

The 1955 MUTUAL

BASEBALL ALMANAC

By

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DOUBLEDAY & COMPANY, INC., Garden City, New York

land around his Southern California home and off season he raises avocados. When he's through with baseball he intends to go right on raising avocados. If his baseball success is any indication, it's safe to assume that in twenty years, Duke Snider will have become the avocado king of California.

THE CATCHER

By YOGI BERRA *of the New York Yankees*

I am not one of those guys who got into baseball easily. I had to work hard. I am not one of those guys who had natural ability. I had to learn.

Catching is very hard work and it took sweat for me to learn how to catch. But I am glad I worked hard and sweated. It has been worth it.

In St. Louis, where I was born, there is a neighborhood called The Hill. It is not a very rich neighborhood and it was there that I grew up. Joe Garagiola, who has been catching in the National League, grew up there, too. We played together and we were buddies.

Ever since I was a kid, I wanted to be a ballplayer. I left school early and I had to work at a lot of tough jobs, but I always wanted to play ball. Once I worked in a coal yard in St. Louis. I wrapped pieces of coal that they would sell. Sometimes I helped to deliver the coal, too. Whenever I could, I would sort of sneak out on the coal job and go play baseball. Then, I worked on a soda truck. You know the kind: it goes around delivering soft drinks. I worked in a shoe factory for a while as a tack-puller. I would pull out the tacks they used to hold the shoes together until the cement dried. I was a driller in the shoe factory later on.

I'm not complaining, but these jobs were pretty hard. Wanting to play ball like I did, only made it worse. It was hard to hold a job when you wanted to take off every afternoon in the summer and go out and play baseball and I didn't stay long at some of those jobs. My family was worried because they figured I should be working hard at the jobs. I wanted to work hard at learning how to be a baseball player. They understood when I told them how it was. What I should have done and didn't do was get more of an education. I didn't even go to high school. When my son gets old enough, I'm going to see that he goes to college.

It was better for me when I got signed by the Yankees, because then all I had to do was play ball. I had played on an American Legion team around St. Louis and I could always hit pretty hard.

What I mean about not having much natural ability is about catching. Anyway, the Yankees signed me for Kansas City for the 1943 season when I was only eighteen and I wasn't good enough for Kansas City. They sent me to Norfolk and I got paid around ninety bucks a month. I was a pro ballplayer then but there were a lot of things that made it tough. There was this business of getting to be a good catcher, like I say. And it was hard to live on the money I was getting paid. Back in St. Louis, the family never had too much money, but 90 bucks a month in Norfolk was real rough in 1943.

It was in the war and there were a lot of sailors and guys making good money in the shipyards and it was an expensive town to live in. So I was short of money a lot of the time. I didn't have a real great year, or anything, either. I hit a little more than .250, but I hit some long shots. It was pretty good for a kid of eighteen, but it wasn't great.

Then I went into the Navy and I was overseas and all, but around 1945 I got to playing ball in Connecticut and I was hitting pretty good and the Yankees heard about it so when I came out they put me on Newark. I hit fine there, .314, and I was going better than that for a long time. But I hit a slump toward the end and I got all mixed up and lost a lot of points. But after Newark was eliminated in the play-offs, I went up to Yankees and hit okay.

I was nervous about it, sure, but the hitting was okay. Catching was what bothered me. There's so much you have to do when you're catching and there's so much you have to know. So the next spring when I went to camp with the Yankees, Bucky Harris, who was the manager, decided that maybe I could be a pretty good outfielder. I played all over when I was a kid and the position wasn't all new to me. Still, I was used to the big fat mitt and they got Joe Medwick to show me how to handle a fielder's glove just right. It went pretty well but I guess I'm more a catcher than an outfielder.

Opening day in 1947 in Washington, I'm playing, and it was my first real big-league game. In '46, the season was pretty near over by the time I got up. But here I was in Washington with a big crowd and President Truman was there watching. So I was nervous, but I remember I got 4 hits.

