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# The I-55 Series: Cubs vs. Cardinals

George Castle  
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*To my wife, Nina Castle, with love for shouldering a tremendous personal burden so I could help finish this book, and to my late mother, Vera Castle, for always believing in me through the upheavals of growing up.*

*George Castle*

*To the real Cardinals and Cubs fans, and to their continued rivalry. May it always remain fun for both.*

*Jim Rygelski*

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## Contents

Foreword	vi
1 The Rivalry: Views From Players, Execs and Fans	1
2 The Best and Worst of Both Worlds: Dual Identity Players	21
3 Harry Caray: Pied Piper of Two Cities	31
4 Roots of the Cubs-Cardinals Rivalry	39
5 Great Cubs Games vs. the Cardinals	47
6 Great Cardinals Games vs. the Cubs	63
7 Great Cubs Player Performances vs. the Cardinals	89
8 Great Cardinals Player Performances vs. the Cubs	107
9 A Dual Great Player Performance	135
10 Jenkins vs. Gibson	139
11 McGwire vs. Sosa: A Year-After Viewpoint	151
12 Brock for Broglio	157
13 The Trading Market	177
14 Mr. Holland's Opus, 1956-1975	189
15 The Kennedy Administration 1976-1981	203
16 Foibles, Fumbles and Fracas	209
17 The Mason-Dixon Line of Illinois	233
Appendices	244

## Foreword

I can bring an insider's perspective to the Cubs-Cardinals rivalry; so much of my professional life has been tied up with both franchises. You know me best now as the Cubs' manager since 1995, but I also worked for the Cardinals from 1976 to 1990 as a minor league player, minor league coach, minor league manager, director of player development, and first-base coach for the big-league club under Whitey Herzog. So I believe I have seen both ballclubs from almost all angles possible.

The Cubs and Cardinals are much more alike than not. During my tenure in each city, the two teams had corporate ownership that was first-class and respected, Anheuser Busch for St. Louis and the Tribune Co. for Chicago. Each parent company had brilliant people in high management positions, and both companies had developed strong, distinctive identities away from baseball ownership. That helps with perception. You'll have the advertising with Budweiser, the Clydesdales, WGN. It's all first-class.

There's also great similarity in the fan bases of both teams. Both are extremely loyal. Some of that comes from the fact Chicago and St. Louis used to be the furthest west of all the major league teams. The loyalties used to be passed from generation to generation. If you were in Missouri, Arkansas, Tennessee all through that area you were a Cardinals fan. Further north, you were a Cubs fan. Those regional loyalties stayed firm even as more teams were added to the majors. Cubs and Cardinals fans were like the Hatfields and the McCoys for decades on end.

The loyalties were helped by a great tradition of broadcasting with each club. The Cardinals had that huge radio network all over the area with Harry Caray and Jack Buck. The Cubs televised the most games of any team, with Jack Brickhouse, succeeded by Caray, the mainstays at the microphone over a 50-year span. These were all Hall of Fame announcers bringing the news about each team to the listeners and viewers.

Even the uniforms are traditional. The designs of the Cubs' and the Cardinals' uniforms have stayed the same for many decades. St. Louis' bat with the two cardinals perching on each end on the shirt is one of the longest-appearing logos anywhere. The Cubs have had the blue pinstripes with the red Cubs "C"

since 1957.

But then there are differences between the two clubs. The Cardinals had a long tradition of player development dating to when Branch Rickey set up the first true farm system in the 1930s. St. Louis almost always has

been able to produce many of its players through the decades. The Cubs didn't put as much emphasis in the farm system through much of that same time. However, in recent years, a lot of positive steps have been taken for Chicago to become a more consistently productive player-development operation. In spite of the Cardinals' advantage in developing players, the Cubs haven't done too badly in head-to-head matchups with a 1,003-959 all-time record against St. Louis going into the 1999 season.

The nature of the two teams' ballparks also provides a stark contrast. Different Cubs management regimes over the years may have looked toward the quick fix, importing various power hitters at the expense of developing young players, because of cozy Wrigley Field. The power alley may be labeled "368 feet" in left-center field, but the dimensions are probably shorter. Meanwhile, the Cardinals knew they had to emphasize speed with the spacious dimensions of Busch Stadium power alleys about 20 feet deeper than Wrigley Field prior to the re-doing of the field and seats in the last few years, making it more conducive to power hitters.

Both the similarities and differences are on display when the two teams play each other. Personally, as a manager, I don't get up any more for a game against the Cardinals compared to other opponents. But the fans get more energized, and that energy seems to filter into our clubhouse and dugout and it's probably the same with the Cardinals. Ten minutes prior to the game, you look around the stands, and you see 10,000 or 15,000 more people than usual. You'll see a lot of red in the stands in Chicago; in St. Louis, it's full of Cubs blue. Then you see it's big, and you start feeling that excitement. It doesn't change how you manage the game, but it does send a message to you about how much this means to all these people. You feel, Let's go, let's get after it.

