

How Fall Classic Shaped Cup

Epic 1912 World Series inspired baseball maven and hockey pioneer Lester Patrick to alter the Stanley Cup final format

BY ERIC ZWEIG

One hundred years ago, in October 1912, Lester Patrick came east from his home in Victoria, B.C. He was on a scouting mission for the Pacific Coast Hockey Association, the league he and his brother Frank formed the previous winter. Lester visited Winnipeg, Ottawa, Montreal, and Toronto looking for promising amateurs

The Red Sox and Giants were his inspiration

or pros yet to re-sign with their teams in the rival National Hockey Association. The PCHA raided NHA rosters the year before and there was plenty of bad blood between the leagues.

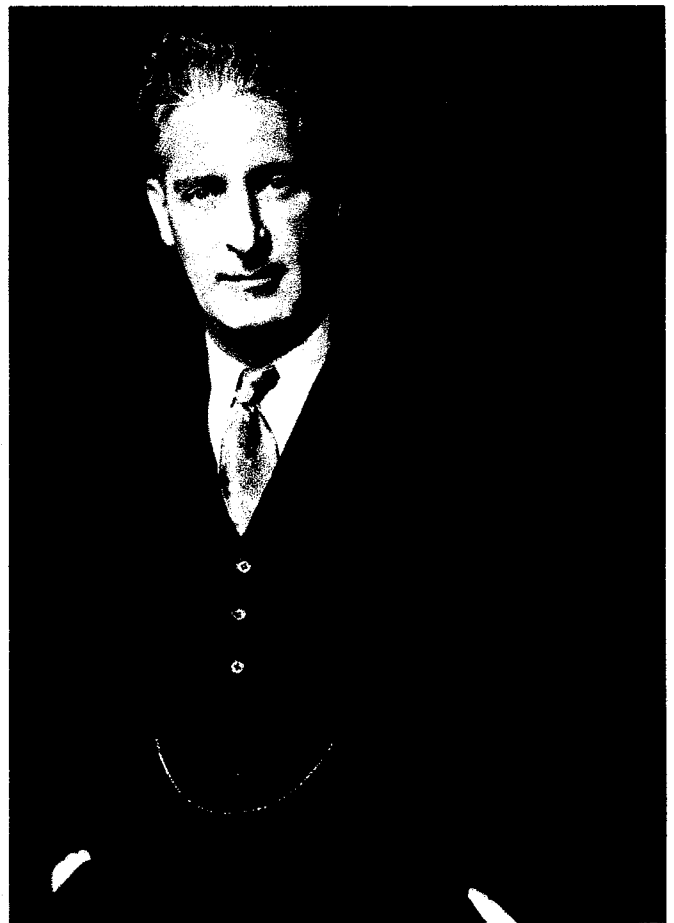
Lester Patrick was a hockey man, but he also loved baseball. Patrick once wrote, "It was all baseball" in the summertime while growing up in the city of Westmount in Montreal. He kept playing after moving out west in 1907. In his biography, *The Patricks: Hockey's Royal Family*, author Eric Whitehead relates the following from the *Nelson News* in 1909: "Lester Patrick, shortstop, singled

home the winning run yesterday as Nelson defeated the University of North Dakota 5-3. The single was Patrick's third hit of the game and the University of North Dakota's Bill Hennessey, who once played for the Baltimore Orioles in the National League, said the rangy shortstop was a fine pro prospect. He said he would so advise the Orioles, if Lester was interested."

By 1914, Patrick was a director with the Victoria Baseball Club.

Given how coverage dominated the sports pages in every city Patrick visited in 1912, it seems impossible he wasn't following the fabulous World Series between the New York Giants and Boston Red Sox. The best-of-seven actually required eight games because of a tie and the Red Sox won the finale 3-2 with a two-run rally in the bottom of the 10th inning. The key play was a dropped fly ball by Fred Snodgrass, which would follow him the rest of his life. When the Giants center-fielder died 62 years later, his obituary in the *New York Times* was headlined: "Fred Snodgrass, 86, Dead; Ball Player Muffed 1912 Fly."

The 1912 World Series was the first to truly deserve the term 'Fall Classic' and was far more exciting than anything going on with the Stanley Cup. No challenges were accepted in 1909 and the one- and two-game series in subsequent years were routs. In 1911, Ottawa beat Port Arthur 13-4. In 1912, Quebec beat Moncton 9-3 and 8-0.



While Patrick was in Montreal on his eastern visit, he exchanged ideas with NHA president Emmett Quinn for a Hockey Commission to oversee the two leagues and devise rules for contracts and salaries. But Patrick – who had hundreds of thousands of dollars of his own family's money tied up in the PCHA – also knew gate receipts from a one- or two-game Stanley Cup series wouldn't even cover travel expenses for taking a team from British Columbia to Quebec or Ontario. He envisioned something bigger and baseball was his inspiration. "A 'Worlds Series' in hockey between the champions of the NHA and the B.C. league is the idea of Lester Patrick," reported the *Edmonton Daily Bulletin* Oct. 17.

The Globe in Toronto had more the following day: "My idea is to have a series of games, such as the 'Worlds Series,' to decide the champi-

FROM GREEN TO SILVER
Lester Patrick's love of baseball likely shaped the way we play the Stanley Cup final today.

onship – not a series of two games, but of seven or more, which would decide beyond all question which is the better team."

It took until September 1913 before the NHA and PCHA signed an agreement. It included provisions for an annual five-game championship series. From 1914-26, the winner of the NHA and then the NHL met the winner of the PCHA and subsequent western leagues for the Stanley Cup. These battles were regularly referred to as "The World's Hockey Series" or "The World Series of Hockey." And though it took until 1939 for the NHL to expand the playoff to a best-of-seven, there can be little doubt baseball's World Series of 1912 helped pave the way. **THN**