oakland Oaks, the Sacramento Solons, the Portland Beavers and the Seattle Rainiers.

The growth of the West Coast's population led to civic leaders in the largest cities in the PCL to call for Major League teams in their cities, leading to a movement amongst PCL officials to become a third Major League in their own right in order to retain their largest and most valuable cities. The effort would eventually prove fruitless as the League's attempts would fail to gain traction and eventually the National League would come to occupy the PCL's two most valuable cities, Los Angeles and San Francisco, when the Brooklyn Dodgers and New York Giants relocated to their respective new West Coast homes. These twin moves have been generally regarded as the end of the PCL's most prominent era.

The PCL's challenge to the established supremacy of the American and National Leagues has made it a focus of writing on baseball history on numerous occasions since the League began its decline in the late 1950s. Through these works which began appearing as early as the 1970s, three major trends in analyzing the PCL's history emerge. The earliest writings focus only on the PCL as it relates to Major League Baseball (MLB) and the reasons why MLB was motivated to deny their applications to become their own Major League. This trend appeared first in the earliest analysis of the demise of the PCL appearing in 1974 and then recurred from the mid-1990s and early 2000s, and may have been motivated by critics of the contemporary economic state of MLB. The first historian to tackle the subject was Lance E. Davis with his work "Self-Regulation in Baseball 1909-71," which focuses primarily on the benefits the American and

National Leagues enjoyed by keeping the PCL as a minor league.² Davis's work appeared at a time when the business practices of MLB were being called into question for the controversial Player Reserve Clause, which was being challenged for restricting players from switching teams, thereby depressing their wages. Edward G. White follows Davis's line of thought in his 1996 book, *Creating the National Pastime: Baseball Transforms Itself 1903-1953*, which features the chapter, "The Enterprise 1923-1953."³ White's work focuses specifically on the harm the player draft did to the PCL's ability to retain players and develop further as an independent league. Like Davis, White tackled the subject not long after MLB's business practices were called into question, as they were published only two years after a players' strike prematurely ended the 1994 season. This strike prevented the World Series from being played for the first time in ninety years and calling into question the high player salaries and the high cost of operation of Major League teams.

The final two works through this lens of history both appeared in the early 2000s. Robert Frederick Burk's *Much More than a Game: Players, Owners, & American Baseball since 1921*, was released in 2001 and argues that the American and National Leagues intentionally set standards too high for the PCL to achieve in order to become its own Major League.⁴

Additionally, Mitchell J. Nathanson's article "The Irrelevance of Major League Baseball's Antitrust Exemption: A Historical Review," released in 2005 in the *Rutgers Law Review*, holds

² Lance E. Davis, "Self-Regulation in Baseball," in *Government and the Sports Business: Papers Prepared for a Conference of Experts, with an Introduction and Summary*, ed. Roger G. Noll (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1974), 349–86.

³ G. Edward White, "The Enterprise 1923-1953," in *Creating the National Pastime: Baseball Transforms Itself, 1903-1953* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996), 275–315.

⁴ Robert Frederick Burk, "Men in Gray Flannel Suits," in *Much More than a Game: Players, Owners, & American Baseball since 1921* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 108–41.

that the two Major Leagues intentionally worked to displace the minor league teams from Los Angeles so they could occupy the city themselves.⁵

The bulk of histories written about the PCL tend to take a nostalgic look at the league and began appearing in the 1990s. The nostalgia trend appeared as the last generation of fans to see the PCL at its peak in the 1940s and 1950s as children began to reach middle age, creating a natural impulse to look back at their childhoods. The trend was launched by the work of Paul J. Zingg and Mark D. Medeiros with their book, *Runs, Hits, and an Era: the Pacific Coast League, 1903-1958*, which was the first work to look at the League's history in and of itself.⁶ This concept would be followed in the next twenty years with books focused on two of the PCL's most prominent teams, first Richard Beverage's 2011 work, *The Los Angeles Angels of the Pacific Coast League: A History, 1903-1957*, which examines Los Angeles' leading team.⁷ Next, P.J. Dragseth's *The 1957 San Francisco Seals: End of an Era in the Pacific Coast League* discusses the final year of the League's San Francisco franchise.⁸ William Marshall follows the nostalgic trend in his chapter, "A Stepchild in Peril," appearing in *Baseball's Pivotal Era, 1945-1951*, which comments on the PCL's struggles to overcome the control of the American and National Leagues to rise above their minor league status.⁹ Michael Lomax furthers this discussion in his article *Not Quite Ready for Prime Time: The Pacific Coast League's Attempt to Become a Third Major League*, which focused the blame for the PCL's inability to achieve a Major League promotion on the League's failure to control the city of Los Angeles' independent

⁵ Mitchell J. Nathanson, "The Irrelevance of Major League Baseball's Antitrust Exemption: A Historical Review," *Rutgers Law Review* 58, no. 1 (2005): 1-43.

⁶ Paul J. Zingg and Mark D. Medeiros, *Runs, Hits, and an Era: The Pacific Coast League, 1903-58* (Urbana: Published for the Oakland Museum by the University of Illinois Press, 1994).

⁷ Richard E Beverage, *The Los Angeles Angels of the Pacific Coast League a History, 1903-1957* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co., 2011).

⁸ P. J. Dragseth, *The 1957 San Francisco Seals: End of an Era in the Pacific Coast League* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co., 2013).