Now that sounds like it was easy, but that was only the hitting. I had trouble throwing right when I was a catcher, and I had trouble making plays on some of the bad pitches, and sometimes I guess I called the wrong pitch because I didn't have much experience. In the outfield it was a little easier, but I didn't have much confidence in myself. Didn't have much? I didn't have any confidence. The way you get confidence is with experience and with doing a job well so that you know you can handle it. I was young and I wasn't sure.

But it was pretty much in the cards that I was going to catch. The outfield the Yankees had in 1947 was very good. There was Joe

DiMaggio in center field and Charlie Keller in left field and Tommy Henrich in right field. There wasn't much chance for a young guy like me to break in there. So mostly, when I played in 1947, I was a catcher and though I played a couple of games in the outfield in 1948, I was pretty sure that I'd end up behind the plate. So I knew I had to learn. I had to work on throwing to bases and calling pitches and I had to work at becoming a better receiver.

It was rugged in the 1947 World Series. I wasn't much at throwing to bases and the Dodgers had a lot of good base runners. They stole a lot on me and it got me worried and I didn't hit for much in the Series, probably because I was worried about all that stealing. They had me playing the outfield in the last couple of games, it was so bad.

Next spring, in '48, I knew I had to get better. How does it look, being a big-league catcher and having all those guys steal on you? The Yankees knew I had to get better and, let me tell you, that training in '48 was rough.

Every day in the drills before the exhibition games had started even, I had to catch. And they told me to be ready after each pitch, like I was going to throw down to second base and get some guy out stealing. They had a coach, Frank Crosetti, who was standing in the middle of the infield, and every so often after a pitch, Crow would yell: "There he goes." Then I'd have to throw down to second like there really was somebody stealing and it was in a game.

This was very hard work but I had to do it and I knew why. I had to become a big-league catcher since I was already a big-league hitter. Well, that spring I was better. I would have been a whole lot better, but I got hurt a couple of times. I went pretty well for a while that season behind the plate. Not real good, but pretty well. Sometime in August, though, after I had been going badly for a while, they moved me out to the outfield again. I played it for a while, but ever since 1948, I have been a catcher.

For that I've got to thank Bill Dickey. He was the man who helped me that next spring. He taught me a lot of things that he knew well because he had been such a great catcher himself. He moved me in closer to the hitter—I had been catching too far back and that had made it easier for runners to steal. He sort of went over everything I did and showed me what I was doing wrong. That was a rough spring, too, because there was a lot of hard work. But I was learning and I was learning pretty fast.

With Dickey teaching me, I still had to give it a lot of practice: throws down to second, foul pops, bad pitches, bunts, things like that. I practiced and it went better. The '49 season wasn't as good as it could have been, because I broke a thumb and was laid up, but the Series was something that made me happy. I didn't hit a lick, but we were playing the Dodgers and this time they didn't run wild. That gave

me confidence. Ever since then I think I've been improving and it's been a lot easier. But, believe me, learning how to catch was rough.

For anybody who wants to be a ballplayer there are things to learn. There aren't too many guys with a lot of natural ability who can do it the easy way. You have to want to be a ballplayer because there are times when learning what you have to learn gets you down. Some days it doesn't go well. If you want to be a ballplayer, you can stick it out.

It's important to go to school for as long as you can and to play ball as often as you can. Now I'm doing fine. I mean, the money is pretty good and my wife Carmen and me, we got a nice house over in New Jersey where we live. A lot of the Yankees live in New Jersey and it's pretty nice.

I still remember The Hill and how tough it was in St. Louis and I'm glad things worked out. But the thing you have to remember in baseball is that it is hard to get things to work out. You have to sweat.

Yogi Berra

Yogi Berra's given name is Lawrence but the brilliant Yankee catcher has been answering to "Yogi" since his boyhood. Someone gave him the nickname in St. Louis, and it has remained.

Berra's forte has been batting but he has developed into a good receiver. Twice he has won awards as the Most Valuable Player in the American League. Yogi is a hitter without any weakness. He has a penchant for swinging at bad pitches, which might be criticized but for the great number of times Yogi has golfed a bad pitch off his shoe tops into the stands. One baseball man watched Berra hit an outside pitch to left field and a high inside pitch, which made him fall away from home plate, down the line into right.

