

Coast Missed Major Ball by Day in '41

Barnes Tells of Plans for Browns' Shift

Cards Were to Pay A. L. Club \$250,000 and Take Over Rental of St. Louis Field

By RAY GILLESPIE
ST. LOUIS, Mo.

Another anniversary of the bombing of Pearl Harbor was given as the reason for the most recent get-together of Don Barnes, one-time president of the now-extinct St. Louis Browns, and the little group of men with whom he nearly succeeded in transferring the St. Louis American League franchise to Los Angeles on December 8, 1941.

Harry Arthur, president of Arthur Enterprises, but then head of the Fanchon & Marco Amusement Co., and a director of the old Browns, flew in from Los Angeles for the reunion. The next to drop in was Bill DeWitt, coordinator of the majors' \$500,000 minor league fund and former general manager of the St. Louis club. Another who called was Charley DeWitt, now a prosperous insurance executive who, in those days, served as the team's traveling secretary. Jim Arthur, brother of Harry and a St. Louis theater man, also was on hand.

"It's wonderful that the West Coast is getting major league ball at last," announced Harry Arthur.

N. L. 16 Years Behind Schedule

"What's so wonderful about that?" ribbed Barnes. "The National League is running 16 years behind schedule. If you'll recall, we missed by just one day of putting American League ball—the St. Louis Browns—in Los Angeles for the opening of the 1942 season. And that's why I've invited you gentlemen here (to his Clayton, Mo., offices of the American Investment Co.). I want you to help me revive for THE SPORTING NEWS the details of our negotiations and planning which culminated in a near-miss when the Japanese threw this country into war on December 7, 1941, the day before we were to propose our shift, thus putting an end to all thoughts of moving the Browns to the Coast.

"In direct contrast to the shift of the Brooklyn Dodgers to Los Angeles and the New York Giants to San Francisco," the ex-head of the Browns went on, "you will recall that for the 1942 campaign, only one club, the Browns, was to move west, though another team, our neighbors, the St. Louis Cardinals, were very much involved in our shift. That is why I chuckle whenever I hear it said that Walter O'Malley, president of the Dodgers, couldn't possibly have moved his club to California unless Horace Stoneham, head of the Giants, had agreed to take his team out there, too, for the 1958 season. For, 16 years ago, we of the Browns had convinced both leagues that we were on safe ground by asking for the right to transfer the St. Louis franchise to Los Angeles."

Cards Encouraged Shift

"Back in 1941," Bill DeWitt hastened to explain, "you had to have a three-fourths vote of both leagues before you could shift a franchise. Through the Cardinals, who were vitally interested in seeing the Browns leave St. Louis, we had the assurance that the National League would sanction our departure for the Coast. It was up to us to sell the American League on the idea and, as it later became known, we did a pretty good job of it."

Here Barnes picked up the story. The attendance at Browns' home games had been so low in 1939 (109,159) and 1940 (239,591) that Harry Arthur approached him during the 1941 season with the suggestion that "something be done to revive interest in the Browns, such as transferring the club's franchise to Los Angeles."

"At first I took these remarks as good-natured ribbing, for I believed that Harry, being a loyal Californian, was just bragging about the West Coast," the club's ex-president declared. "But when our attendance continued

Ready to Move West 16 Years Ago



THE HIGH COMMAND of the Browns in 1941, in the St. Louis club's suite at the Palmer House, Chicago, when the shift of the franchise to Los Angeles was considered, consisted of (left to right) General Manager Bill DeWitt, Manager Luke Sewell and President Don Barnes.

Barnes Signed Transfer Papers as 'Mr. X'

ST. LOUIS, Mo.—In making reports and signing documents, such as his optional agreements with Presidents Sam Breadon of the Cardinals and P. K. Wrigley of the Cubs, Don Barnes, head of the St. Louis Browns, signed his name as "Mister X" in order to conceal his identity during prolonged negotiations for the transfer of the Browns'

American League franchise in 1941 to Los Angeles.

"Everyone was sworn to secrecy, for we realized that a leak might wreck the Coast league and, at the same time, ruin our own plans to move the St. Louis club," Barnes explained. "It was remarkable that, with so many people involved in the negotiations over a period of

several months, nobody broke our confidence.

"Then, even though our decision to drop the idea of shifting our franchise at the December 8, 1941, meeting became sensational news, it was pushed off the front pages of the newspapers by the United States' declaration of war on Japan on that very day."

to fall—we drew only 176,240 in 1941—and Arthur became more insistent in his remarks, I decided one day to pin him down.

"I asked him to go out to Los Angeles and report back on what interest he could raise out there.

"Well, the result floored me. In practically no time at all, he notified me that he had interested A. H. Giannini, one of the co-founders of the Bank of America, in the project, and he was willing to invest heavily in the 'Los Angeles Browns' to acquire top-notch playing talent. The Los Angeles Junior Chamber of Commerce went on record as guaranteeing our team an attendance of 500,000 annually for five years. That was all I wanted to know."

"Wrigley Co-Operative"

Here Arthur broke into the reminiscing. It was he who advised Barnes to take a fast trip to California and see what he could do among the baseball people to make the franchise shift possible.

"That was about midseason, 1941," Arthur recalled. "Don joined me in Los Angeles and we went to work at once. I introduced him to the civic officials, bankers and people who wanted major league ball out there. Then he called on Phil K. Wrigley, president of the Chicago Cubs, who also owned the Los Angeles Angels of the Pacific Coast League and their ball park, Wrigley Field. Wrigley was very co-operative, for he felt, even at that time, that Los Angeles deserved major league ball, and he announced he was willing to sell his Los Angeles interests to Barnes so he could move the Browns into the city."