⁹ William Marshall, "A Stepchild in Peril," in *Baseball's Pivotal Era, 1945-1951* (Lexington, Ky.: University Press of Kentucky, 1999), 259-62.

efforts to acquire their own Major League franchise.¹⁰ Charles D. Johnson echoes Lomax's approach in his 2009 analysis of the final years of the San Francisco Seals. "The Little Corporation: Professional Baseball in San Francisco," examines the disorganization in the Seals' ownership as the PCL's efforts to become a Major League gradually fell apart.¹¹ Dennis Snelling also examined the League's history in this way in his book, *The Greatest Minor League: A History of the Pacific Coast League, 1903-1957*, which examines the League's better days. The book also discusses the negative effects of news reporting focusing on the possibility of gaining Major League franchises as a factor in dividing and decreasing fan interest in the League as they attempted to make the final step toward the Major Leagues in the 1950s.¹²

The third perspective historians have taken in examining the PCL's history is to explore the role of the League in preparing the West Coast for the arrival of American and National League teams. Cary S. Henderson first explored this approach first explored in 1980. He recounts the efforts undertaken by the Brooklyn Dodgers' ownership to relocate to California to illustrate how attractive the Los Angeles market had become to existing Major League teams in his work "Los Angeles and the Dodger War."¹³ Steve Treder also explores how attractive the Los Angeles market was to MLB in his article, "Open Classification: The Pacific Coast League's Drive to Turn Major."¹⁴ Michael Lomax follows a similar path in his two articles, "Stadiums, Boosters, Politicians, and Major League Baseball's Reluctance to Expand," and "A Reshuffling Market: The Pacific Coast League's Efforts to Become a Third Major League and How the

¹⁰ Michael Lomax, "Not Quite Ready for Prime Time: The Pacific Coast League's Attempt to Become a Third Major League in Baseball," *Journal of the West* 47, no. 4 (Fall 2008): 14–25.

¹¹ Charles D. Johnson, "The Little Corporation: Professional Baseball in San Francisco, 1953-1955," *The Baseball Research Journal* 38, no. 1 (Summer 2009): 106–116.

¹² Dennis Snelling, *The Greatest Minor League a History of the Pacific Coast League, 1903-1957* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co., 2012).

¹³ Cary S. Henderson, "Los Angeles and the Dodger War, 1957-1962," *Southern California Quarterly* 62, no. 3 (October 1, 1980): 261–89, doi:10.2307/41170888.

¹⁴ Steve Treder, "Open Classification: The Pacific Coast League's Drive to Turn Major," *NINE: A Journal of Baseball History and Culture* 15, no. 1 (2006): 88–109, doi:10.1353/nin.2006.0059.

Braves Made Milwaukee Famous.”¹⁵ Treder and Lomax both point to the efforts by Los Angeles city officials to convince Major League franchises to relocate to the West Coast prior to the Dodgers’ and Giants’ relocations to California. Richard O. Davies and Fran Zimniuch authored the final two analyses on the subject with their respective works, *Sports in American Life*□: *A History* and *Baseball’s New Frontier: A History of Expansion, 1961-1998*; both works point to the success of the Dodgers in Los Angeles and the Giants in New York as proof that the West Coast was already nearly prepared for MLB by the time the National League authorized clubs to move there.¹⁶

This paper proposes that while the PCL had the capability to become the third Major League if the American and National Leagues had allowed it to do so, the attempt was ultimately undone not from outside tampering, but rather from a lack of cohesion in internal strategy. This thesis will examine newspaper articles from both Los Angeles and Seattle as well as the minutes from both PCL meetings and those of the Seattle Rainiers as well as testimony given before a 1951 House of Representatives Subcommittee hearing to illustrate the strategies taken by various club members during the League’s efforts to become a Major League. In doing so this work will attempt to provide a bridge between the purely nostalgic histories of the PCL and those that examine the League purely as an incubator for American and National League expansion. While other historians have looked at similar sources when crafting their histories, rarely have any done so in a way that looks at the interaction and differing viewpoints between clubs during the PCL’s

¹⁵ Michael Lomax, “Stadiums, Boosters, Politicians and Major League Baseball’s Reluctance to Expand: An Exploration of Post-Second World War US Trends,” *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 25, no. 11 (2008): 1511–1528, doi:10.1080/09523360802299260; Michael Lomax, “A Reshuffling Market: The Pacific Coast League’s Efforts to Become a Third Major League and How the Braves Made Milwaukee Famous,” in *Northeast Popular Culture Association*, 2012, <http://fisherpub.sjfc.edu/nepca/conference/2012/55>.

¹⁶ Richard O. Davies, *Sports in American Life*□: *A History*, 2nd ed. (Hoboken: Wiley, 2011), 232-237, <http://www.washington.ebib.com.offcampus.lib.washington.edu/patron/FullRecord.aspx?p=817330>; Fran Zimniuch, *Baseball’s New Frontier*□: *A History of Expansion, 1961-1998* (Lincoln: UNP - Nebraska Paperback, 2013).

most pivotal period in the late 1940s and early 1950s as they tried to become the third Major League.

Chiefly, the differences in strategy undertaken by the PCL's three largest member cities, Los Angeles, San Francisco and Seattle, provided an excuse for the existing Major Leagues to deny or ignore the PCL's applications for promotion or reclassification. If Los Angeles had not looked outside the PCL to fulfill its Major League ambitions, if San Francisco had been able to convince its fellow league members to join with them in the needed spending spree to make the final case that the PCL was worthy, or if Seattle had agreed to spend and expand its stadium, the final result of the League's applications may have been different. If these three cities had been able to agree on a strategy, then the pressure applied to the Major Leagues by Congress may have been enough for them to grow into a Major League in their own right and have protected their separate West Coast baseball identity. The fatal problem in the League's attempt to become the third Major League was that the three cities that had the capacity to lead their league into a new era were unable to coordinate amongst themselves.