I think an ideal Cubs-Cardinals situation would be one winning the National League Central and the other club winning the wild card. Both teams in the playoffs at the same time, possibly playing each other to get to the World Series, would really excite the fans of each club and the world of baseball in general. The presence of the wild card makes that a realistic possibility. No longer do both teams have only a first-place finish as an entrée to the post-season. So that provides additional hope to players and fans.

But even short of such a dream matchup, the tradition and drama involving the Cubs-Cardinals rivalry will keep your interest. This captures the flavor of the rivalry. It will be a good read for the fan; it is an even better show in

person at either Wrigley Field or Busch Stadium.

JIM RIGGLEMAN, APRIL 1999

## The Rivalry: A Personal View from Chicago

My subterfuge was complete. I had observed my mother's note-writing for several years, and I could do a decent imitation. The note excusing my absence from Mather High School on Chicago's North Side on Tuesday, April 6, 1971, had to look authentic. I certainly didn't want school disciplinarians Abe Fink and Carl Myrent to believe anything was askew.

But maybe in this rebellious era, Fink and Myrent didn't have too many sophomores cutting classes to go to the Cubs' season opener at Wrigley Field. What was passion for the Cubs in 1967-69 by many of the then teen-age Boomers had probably evolved into devotion for the Rolling Stones, The Who and Led Zeppelin, and sneaking marijuana on some remote part of the school grounds. Perhaps I was some kind of geeky throwback at 15, carrying the torch for something as old-fashioned as baseball.

Around 9 a.m., I climbed aboard a Devon No. 155 bus at Western Avenue, rode to the Loyola L station two miles east, and hopped aboard a southbound "B" Howard train. Half an hour later, I was at the northeast ticket window of Wrigley Field. The bleachers looked too crowded already; they had been a trendy choiceto a fault, anywayover the past four seasons. So I opted for a \$1.75 grandstand seat in right field. The crowd already had filled much of the unreserved area, so I had to take a seat near the back row.

Bad mistake. The wind chills of an early Chicago spring had made the shaded area of the grandstand ice cold. The temperature would not break 40 degrees during the afternoon. Foolish me, I forgot to bring gloves, tricked by the sun in which that the luckier bleacher fans basked.

The visiting Cardinals took the field for batting practice. I worked my way down to the front row for a closer look. Matty Alou, a St. Louis newcomer after tormenting the Cubs and this day's starter, Fergie Jenkins,

for so many years in Pittsburgh, began limbering up. A leather-lunged fan tried to get Alou's attention. "Hey, Mateo, how's your brother JEEESSUS!," cried the wise-ass bloke. Soon I returned to my seat.

Again, bad idea. Sitting still in the chill numbed my hands. I tried to fill out my scorecard with the lineups, but I got only as far as a scraggly "Brock, LF" on the St. Louis side before I had to stuff my hands in my pockets to keep them warm, waiting for the game to begin at 1:30 p.m.

But at least Jenkins and mound opponent Bob Gibson cooperated. They kept the pace as brisk as the winds. The Cubs scored one, the Cardinals scored one, and the two great aces could have pitched forever in their seemingly effortless rhythm.

Both the Cubs and the Cardinals had their familiar faces besides Jenkins and Gibson. Billy Williams, Ron Santo, Don Kessinger and Glenn Beckert for the Cubs; Lou Brock, Joe Torre and Ted Simmons for the Cardinals. I was particularly interested in how a Cubs rookie handled himself in center field. Jose Ortiz, acquired from the White Sox recently, led off the latest three platoons of center fielders Cubs manager Leo Durocher employed in that era. Some 15 different faces played center for the Cubs in 1969 and 1970. Ortiz would eventually give way to Brock Davis, who would give way to Cleo James, who would

By 3:30 p.m., 9 1/2 innings had been played. Jenkins and Gibson showed no signs of weakening. Then Billy Williams came to bat in the bottom of the 10th. He took one of his sweet swings. The ball was lofted toward the right-field bleachers. I never saw it land, but from the scramble in the bleachers and the screaming of the overflow crowd it was a game-winner. Cubs 2, Cardinals 1, typical of the games of this era.

Such a grandstand, bleachers or TV vantage point is how I viewed the Cubs-Cardinals rivalry in those days. For me, though, the blood-boiling point was provided not by the Cardinals, but by the Mets and White Sox.

The New Yorkers' 1969 miracle run was self-explanatory. How could the Mets leap from 73 to 100 wins in one year, not taking intermediate steps of development like the Durocher-era Cubs teams? And why did New York deserve yet another championship? Weren't they already drunk on titles with the Yankees, a team that could barely draw 1.5 million fans for a winning team amid a metro area of 14 million or so? Why couldn't the timing had been

oh-so-slightly different so the Cubs could have sneaked in just one precious World Series appearance?