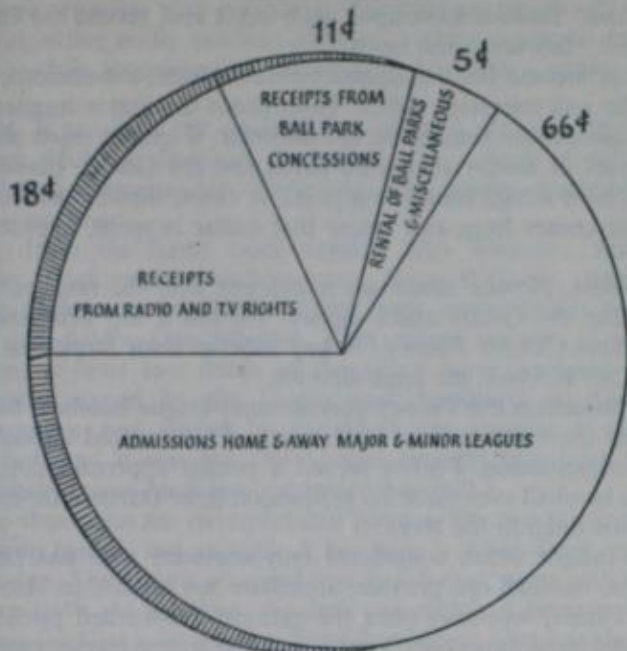
"I guess," the man said, "that the way to pitch to Yogi is to throw strikes."

Unfortunately for pitchers, Berra hits strikes, too. As a Yankee, his unpretentious good humor has endeared him to his teammates and to Manager Casey Stengel. There are chapters and chapters of "Yogi stories," most of them dealing with Berra's early struggles to master the English language. When given a host of gifts one night in St. Louis, Berra told the crowd assembled at the ball park that he wanted to thank "everyone who made this night necessary."

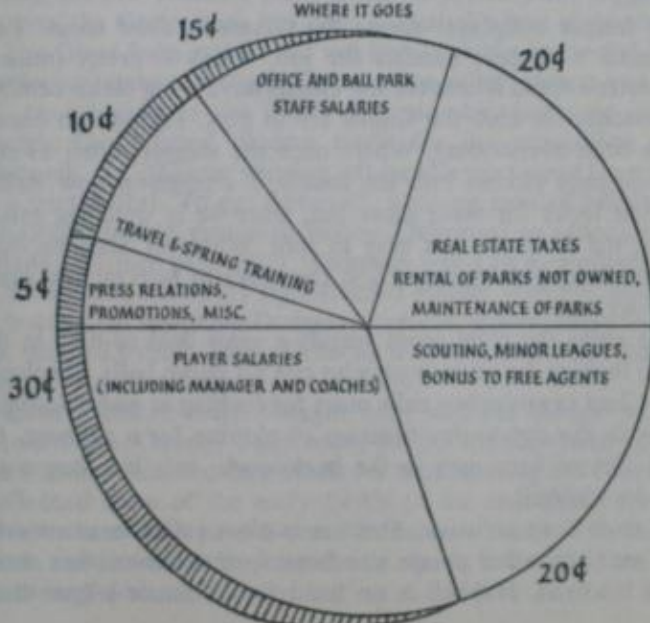
There used to be a general tendency to laugh at Berra, but the tendency has subsided somewhat in recent years. By his great work for the Yankees, Berra has boosted himself into the upper income brackets. There's nothing funny about that.