"I inspected Wrigley Field, which seated around 21,000," Barnes broke in. "It was even agreed that a certain street would have to be condemned to enlarge the ball park along left field so that when we got through double-decking the place and adding bleachers in right field, it would have had a capacity of 30,000.

"Phil Wrigley made me a wonderful

proposition. He offered to sell me the Los Angeles club in the Pacific Coast League, with all but a few players then on the roster, as well as Wrigley Field, for \$1,000,000."

"Yes," agreed Arthur, "and that's not all. His terms of payment were very fair. If you'll remember, you were to make a down payment of \$250,000, with

Blazed Trail



HARRY ARTHUR, a director of the Browns, who first suggested the shift of the St. Louis A. L. club to California, then provided further impetus by lining up financial support in Los Angeles. Arthur, former head of Fanchon & Marco; now is president of Arthur Enterprises, Inc.

the remaining \$750,000 to be paid off at \$30,000 per year for 25 years. You couldn't have asked for a fairer deal!"

"That's right," agreed Barnes. "Well, that sent me back east to take up matters with the baseball people here in St. Louis and in the American League. I called on the late Sam Breadon (then head of the Cardinals) and told him what I was trying to do. He agreed to go along and we struck up a deal. I explained that we had spent something like \$90,000 on the new lights that had been installed at Sportsman's Park two years before, had invested heavily in the new scoreboard and had five more years to go on our rental contract for the ball park.

"We drew up a contract and by its terms the Cardinals were to give the Browns what amounted to \$250,000 for vacating St. Louis. Breadon agreed to give us \$200,000 in cash and two players, valued at \$25,000 each or, if we could not agree on the players, then we were to get an outright sum of \$50,000."

Breadon Promised N. L. Okay

"It was also agreed that the Cardinals would assume our lease with the Dodier Realty Co. for rental of Sportsman's Park for \$35,000 per year for the next five seasons.

"Another very important part of the deal was that Breadon promised to get the vote of the National League approving the transfer of the Browns to Los Angeles. Sam later told me that the National League was prepared to approve the franchise transfer, as it had nothing to lose and everything to gain by having only an N. L. club in St. Louis.

"Now, the \$250,000 we were to get from the Cards would have been used as our down payment to Wrigley for the Los Angeles franchise, players and Wrigley Field."

Here Bill DeWitt broke in to explain that while all these negotiations were going on, he had been sent to New York to confer with the major league schedule-maker, a Boston man, who

Wrigley Was Ready to Sell Angels, Park

Deal Involved \$1,000,000 for Franchise, Real Estate and Players of PCL Club

was advised of the plans to move the Browns to the West Coast, and he came up with three separate schedules for 1942.

"One schedule would have had the Browns opening the season two weeks earlier than the rest of the league, and playing the teams that were training in the West (Philadelphia and Chicago)," he said. "The second schedule would have required all clubs to make three trips to California. The third would have required three trips to the Coast and four trips to all cities east of the Mississippi."

Extra Payoff for Visits

"The extra jumps to the West Coast for all clubs sounded expensive, but we were prepared to foot part of the bill. In fact, with a guaranteed attendance of 500,000, or more than double what we had been drawing in St. Louis, the other American League clubs realized they were not going to get the worst of it. Nevertheless we were prepared to pay each visiting club 25 cents additional per head over the pay-off required by the American League. We also were prepared to pay each club a flat fee for making the trip to California, but we'd offer them the option of accepting either the flat fee or the additional 25 cents per admission, whichever was greater. We were prepared to do this for at least five years."

Charley DeWitt, in his capacity as traveling secretary, was summoned to a meeting in Chicago at which Jack Frye, then president of TWA, and representatives of the Santa Fe Railroad mapped out plane and train schedules that would carry the teams to and from Los Angeles.

"Frye pointed out that between 21 and 28 flights on three lines—TWA, American and United—left Chicago daily for Los Angeles," Charley said. "He assured us that this meant we could stagger the transportation of our players, sending one, two, three or four players—and a maximum of six—per flight. In those days, air transportation wasn't accepted as being as safe as it is today."

The Santa Fe Chief had a fine rail schedule, it was pointed out, and after several meetings, it was found that teams making the trip to the West Coast would have to fly only once, with the two other jumps being made by train. An open date between a game in Chicago and the next scheduled contest in Los Angeles would have been provided, allowing 30-36 hours for travel.

\$1,000,000 Travel Policies

"But we had the answer for the skeptics of the safety of airplane travel in those days," Barnes broke in. "We were assured that for \$1,250 we could buy \$1,000,000 worth of travel insurance, thus insuring every player on the team and protecting the club as well as the players' families. We felt sure that this insurance feature would appeal to the players and 'sell' them on traveling by plane."

Asked if the various American League magnates were willing to fly their clubs to the West Coast for the 1942 season, the group admitted it was having "some difficulty" trying to convince such members of the "Old Guard" as the late Clark Griffith, then head of the Washington Senators, and Connie Mack, boss of the Philadelphia Athletics.

"But even while we were worried a bit about some of the owners, we had definite commitments from others," Barnes insisted. "In fact, all of the owners were sympathetic with our situation in St. Louis and seemed willing to help us."

"We had several secret meetings with President Will Harridge of the American League, who appointed a commit-

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 6, COL. 4)