You could foam at the mouth at the thought of Mets' somewhat fluky successes and the televised sight of another squeaky-clean Tom and

Nancy Seaver commercial endorsement. But the real pressure-raisers were the verbal duels with fans of a team the Cubs never played except in exhibition games.

Far more than the Cardinals, the White Sox and their backers put a burr under the average Cubs fan. Even when the Sox lost a team record 106 games in 1970, their fans didn't crawl under rocks to hide. I had many a sparring match with Sox stalwarts Steve Ruby and Ron Eisenstein on the long morning walks to Mather. The Sox supporters practically became insufferable when their heroes leaped into the pennant race against the Oakland Athletics in 1972. Meanwhile, the Cubs lagged as second-place also-rans, just out of contention against the powerful Pirates, a team of free swingers that enjoyed a merry time against Chicago pitching in this era.

I could never figure out exactly why Sox fans hated the Cubs so much. After all, the Cubs, playing in the other league, never deprived some of their fine Paul Richards- and Al Lopez-managed teams of pennants in the manner of the Yankees. The only logical explanation was jealousy at all the publicity the Cubs received. Bill Veeck later picked up the media-coverage imbalance issue. Little did anyone realize at the time that the Cubs' schedule of all-day baseball at home gave them an advantage enjoyed by no other franchise in a two-team market. Of course newspapers and broadcast outlets were going to give more space and airtime to the Cubs; they played a lot better to their deadlines than the prime-time Sox did.

At one point, I even believed Sox fans rooted for the Cardinals because they were the Cubs' chief rival. If that was the case a generation ago, it has to change now with interleague play and Cardinals-Sox matchups.

Even after you got past your feelings toward the Mets and Sox, you still had the Cardinals. They were always nibbling and nicking the Cubs, who often found their long fly balls falling short of the fences in then-spacious Busch Stadium. Lou Brock, Garry Templeton, Bake McBride, Tony Scott and other speedsters would chop high bounders off the Astro turf or slash triples into the faraway gaps. The intermediate game was handled by the pesky duo of Mike Tyson and Ted Sizemore, who dribbled 20-bouncers through the infield. Always, always, to the backdrop of the Busch Stadium siren and Budweiser theme.

The Cardinals would hurt the Cubs; the Cubs would hurt the Cardinals. One

overriding aspect was Brock's determination against his old team, whether at the plate or on the basepaths. Surprisingly, a man

with a mediocre outfielding reputation applied the heartbreaker more than once against Chicago. I recall one bases-loaded rally in 1973 when a Cub crushed the ball toward the left-field wall. Up leaped Brock, Jordan-esque. Down he came with the rally, thwarting the Cubs once again.

There were comical moments, too. One late September day in 1972 at Busch Stadium, Cubs pitcher Joe Decker laid down a bunt with a man on second base. But the Cardinals' pitcher heaved the ball into left field trying for the force at third base. The ball rolled down the line, where Brock bobbled it in the corner. By the time the ball was relayed back to the infield, Decker had circled the bases.

On another night in 1975 in St. Louis, a Cardinals hitter rocketed the ball back to Cubs reliever Darold Knowles. The ball hit Knowles in his supporter cup so loudly the noise was heard up in the pressbox. Knowles fell to the ground, then somehow recovered via instinct or competitive spirit or whatever to throw the man out at first base before crumpling to the ground again. "He's a real pro; he didn't think of himself and got his man at first," Jack Brickhouse intoned on WGN-TV.

That broadcast booth in Busch Stadium was the site of several other interesting sidelights. Brickhouse tried to do a "Tenth Inning" post-game interview with Billy Williams in 1970 while a fleet of moths buzzed around the light reflecting off Brick's balding pate. Five years later, Brick and partner Jim West handled the introduction to the game on a blazing hot day. West was sweating a river, turning redder and redder live on the air, confined in his tie and WGN blazer as Brick happily went on and on about the upcoming game.

But the Cubs-Cardinals series never was personalized until I met Jim Rygelski.

Attending Northern Illinois University in DeKalb in 1976, I hooked on as a sportswriter on the *Northern Star*, the campus daily. I made the acquaintance of Rygelski, who had moved to Chicago a few years previously from his native St. Louis. Again, it was great to find a fellow baseball fan and someone who transcended the prevailing cliques on the *Star*, which appeared to be an extension of high school social life for many of its staffers.