THE GIANT DOLLAR

WHERE IT COMES FROM

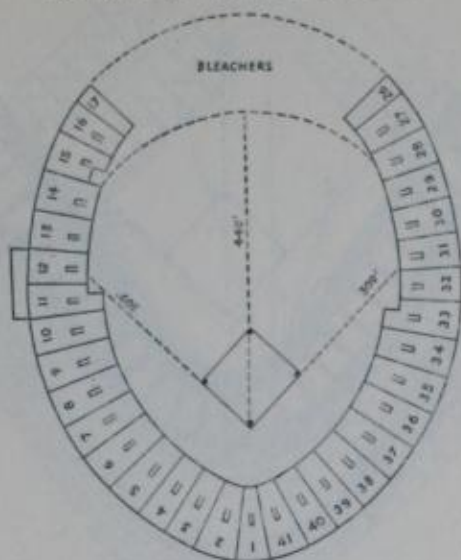


WHERE IT GOES

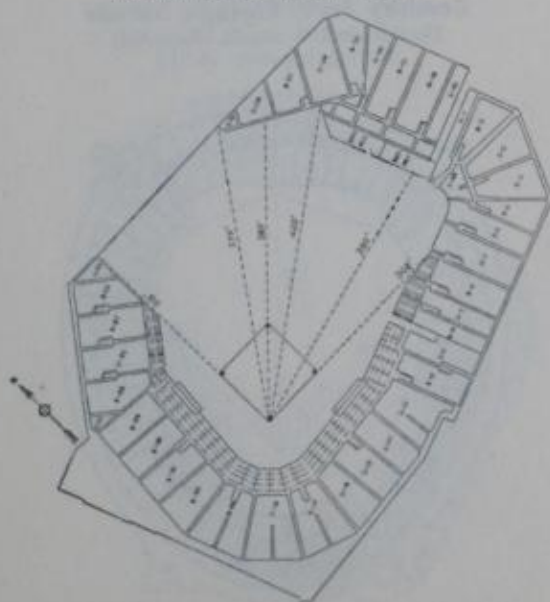


DOLLAR IS BROKEN DOWN ABOVE. AFTER BOTH ADMISSION AND PROFIT TAXES, IF ANY, HAVE BEEN TAKEN OUT.

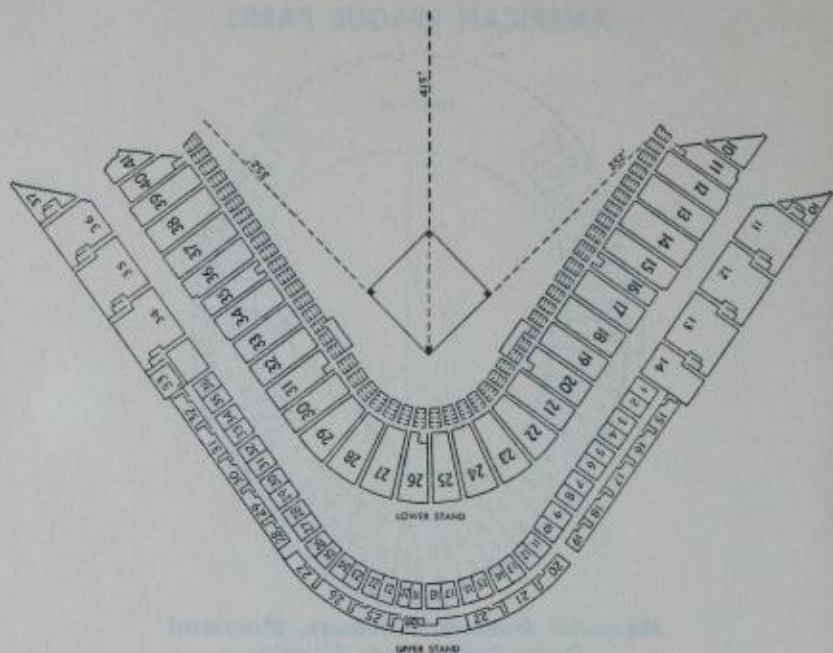
AMERICAN LEAGUE PARKS



Memorial Stadium, Baltimore, Maryland
Double-decked stands. Bleachers

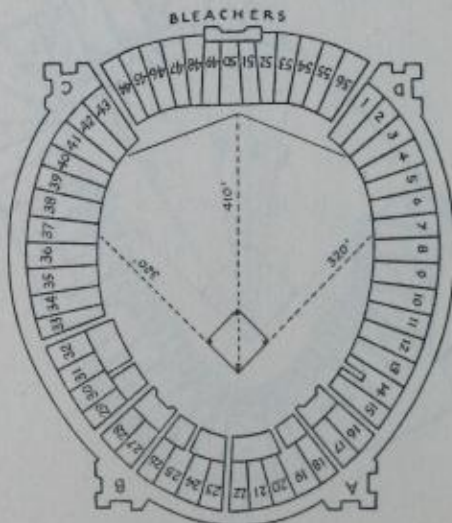


Fenway Park, Boston, Massachusetts
Double-decked stands. Bleachers
Seating capacity 34,822