Los Angeles

By 1941 Los Angeles had blossomed into a major American city, having seen its population grow from 319,198 in 1910 to a robust 1,504,277 by 1940.¹⁷ Following the area's rapid growth, Los Angeles's city leaders wanted their city to be seen as a first-rate city on par with its more established Eastern rivals, not as a distant outpost from true American society. Among the items of the agenda of the city's boosters was the acquisition of a MLB team, which they hoped would help to erase any doubt that their domain had risen above any second-class

¹⁷ "General Population By City Los Angeles County, 1910 - 1950," *Los Angeles Almanac*, accessed November 3, 2014, <http://www.laalmanac.com/population/po26.htm>.

designation older American cities could cast upon it, and leave behind their minor league status for good.

To this end, in 1941 interests acting on behalf of the city began to negotiate with the owner of the St. Louis Browns, Donald Lee Barnes, to relocate the franchise to Los Angeles for the 1942 season, a move that seemed imminent until the bombing of Pearl Harbor disrupted the American League's scheduled December 7, 1941 vote.¹⁸ The sudden threat of the potential loss of the Los Angeles market stunned the directors of the PCL into action. As the nation dealt with the reality of the Second World War, the PCL office was laying the ground work for a more ambitious plan, one that they hoped would protect them from losing their most populous market and launch the league into a more prominent position.

As early as December 1944, the PCL Directors authorized League President, Clarence Rowland, to begin applying to the American and National Leagues for recognition as their own Major League.¹⁹ As part of the directive to Rowland, the League Directors agreed not to sell or transfer their clubs or the right to operate in their cities to American or National League interests. The only hold out to this agreement were the Los Angeles Angels.²⁰ The Angels had compelling reasons to reject the motion to bind the league members together for the cause of promotion: first, Los Angeles was the largest market in the league and thus was a more attractive destination for existing Major League franchises; second, Angels' owner Charles Wrigley also owned the Chicago Cubs of the National League and stood to receive significant compensation from any

¹⁸ Kevin Modest, "History of a Different Hue Before Pearl Harbor, St. Louis Browns were L.A.-Bound," *Los Angeles Daily News*, December 7, 2001. The Free Library. <http://www.thefreelibrary.com/HISTORY+OF+A+DIFFERENT+HUE+BEFORE+PEARL+HARBOR%2c+ST.+LOUIS+BROWNS+WERE...-a080647959>.

¹⁹ "Minutes of Meeting of Pacific Coast League Board of Directors" (Statler Hotel, Buffalo, NY, December 6, 1944), MS 4031 Box 2 Folder 6, Property of Dick Dobbins Collection, California Historical Society (hereafter referred to as Dobbins Collection).

²⁰ Ibid.

transfer of his territorial rights to a Major League club, including ownership of other minor league franchises and their territorial rights as well as cash considerations. While Wrigley would remain publically supportive of the league's big league efforts, his club's vote continued to suggest they were less than fully committed.²¹ Finally, Los Angeles had already shown the ability to attract a Major League team on its own merits, with game attendance already rivaling that of some Major League teams, and did not want to be constricted by the efforts of the weaker PCL markets in their labors to become a Major League city.²²

The PCL Directors would again vote for consideration as a Major League in December 1945 with a goal to be recognized as an equal league to the American and National Leagues by the 1946 season, but once again the Angels were the lone holdout, with their representative Don Stewart, stating directly in the meeting that they no longer considered their territory bound to the decisions of the PCL.²³ Despite Los Angeles' lack of commitment, League officials were optimistic about their chances.²⁴ This declaration meant that the Angels and Los Angeles felt they were free to secure an existing Major League franchise on their own without consideration for the efforts of the PCL's successes or failures. This put Los Angeles in the prime position to lobby for a team on their own while still being a party to the PCL's promotion efforts if they

²¹ Al Wolf, "Wrigley Favors Coast Major Loop: Owner of Cubs and Angels Feels Big-Time Baseball Should Expand," *Los Angeles Times (1923-Current File)*, October 25, 1946, <http://search.proquest.com.offcampus.lib.washington.edu/hnplatimes/docview/165695532/abstract/421C2BAE9C3541BFPQ/104?accountid=14784>.

²² "Los Angeles Gate Surpasses Major Loop Attendances," *Los Angeles Times (1923-Current File)*, April 18, 1946, <http://search.proquest.com.offcampus.lib.washington.edu/hnplatimes/docview/165671972/citation/421C2BAE9C3541BFPQ/468?accountid=14784>.

²³ "Minutes of Adjourned Session of Annual Meeting of Board of Directors of PCL" (Deshler-Wallick Hotel, Columbus, OH, December 4, 1945), MS4031 Box 2 Folder 6, Dobbins Collection.

²⁴ Al Wolf, "Coast Loop Will Go Major Soon---Rowland," *Los Angeles Times (1923-Current File)*, January 6, 1946, <http://search.proquest.com.offcampus.lib.washington.edu/hnplatimes/docview/165649790/abstract/421C2BAE9C3541BFPQ/635?accountid=14784>.

proved successful. Los Angeles' independent position would remain a favorable one as the League's initial application was rejected.²⁵

The PCL would continue to agitate the American and National Leagues to be considered a Major League for the remainder of the 1940s.²⁶ The established Major Leagues, however, consistently turned a deaf ear toward the PCL's efforts, eventually drawing the interest of Congress.²⁷ Instead, the Commissioner of Baseball's Office authorized committees to travel to the coast and investigate the possibility of a Pacific Coast Major League, while dodging questions from anxious civic groups hopeful for their own Major League.²⁸ As time passed, it became clearer that the power brokers in the American and National Leagues were unwilling to share their power with an upstart PCL.²⁹

The House Subcommittee on Monopoly took an interest in the lack of expansion in MLB. Until the 1950s, MLB was located only in the cities that were seen as being major American cities in the first decade of the twentieth century. Congress saw the lack of change in the locations of MLB to be inconsistent with the changing shape of the population of the country and

²⁵ Al Wolf, "Pacific Coast's Bid For Major Status Fails: Territorial Protection Refused," *Los Angeles Times (1923-Current File)*, December 7, 1946, <http://search.proquest.com.offcampus.lib.washington.edu/hnplatimes/docview/165723481/abstract/421C2BAE9C3541BFPO/32?accountid=14784>.

