

However, Ty was present in the afternoon part of the program, and then went on to New York to see the Yankees play the Indians. He was particularly interested in seeing Bob Feller.

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Landis Declares Ninety-one Tigers Free Agents

(1940)

SOURCE: *Detroit News*, January 16, 1940

*Commissioner Landis was an avowed opponent of the farm system, conceived by Cardinals general manager Branch Rickey as an inexpensive means of developing future major leaguers. Landis believed that the system unnecessarily slowed the progress of the best minor leaguers and allowed the clubs with the most farm clubs to monopolize the talent pool. On several occasions he invoked rules regulating farm systems to declare numerous minor league players free agents. In 1938 Landis "freed" seventy-four Cardinal players, and two years later he dealt an even harsher blow to the Tigers. By this point, as Benjamin Rader notes in his *Baseball: A History of America's Game* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), major league clubs had started to curtail their purchase of minor league teams. After World War II new rules were enacted governing the drafting and purchase of minor leaguers, which, coupled with the fading fortunes of the minor leagues, eliminated the broad, Rickey-style farm system that flourished in the 1920s and 1930s.*

THE UMPIRE

By H. G. Salsinger

Judge K. M. Landis' decision, making free agents of 91 players owned by Detroit, and ordering the club to pay a total of \$47,250 to 14 players now under contract to other clubs, means a loss of close to half a million dollars. It would require several weeks of examination of books, records and reports by expert accountants, to reach an approximate estimate.

It was not so much the money originally paid the 91 players for signing contracts as the salaries handed them since signing, transportation costs, living expenses while on the road, salaries of scouts, sums paid to minor league clubs for affiliations, numerous deficits squared away to continue "connections," and untold incidental expenses.

This entire investment was swept away when Landis scrawled his signature on the last of seven pages of typewritten sheets, setting forth in elaborate detail the numerous violations of which he found the club guilty.

SPENT FOR WHAT?

Detroit spent money lavishly in creating a network of affiliated clubs, but there is no proof that the club spent wisely. The wisdom of any investment must be

judged by the returns and in the case of the Detroit farm system the returns since 1936 have been so negligible that the club stocked its roster with cast-off veterans.

Detroit owned 165 minor league players last year, but when outfield material was needed the club gave Harry Eisenstat and \$15,000 in cash to Cleveland for Earl Averill, a player who was never considered a good competitor, whose major league career was apparently finished two years ago, and who turned in a batting average of .262 for Detroit.

Having claim to 165 minor league players Detroit went to the last-place St. Louis and plucked Beau Bell and Ralph Kress from the Little Brownies' roster.

UNDEVELOPED

There must be something radically wrong with a farm system that enrolls 165 ball players and that cannot deliver one capable of playing with a second division team.

The impression is that Detroit spent its entire efforts shuttling players from one affiliated club to another and none in developing the material on hand.

One hundred and sixty-five ball players are of no use to a club unless they are developed and the Detroit farm plan made no provisions for developing them. At none of the Detroit farms was there a man of major league experience to guide the raw recruits or to coach them. They were in the hands of minor leaguers and left pretty much to shift for themselves. . . .

THEY DID ONCE

There was a time when Detroit farms developed players.

The team that won two pennants and a world championship was developed at Beaumont and Evansville during the late Frank J. Navin regime.

Del Baker, now manager of the Tigers, tutored the players at Beaumont and Bob Coleman was in charge at Evansville.

The policy of "develop-your-own" was shuffled after Mr. Navin's death. The club began acquiring "ready-made" players, nearly all of whom had outworn their usefulness. The club's fortunes have been declining ever since.

GOOD AND BAD

Landis' decision wrecks the Detroit farm system. The loss is heavy, but if the result is a general revision of the club's farm plan, making the development of players the main mission, and, with capable men in command, the decision will have its benefits.