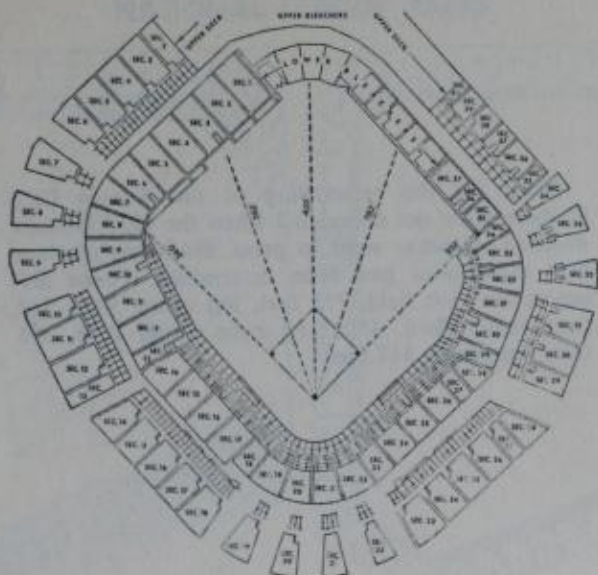
Comisky Park, Chicago, Illinois

Double-decked stands. Bleachers
Seating capacity 46,550

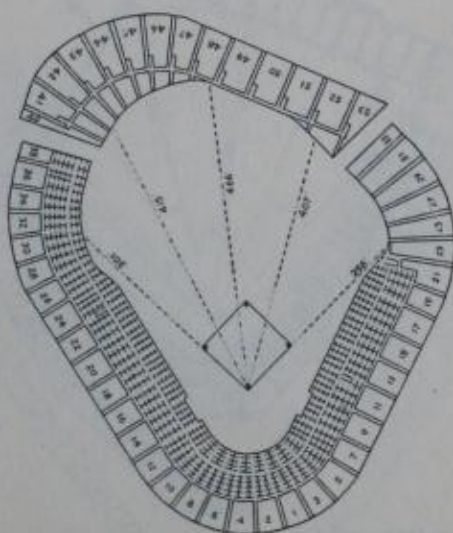


Municipal Stadium, Cleveland, Ohio

Double-decked stands. Bleachers
Seating capacity 73,500

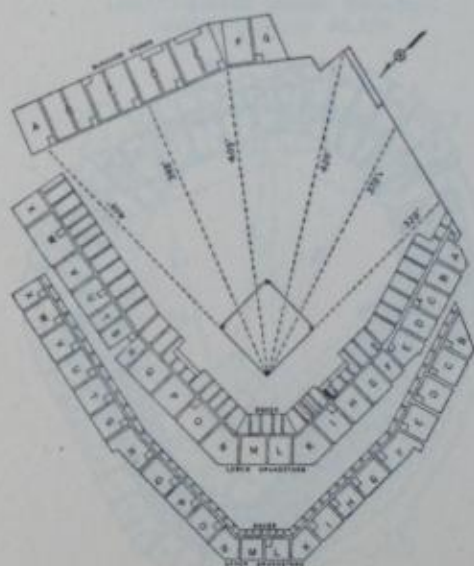


Briggs Stadium, Detroit, Michigan
 Double-decked stands. Bleachers
 Seating capacity 52,954