²⁶ Al Wolf, "P.C.L. Presses for Major Rating: Representatives Hold Advance Meeting to Adopt Resolution," *Los Angeles Times (1923-Current File)*, December 3, 1946, <http://search.proquest.com.offcampus.lib.washington.edu/hnplatimes/docview/165721391/abstract/421C2BAE9C3541BFPO/42?accountid=14784>.

²⁷ Al Wolf, "Rickey Says Major Ball for Coast Long Way Off," *Los Angeles Times (1923-Current File)*, December 6, 1946, <http://search.proquest.com.offcampus.lib.washington.edu/hnplatimes/docview/165754292/abstract/421C2BAE9C3541BFPO/33?accountid=14784>.

²⁸ Al Wolf, "Chandler Ducks Talk of Third Big League Here," *Los Angeles Times (1923-Current File)*, July 21, 1946, <http://search.proquest.com.offcampus.lib.washington.edu/hnplatimes/docview/165681948/abstract/C3F78F678DFF48E8PQ/3?accountid=14784>.

²⁹ Paul Zimmerman, "Sportscrips," *Los Angeles Times (1923-Current File)*, July 24, 1946, <http://search.proquest.com.offcampus.lib.washington.edu/hnplatimes/docview/165677034/abstract/421C2BAE9C3541BFPO/302?accountid=14784>.

began to question the use of its monopoly power in restricting expansion or relocation into new markets.³⁰

The PCL saw the hearings convened by the Subcommittee in 1951 as a prime opportunity to state their case for promotion. In the eyes of the PCL Directors they finally had a chance to plead their case to the nation that the West Coast was equally deserving of MLB as the East Coast and the Midwest. While the hearings did not achieve the PCL's intended result, they did begin to loosen the traditional markets' grip on baseball, paving the way for the Boston Braves to relocate to Milwaukee.³¹ Despite surviving another PCL challenge to their supremacy, the Major Leagues received a clear message from the Subcommittee, give the West Coast a fair chance to gain Major League representation or face Congressional regulation. As a result, when the PCL once again applied for consideration to be promoted, they received a response they seemed to give them hope. For the first time, the Coast League received a set of guidelines to become a Major League.³²

San Francisco

Now with the requirements for promotion to Major League status clearly laid before the PCL, the teams representing its three most populous cities took three different approaches to the prospect of the League's elevation. The reaction of the cities, Los Angeles, San Francisco and Seattle, were key to any hope the PCL had of becoming the third Major League as each

³⁰ US Congress, House of Representatives, *Study of Monopoly Power. Part 6: Organized Baseball: Hearing Before the Subcommittee on Monopoly Power, Committee of the Judiciary*. 82nd Cong, 1st Sess. Jul. 30 - Aug. 1, 3, 6-8, 10, Oct. 15-19, 22-24, 1951, [HTTP://congressional.proquest.com.offcampus.lib.washington.edu/congressional/docview/t29.d30.hrg-1951-hjh-0016?accountid=14784](http://congressional.proquest.com.offcampus.lib.washington.edu/congressional/docview/t29.d30.hrg-1951-hjh-0016?accountid=14784).

³¹ Lomax, "A Reshuffling Market," 23-25.

³² "Major League Plan Would Assist Pcl," *Los Angeles Times (1923-Current File)*, November 15, 1951, <http://search.proquest.com.offcampus.lib.washington.edu/hnplatimes/docview/166308462/abstract/3977E21DE24C426BPQ/22?accountid=14784>.

represented a large distinct regional base as well as being the three largest cities in the league. San Francisco may have had the most to lose, falling only second to Los Angeles in total population with 634,536 residents as of 1940, nearly a million less than that of its Southern California counterpart.³³ This population difference made it difficult for San Francisco to attract an existing Major League team on its own while still being large enough to dwarf the population of the next largest city in the PCL. This knowledge likely played into the thinking of San Francisco Seals owner, Paul Fagan, in becoming the most bullish and committed of the PCL owners toward Major League promotion. Fagan's optimism was shared by League President, Clarence Rowland, who believed that the League's attributes were too impressive to be denied forever.³⁴ As early as 1947, Fagan was willing to accept the suggestion of the Major League's Commissioner's Office that each of the PCL franchises should increase their spending to prove they were able to sustain the increased costs of operating on a Major League budget as compared to a minor league budget, while many of the smaller franchises expressed reservations over the proposal.³⁵

Fagan was also a key proponent in developing a middle step between the PCL's long established "AAA" designation and outright Major League promotion.³⁶ In order to help convince the Major Leagues they were worthy, the PCL proposed the concept of an "Open" designation, which would allow teams to protect their players from being drafted into the Majors for a longer period of time and allow increased opportunities to purchase players from lower

³³ "San Francisco County 1860-1940 Census Data," *Bay Area Census*, accessed November 5, 2014, <http://www.bayareacensus.ca.gov/counties/SanFranciscoCounty40.htm>.

³⁴ Al Wolf, "Rowland Gains in Major Drive," *Los Angeles Times (1923-Current File)*, October 11, 1946, <http://search.proquest.com/offcampus.lib.washington.edu/hnplatimes/docview/165717099/abstract/421C2BAE9C3541BFQ/142?accountid=14784>.