Rygelski and I found the commonality of baseball as a reference point. We'd repair to the Twin Taps tavern on the south side of town to discuss the world. When we weren't analyzing his relationship with one particularly fiery

redhead or the lack of a significant other for myself, we'd talk Cubs and Cardinals. Poor Jim, who I soon nicknamed "Harry," after Cardinals pitchers Harry Rasmussen and Harry Parker and, of course,

Harry Caray. All the guff he had to take about his St. Louis origins. Fellow Chicagoans gave him jibes not only about the Cardinals, but also the Mark Twain and Daniel Boone expressways, funny-sounding names of interstate highways in St. Louis that Jim, or Harry, protested that the natives didn't use.

In the summer of 1977, I finally found out first-hand about Rygelski's baseball experience. As a reporter intern on the Decatur Herald, I had the chance to drive down for a number of Cardinals games at Busch Stadium. The first contest featured John "The Count" Montefusco, then of the Giants, homering to beat the Cardinals. Next up were several Cubs-Cardinals games in which the visitors got thrashed. Then, during July 4 weekend, I met Jim's parents, John and Jessie, a wonderful couple as gracious as possible to the visitor from big, smug Chicago. I also learned about his fan background, going to games at the old Busch Stadium, and life in their former north St. Louis neighborhood as Cardinals fans were just like Cubs fans, wronged almost as much as exulting in success. One 1960 Rygelski scorecard featured Willie Mays doing a number on his beloved Redbirds. The kid had scrawled, "I hate Willie Mays!" across the lineup.

Jim and I saw some really strange baseball that holiday weekend, including five Cubs errors in the first inning of one game and Bill Buckner slugging a game-winning, three-run homer off Al "The Mad Hungarian" Hrabosky in the ninth inning of the next contest. In the miscue-strewn first game, amid an overflow, partying crowd, Cubs and Cardinals fans really got into it verbally in the left-field bleachers and brawls were narrowly averted.

Rygelski got a job on the *Galesburg Register-Mail* and returned the favor the next year in 1978, coming up one morning on the train to attend a Cubs-Cardinals game at Wrigley Field, then going back that night the same way. In 1979, I made my first Chicago-St. Louis trip via car with a whole bunch of right-field bleacher chums. In those days of the 55 mph limit, there was no more boring, endless drive than I-55 through the cornfields of central Illinois. Six hours on the road seemed like 12.

In the five-game Friday-through-Monday Cubs-Cardinals series that climaxed with Lou Brock's 3,000th hit off Dennis Lamp in the finale, I experienced one of the freakiest mid-August spells of weather in St. Louis history. I wore a light jacket to the Saturday night game in Busch Stadium in the 60-degree weather. When was the last time that happened? The next afternoon, in box seats down the left-field line, I witnessed how hot the Astroturf-covered

ballpark could become. Although the air tempera-

ture was a relatively comfortable 85 degrees with low humidity for St. Louis, the sun beating down on the below-ground field and heating up the turf made it feel 10 degrees warmer. I can't imagine how fans handle watching games from those seats when it's in the high 90s with heavy humidity.

By 1982, I had married. My wife, Nina, and I accepted another invitation to visit Jim, or Harry, over another Fourth of July weekend. This time, living in the north St. Louis neighborhood of Baden, he volunteered to play tour guide when we weren't attending games. Rygelski also offered the use of his apartment for our lodging, gratis, while he stayed with his parents. There was one caveat: He lived Spartan, without air conditioning.

We watched the Cubs and starting pitcher Tom Filer (fodder for trivia buffs) dodge numerous bullets to win 2-1 on a Saturday night, then enjoyed a nice Italian meal in south St. Louis. But then we perspired continually and couldn't sleep as storms battered the area during the night. I tried to cool off by sitting in Jim's bathtub. Guess this was a sample of normal life in St. Louis 40-some years previously. How did they survive the summers? The next day, the three of us attended a 1 p.m. game in Busch Stadium's right-field bleachers. I can never remember experiencing more stifling humidity, not even when Chicago was hit by a deadly 105-degree heat wave in 1995. The St. Louis-area mercury climbed into the mid-90s and an exhausted Nina actually fell asleep on a bleacher bench. She didn't miss anything; the Cubs got pounded.

Rygelski made it up to Chicago for games other than the Cardinals' visits. He was indicative of many Cardinals fans; he truly enjoyed watching baseball at Wrigley Field. And through the more than two decades I have known Jim, or Harry, I discovered that Cubs and Cardinals fans were more alike than not. St. Louis fans have just been a little luckier, their farm system having been more productive, their trades having been more astute and their pitchers having not gotten hurt as often as their Chicago counterparts. But both sets of rooters had undying loyalty for their respective teams that was hardly matched elsewhere in baseball.

Cubs' fans loyalty and belief in a universal fairness was tested even further when strikeout wunderkind Kerry Wood's precious ulnar collateral ligament snapped in spring training 1999, costing his services for at least the following season. Cardinals fans never suffered through 40 years of promising pitchers being injured, of which Wood was the worst case.