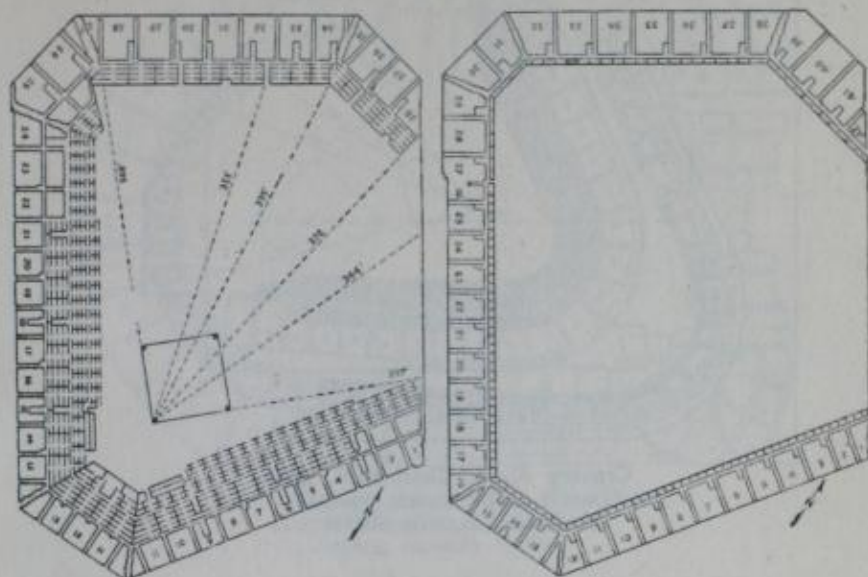
Yankee Stadium, New York, New York
 Triple-decked stands. Bleachers
 Seating capacity 67,000

Plans for the remodeling of the Kansas City Stadium were not completed when the *1955 Mutual Baseball Almanac* went to press. However, playing-field dimensions had been determined. Fence distances are: left field, 312 feet; left center field, 382 feet; center field, 450 feet; right center field, 395 feet; right field, 347 feet.

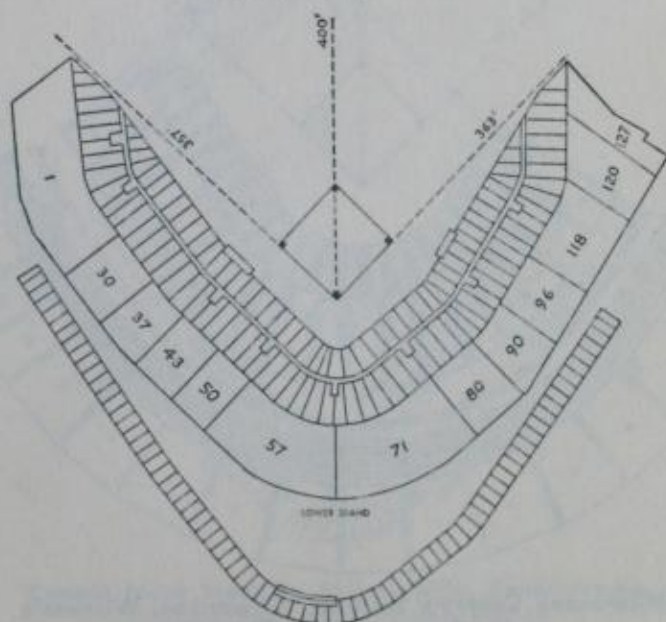


Griffith Stadium, Washington, D.C.
 Double-decked stands. Bleachers
 Seating capacity 27,523