³⁵ "Minutes of the Special Meeting of the PCL Board of Directors" (St Francis Hotel San Francisco, CA, September 1, 1947), MS 4031/16 Box 2 Folder 7, Dobbins Collection.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

levels themselves. The Open proposal fit nicely with Fagan's goals as it suggested that PCL clubs raise the minimum player salary to a similar level of the Major Leagues, thus proving the PCL clubs were capable of supporting the higher payrolls, which they would be required to meet if they ever did become the third Major League. In return the PCL requested that the American and National Leagues grant them a longer period of control over players before they were made available for the Major League draft and the freedom to move Major League players back to their former PCL teams without the risk of losing control of the players to other major or "AAA" teams.³⁷ The idea of the proposal was to exchange higher team expenditures for the ability to keep high-profile players in the PCL for as long as possible to increase fan interest on the West Coast. This in turn would lead to higher attendance, which would then require larger stadiums that would meet minimum Major League standards in all PCL markets. MLB, however, was unwilling to forgo the ability to acquire talent at cheap rates before players' abilities began to erode and ignored the idea of even incremental elevation for the PCL until pressured by Congress to expand their territories.

The Seals would eventually also strive to meet the Major Leagues' demands for larger stadiums by expanding the seating capacity at their ball, Seals Stadium in 1946. The expansion of the stadium was so successful that it would eventually host the rechristened San Francisco Giants for their first two seasons after relocating from New York in the late 1950s. As a means toward making the PCL a more likely candidate for elevation, it however was unsuccessful. Instead of leading a charge for ambitious owners to renovate and expand their own stadiums, Fagan's attempt stood alone among PCL owners and eventually led to significant financial losses, forcing him to sell the team in 1953.

³⁷ Ibid.

Following the collapse of the Fagan ownership, the Seals' position as a financial powerhouse within the PCL quickly faded. No longer was the team able to hold onto its premium players for as long, nor were they able to acquire the more expensive veteran players which they had relied on during the Fagan years. Finally, the Seals were forced to accept financial assistance from the Boston Red Sox, becoming an official affiliate of the American League team, which ended any ambition the franchise had for PCL elevation.

Seattle

As the PCL Operators in San Francisco pursued their aggressive strategy for PCL elevation, the majority of the league followed a more conservative strategy. This strategy was evident in the actions and attitudes of the Seattle Rainiers' owners. By 1940, Seattle had grown to become the third largest city in the league, behind Los Angeles and San Francisco. But while the two leading cities enjoyed a large gap between themselves and their fellow West Coast cities, Seattle had only slightly 60,000 more residents than its closest rival, Portland.³⁸ Seattle also only had slightly more than half the population of San Francisco, 634,536 to 368,302.³⁹ As such, the realities that faced the Rainiers were a closer match for the rank and file of the PCL, for Seattle was a growing city, but had not reached a point where it could command the attention of the traditional Eastern markets on its own.

It is therefore telling that while the Seals favored an aggressive and expensive campaign to make the PCL's case as a third Major League, the Rainiers embraced a much more conservative course. This would allow the Rainiers to benefit if they happened to gain Major League status, but would not hinder their operations as a minor league operation if they did not.

³⁸ U.S. Bureau of the Census, "Population of the 100 Largest Urban Places: 1940," *United States Census Bureau*, June 15, 1998, <https://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0027/tab17.txt>.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

In fact, while Los Angeles and San Francisco exhibited great enthusiasm at Major League possibilities, Seattle expressed a much more cautious tone at the news of the attempt.⁴⁰ The attitude of Seattle owner Emil Sick began to reveal itself at the same League meeting where Fagan began to push for the heavy spending option. Sick declared his opposition to any measures that were potentially harmful to any PCL member.⁴¹ While Sick's declaration did not at first clearly point to opposition to any Major League efforts on the PCL's behalf, it certainly signaled a reluctance to make any moves that would leave behind the smaller clubs within the League, which points to a reluctance to spend any more on the effort than absolutely necessary.⁴²

Sick's position would be clarified by his actions during the Rainiers' internal meetings in the months following the presentation of Fagan's ambitions. In November 1946, after the conclusion of the season where the Seals had unveiled their expanded capacity stadium in hopes of advancing their case as a Major League city, Sick and his board only approved funds for the repairs of the existing seating at their own ballpark, Sick's Stadium.⁴³ The lack of importance the prospect of promotion held for the Seattle club was further expressed as the minutes of the November stockholders' meeting make only a passing references to an update from a PCL lawyer about the League's Major League application, with no detail or enthusiasm for the matter

⁴⁰ Alex Shults, "From the Scorebook," *Seattle Daily Times*, February 16, 1946, sec. Sports, America's Historical Newspapers, http://infoweb.newsbank.com.offcampus.lib.washington.edu/iw-search/we/HistArchive/?p_product=EANX&p_theme=ahnp&p_nbid=K4EB50FJMTQwMTkxNjQwOC4xNTUwODoxOjEzOjEyOC45NS4xMDQuNjY&p_action=doc&s_lastnonissuequeryname=9&d_viewref=search&p_queryname=9&p_docnum=4&p_docref=v2:127D718D1E33F961@EANX-12A7BA1865449654@2431868-12A7B73DD5562C75@6-12A8BD1F27DDE425@.

⁴¹ "Minutes of the Special Meeting of the PCL Board of Directors."

⁴² Alex Shults, "From the Scorebook," *Seattle Daily Times*, March 25, 1946, America's Historical Newspapers, http://infoweb.newsbank.com.offcampus.lib.washington.edu/iw-search/we/HistArchive/?p_product=EANX&p_theme=ahnp&p_nbid=R59A5DUWMTQwMTc2NDc5NC4zMDAwNjoxOjEzOjEyOC45NS4xMDQuNjY&p_action=doc&s_lastnonissuequeryname=8&d_viewref=search&p_queryname=8&p_docnum=55&p_docref=v2:127D718D1E33F961@EANX-12A7F76D45361083@2431905-12A7F5805E9C1474@14-12A83181F9BB94F4@.

⁴³ "Seattle Rainiers' 1947 Special Meeting of the Board of Directors" (300 Airport Way Seattle, WA, November 24, 1947), MSSC 139 Box 2 Folder 5, P 138, Washington State Historical Society Collections (hereafter referred to as WSHS).

being recorded.⁴⁴ While city and team officials in Los Angeles and San Francisco were openly jockeying and agitating to get the attention of either current Major League teams or advance the chances of promoting the PCL as a whole, Seattle was more than willing to accept a wait-and-see approach, but was not willing to risk any major spending in hopes of catching the eyes of the Majors.

Seattle's caution continued even as the Major Leagues finally seemed to be opening a door to the PCL's ambitions. Facing increased scrutiny from Congress in 1951, the Majors offered the PCL a set of guidelines to meet if they wished to be worthy of becoming the third Major League. The guidelines emphasized salaries paid to players, city population, average fan attendance, and, importantly, the seating capacity of the teams' stadiums. The Rainiers responded to the news the Seals, the PCL head office and the city of Los Angeles had been waiting for since the mid-1940s by explicitly deciding to spend money on Sick's Stadium for repair, not the stadium improvements necessary to meet the conditions set forth by the Major Leagues.⁴⁵

The Seattle position was becoming clear; the Major Leagues would have to come to them. They would not risk spending the extra money to declare a need to come to the Majors. This position may not have helped the League's promotion chances, but may have been the most reasonable one. Though Los Angeles and San Francisco may have had the resources to take the

⁴⁴ "Seattle Rainiers' Stockholders' Meeting" (300 Airport Way Seattle, WA, November 24, 1947), MSSC 139 Box 2 Folder 6, 173, WSHS.

⁴⁵ "Seattle Rainiers Board of Directors Special Meeting" (300 Airport Way Seattle, WA, November 26, 1951), MSSC 139 Box 3 Folder 7, p 359-360, Washington State Historical Society Collections.

extra risk on a Major League bid, the smaller league cities may have struggled to meet Major League standards as described by the American and National Leagues.⁴⁶

As the 1950s wore on and it became increasingly clear that the likelihood of the PCL becoming the Pacific Coast Major League was faint at best, the Rainiers did not fight against the coming invasion of the National League into the PCL's territory. By late 1957, the relocations of the Dodgers and Giants to Los Angeles and San Francisco respectively seemed to be a fait accompli. Instead of fighting for the continued supremacy of the PCL as the best baseball on the West Coast, Seattle began to discuss what financial compensation they were due for the invasion. In a November 1957, meeting Sick and the Rainiers' Advisory Board were informed by legal counsel that they were entitled to compensation for the loss of the profitable Los Angeles and San Francisco markets as PCL members with Sick, concluding simply that the PCL would, "have to live with baseball people," and would only seek legal action when, "seriously damaged by reason of said Major League action."⁴⁷

Seattle's defeatist attitude toward PCL promotion may have been the most realistic one but the team also played a key role in limiting the potential of the movement before it became a realistic possibility. Had Seattle been a rallying force for the smaller market teams, perhaps other cities could have stood beside Los Angeles and San Francisco and found a way to extend the PCL's lifespan as the best baseball played west of the Mississippi River.

Congressional Pressure

⁴⁶ "New Proposal Dims PCL's Major Hopes: Stumbling Blocks Placed in Path of Individual Cities," *Los Angeles Times (1923-Current File)*, November 29, 1951, <http://search.proquest.com/offcampus.lib.washington.edu/hnplatimes/docview/166263077/abstract/6DA4383DDD414F0CPQ/1?accountid=14784>.

⁴⁷ "Third Meeting of the Advisory Board of the Seattle Rainiers Baseball Club Division of Sick's Rainier Brewing Company" (300 Airport Way Seattle, WA, September 16, 1957), MSSC 139 Box 5, Folder 22, p 10, WSHS.

The questions of the business practices of professional baseball led to a series of hearings called by the U.S. House of Representatives Subcommittee on Monopoly Power in 1951. These hearings were motivated by the proposal of three bills in the House of Representatives which called for organized professional baseball to be exempted from federal anti-trust laws.⁴⁸ Chaired by Representative Emmanuel Celler of New York, the hearings called into question the way the Major Leagues had responded to the PCL's requests to become a third Major League, among other things. Celler questioned organized baseball's ability to govern itself, and considered whether to formally grant it an anti-trust exemption as the sport had been operating under a de facto exemption since the 1910s.

Organized baseball in the early 1950s was facing an increased amount of scrutiny on a few key issues, "the reserve clause, the farm system, the powers of the high Commissioner, franchises and draft problems, and the geographical distribution of the clubs."⁴⁹ The reserve clause allowed teams to reverse the "rights" to a player until they chose to either trade or terminate the player, which artificially allowed teams to control player salaries as players were unable to market their skills to the highest bidder.⁵⁰ The farm system and the draft both related to the control and limits thereof Major League clubs were allowed to exhibit on their minor league counter parts. The powers of the Commissioner referred to the wide ranging executive powers granted allowed to Commissioner of Baseball. The change in law was debated by Congress as organized baseball found itself facing a number of legal challenges to their de facto anti-trust exemption and was seeking to make it a legal exemption to dodge these challenges.⁵¹ The PCL saw an opportunity in these hearings to argue that the Major Leagues were conspiring

⁴⁸ U.S. House of Representatives *Study of Monopoly Power. Part 6: Organized Baseball*, 1-2.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁵⁰ "Reserve Clause," *Baseball-Reference.com*, November 30, 2012, http://www.baseball-reference.com/bullpen/reserve_clause.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 2-4.

against them and that the threat of losing any anti-trust protection would be enough pressure to force them to grant the PCL Major League status.