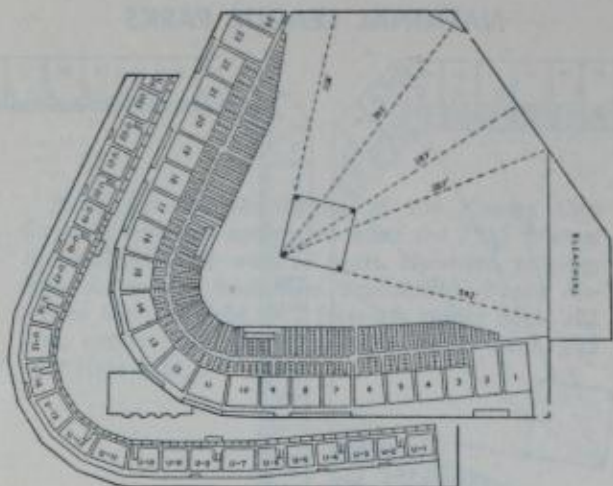
NATIONAL LEAGUE PARKS



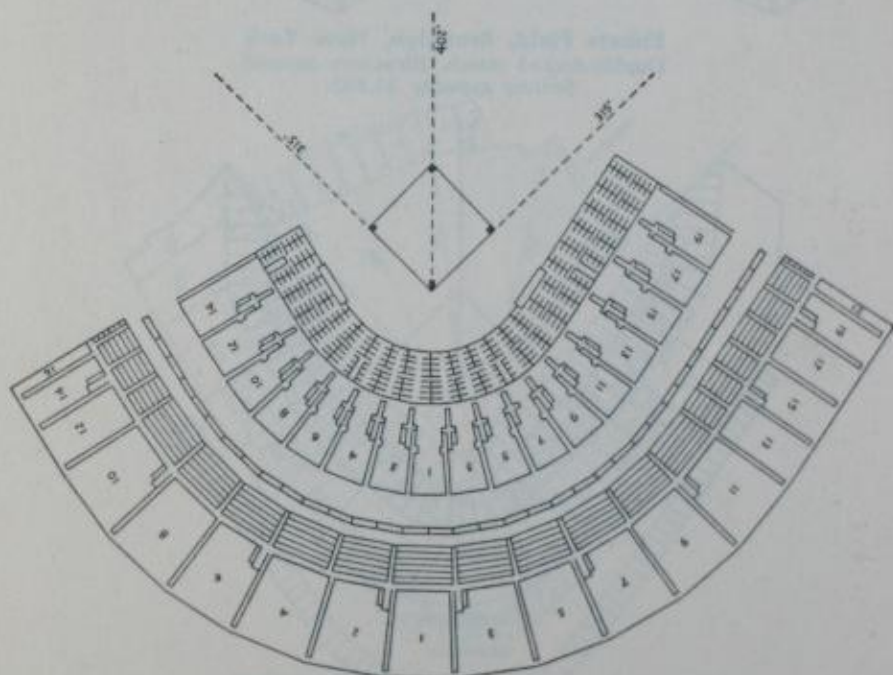
Ebbets Field, Brooklyn, New York
 Double-decked stands. Bleachers covered
 Seating capacity 31,902



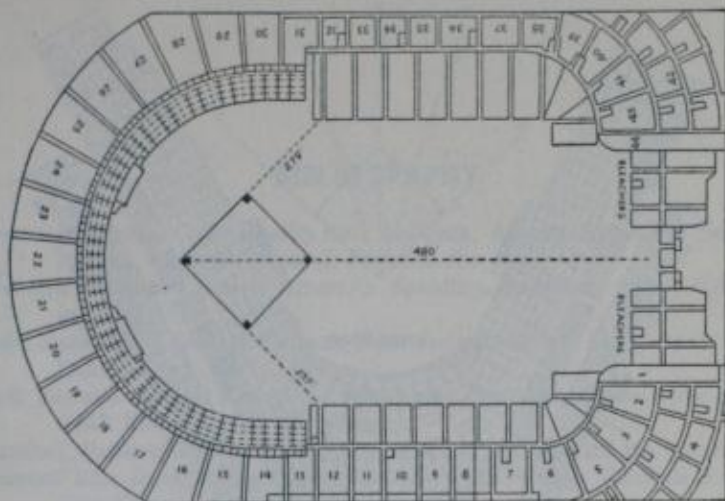
Wrigley Field, Chicago, Illinois
 Double-decked stands. Bleachers
 Seating capacity 36,755



Crosley Field, Cincinnati, Ohio
 Double-decked stands. Bleachers
 Seating capacity 30,000