The PCL's strategy was to raise concerns on two of the issues the Subcommittee was investigating, the draft system, which they felt unfairly deprived their teams of talent without reasonable compensation, and the location of teams. Among the concerns of the Subcommittee was the inability of MLB to adapt to the changing population trends of the United States, as the locations of American and National League franchises had remained unchanged since the 1910s even though the population of the nation had continued to expand westward. The second witness called before the Subcommittee was National League President, Ford C. Frick. Frick played a major role in the Major Leagues' consideration of the West Coast as a potential Major League territory. The National League President would endure heavy directed questioning on the failure of the American and National Leagues to expand their operations to the West Coast or accept the application of the PCL to become the third Major League. The first line of questioning directed to Frick on the subject related toward the practice in baseball of granting franchises territorial rights to their cities, which served to prevent new clubs from competing in a team's territory without permission. Frick maintained that the practice had no bearing on the possibility of spread of the MLB to the West Coast arguing that territorial rights were:

Nothing that prevent a new comer from operating in any city of his choosing. Nor is there any rule that forbids a change in classification on the part of a lower classification league either by changing existing Major League circuits or the addition of new Major Leagues.⁵²

Frick argued that it was the choice of the PCL not to become a Major League, having nothing to do with the decisions or authority of the American or National Leagues. Frick insisted he

⁵² Ibid., 29.

actually hoped for the establishment of a third Major League on the West Coast in the coming years, but that the League had yet to decide to take the steps necessary to fill that void.⁵³

The National League President's argument appeared to be at odds with the attitudes of PCL leaders, an issue about which Subcommittee members harshly questioned him. The Subcommittee first called to Frick's attention correspondence dating back as far as 1939 from Los Angeles civic leaders stating their readiness for a Major League team, as well as similar letters from similar groups representing San Francisco in the interim.⁵⁴ Frick admitted to taking no official action toward the petitions from West Coast civic groups, but did acknowledge the PCL's initial application to become the third Major League.⁵⁵ The National League President then opted to place the blame for the lack of expansion at the feet of the PCL itself, saying that the League had met with Major League officials in 1947, but they had opted to drop their application when they were informed of the costs necessary to operate on the Major League level, and had not reapplied in the following years.⁵⁶ When pressed by Chairman Celler, however, Frick was forced to admit that he attended a National League meeting in June of 1947 that adopted a resolution that, instead of addressing the PCL's request, recommended expanding the Major Leagues only by adding two teams at a time into the existing Major Leagues.⁵⁷ This recommendation raised the question of the Major Leagues' willingness to operate with the PCL's applications in good faith. Instead of deciding if the PCL's members were capable of operating at the level of Major League teams, they were in fact considering carving up the League's territory for their own benefit, whenever they decided they were ready to expand their membership.

⁵³ Ibid., 29.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 80-82.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 82-83.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 82-83.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 83.

Frick's ability to be impartial toward the Western cities was further called into question when a report he helped author describing the suspected ability of PCL member cities to support Major League franchises was entered into the record. The report was a product of a Major League exploratory committee's trip to the West Coast to investigate the PCL's application. The report found that of the PCL's seven member cities, only Sacramento and San Diego lacked the capacity to grow into Major League markets within the next few years.⁵⁸ Upon further testimony, Frick conceded that San Diego also had an opportunity to become a sufficient Major League city, leaving Sacramento as the only League member with which the President could find an insurmountable fault.⁵⁹ Frick was also forced to acknowledge that he was aware of continued PCL applications for either Major League promotion or the creation of a middle ground status between minor and Major Leagues after 1947, on which MLB had failed to act.

The National League President's dismissive attitude toward the PCL continued to be illustrated when Damon Miller, the Secretary and Business Manager for the San Francisco Seals, was called to give testimony on the PCL's attempts from the perspective of one of the leading PCL franchises. Miller testified that when the PCL first approached the Major Leagues about becoming the third Major League they were told to build their stadiums up to a Major League standard and then reapply.⁶⁰ The Seals franchise saw this request as impractical as they were unable to attract a larger fan base that would require a larger ballpark, while still being forced to surrender their best players and biggest box office draws to Major League franchises.⁶¹ Miller argued that in order for the Major Leagues to negotiate with the PCL in good faith they needed to

⁵⁸ Ibid., 87-89.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 99.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 403.

⁶¹ Ibid.

recognize that the Majors were receiving a larger benefit in keeping the PCL as a minor league than the PCL received from being held at that status.

From Miller's perspective, the only way for the PCL to have a chance to meet the Major Leagues' undefined standards for promotion was for the Majors to create a new designation with new privileges that would enable PCL teams to build themselves up to the standard of play necessary to be competitive at the Major League level. When questioned on the possibility of a middle ground between Majors and minor league status, Frick had ruled out that option, arguing that it would be unfair to the other minor leagues to grant the PCL an exceptional status, while at the same time admitting that the PCL was in an exceptional situation owing to its high population in a region with no competition from the existing Major Leagues.⁶²

Frick and Miller's testimony agreed on one issue, the PCL was involved in defeating its own application. Frick maintained the PCL voluntarily dropped its application when the League owners were shown balance sheets that indicated the cost of operating a Major League franchise.⁶³ By taking this attitude, Frick argued that the West Coast was ripe for future Major League inclusion, allowing the National League President to dodge any questions of intentional exclusion from the Subcommittee. Miller's testimony, meanwhile, excused the lack of action taken by the American and National Leagues on the PCL's application as the owners of the PCL teams had been unclear in their applications about what exactly they wanted from the bigger leagues.⁶⁴ Did they want to immediately become a Major League, did they want financial information regarding the cost needed to operate as a Major League, or did they want a new intermediate status, which would allow them to evolve into a Major League in time? Once again

⁶² Ibid., 90.

⁶³ Ibid., 85.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 403.

the PCL's inability to agree on whether they wanted to become their own Major League, join the Major League as individual markets, or find some middle ground between the Majors and the minors doomed the PCL to remain under the thumb of the American and National Leagues and eventually to have their most important cities carved away from them.

The Bigger Picture

By the middle of the twentieth century the nature of the United States was changing, the nation's population was shifting and the cultural dominance once found in the East was slowly fading. The rapidly growing film industry made Los Angeles and by extension California an exporter of culture. No longer was New York the sole predominant origin point for what the rest of the country would see as fashionable or popular. Technology also allowed California and the West Coast as a whole to rapidly expand in decades to sizes that had taken the East Coast the better part of two centuries. The presence of the railroad, and the Panama Canal starting in the late nineteenth century made travel to the Pacific Coast states much less daunting. It was no longer necessary to undertake a perilous overland journey that would last for months, or else a longer trip to sail around the whole of South America. Now it was possible to reach the furthest western points of the country in a matter of weeks, if not days, meaning that a trip to the West Coast need not be a one-way journey. It was now a vacation trip for an increasing number of Americans. The advent and popularization of commercial air travel cut the travel time between the coasts to a single day.

The ease of access to the coast led to a population boom in the West during twentieth century, which saw the Western states grow at twice the rate of the other regions of the country

in all but one decade between 1900 and 1960.⁶⁵ The need for additional labor on the West Coast by the defense industry during the 1940s, resulted in an influx of newcomers. By 1950, the Western states represented 13% of the United States' population, up from 5.4% of the population in 1900, and by far the fastest growing region of the country.⁶⁶

As the population shifted from East to West the public clamored for the same entertainment options offered back in the East, including baseball. While the PCL helped fill the void left by the Major Leagues on the West Coast, it still seemed a slight to the residents of the most prominent Western cities that the players of their beloved local teams were constantly ripe for the picking by the Majors suggesting that their cities were not as important as those in the lofty American and National Leagues.

The appetite for MLB in the West opened a door for the most attentive Major League owners, Walter O'Malley of the Dodgers and Horace Stoneham of the Giants. Neither owner necessarily wanted their teams to move from the profitable New York market, but allowed themselves to be swayed into looking elsewhere when city officials rejected demands to use New York public funds to help finance new stadiums to replace the ballparks the Giants and Dodgers had deemed outdated and crumbling.⁶⁷ Instead O'Malley and Stoneham were convinced by civic interests in Los Angeles and San Francisco, to relocate their franchises to the West Coast in exchange for promises of brand new, state of the art, and publically financed new stadiums.⁶⁸

This move launched a trend that continues into the modern day of professional sports, which sees an owner declare their stadium outdated and demand that the public spare no expense in building

⁶⁵ Frank Hobbs and Nicole Stoops, *Demographic Trends in the 20th Century: Census 2000 Special Reports* (US Census Bureau, November 2002), 20 <http://www.census.gov/prod/2002pubs/censr-4.pdf>.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 18-20.

⁶⁷ Davies, 232.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 232-235.

a brand new one, with all the best and most modern features ever dreamed of. If the local governments refuse to pay, the owner will seek out new ones and move their team to wherever they will be gifted a new stadium or arena.⁶⁹ Thus, in moving their teams from New York to California not only did O'Malley and Stoneham cause the collapse of the only minor league to ever challenge the supremacy of the Major Leagues, they also created a lasting precedent that saw professional sports demand corporate welfare for the right to make millions of dollars off an entertainment business.

Conclusion

The discord in strategy between the PCL's three leading cities, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Seattle, proved to be the League's undoing. Instead of banding together and leading the charge for the entire League becoming its own Major League, the three separate strategies of the Angels, Seals, and Rainiers arrested the League's forward momentum. This lack of cohesion eventually allowed the National League to steal away the PCL's two most important markets leaving the rest of the League behind. The Los Angeles Angels were content to stand pat and allow boosters to lobby the American and then the National Leagues to relocate to their city. The San Francisco Seals attempted to rally the League as a whole to raise spending and improve the ballparks across the League in order to capitalize on a moment of opportunity gained from the pressure applied to the existing Major Leagues by Congress and become their own Major League. This proposal was undercut by the Seattle Rainiers' unwillingness to make anything but necessary improvements to their facilities, feeling that any excess spending by the

⁶⁹ Ibid., 227-237.

franchises in cities that lacked the population base of Los Angeles and San Francisco would create undue risk for League members.

This inability to coordinate or agree on a strategy by the three leading League members allowed the Major Leagues to undercut the pressure applied by Congress in the hearings held by the U.S. House Subcommittee on the Study of Monopoly Power, just when it appeared that the Subcommittee was willing to press the baseball powers for real change in their organization. As a result, the Los Angeles and San Francisco markets remained open to invasion by National League teams in 1958, which caused what is generally considered the end of the PCL's most significant period. This turn of events leads to the question, what purpose the PCL was supposed to serve in baseball history? Was the PCL merely meant to prepare the West Coast for inclusion in the American and National Leagues? If so, it achieved its ultimate purpose and then naturally faded into history in the aftermath of the relocation of the Dodgers and Giants. Or, was the purpose of the League to chart its own course and allow the West Coast to create something as significant as the East Coast had done more than a half century earlier? By failing to create their own Major League, the PCL failed in this objective and missed the opportunity to establish a cultural institution in the world of sports the equal of its predecessors in the East.

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