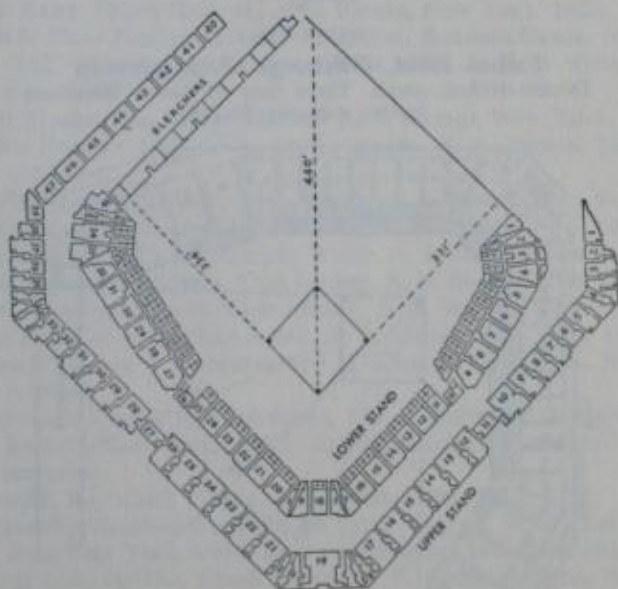


Milwaukee County's Stadium, Milwaukee, Wisconsin
 Double-decked stands. Bleachers



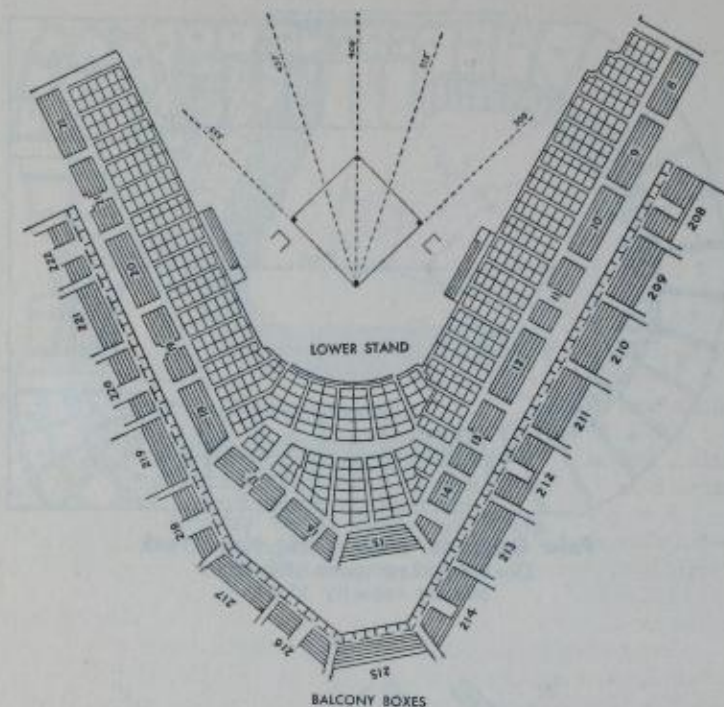
Polo Grounds, New York, New York

Double-decked stands. Bleachers
Seating capacity 55,000

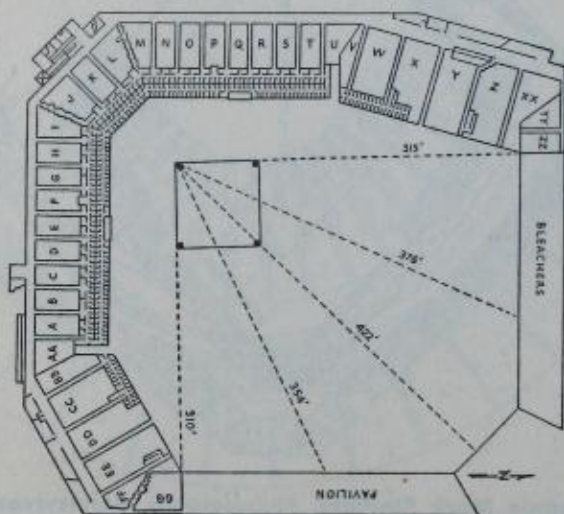


Connie Mack Stadium, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Double-decked stands. Bleachers covered
Seating capacity 33,223



Forbes Field, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
 Double-decked stands. Three tiers of boxes. Bleachers
 Seating capacity 34,249



Sportsman's Park, St. Louis, Missouri
 Double-decked stands. Pavilion covered. Bleachers
 Seating capacity 30,808