

These Are the Good Old Days

The summer of 2015 has proven that there is no need to have a long memory when it comes to great sports moments



BOB LATHAM

Like politicians, sports fans tend to look back in romantic fashion to some “golden era.” We look back to the 1930s when there were horse racing triple crowns (three), baseball triple crowns (four), one of only three men’s tennis grand slams (Don Budge) and the only golf grand slam (Bobby Jones). We look back to the Yankees of the 1920s (or 1950s), the Lombardi Packers, the Bill Russell

Celtics and the Montreal Canadiens of Béliveau, Richard, et al. And we look back to boxing matchups like Louis-Schmeling (also in the 1930s), Ali-Frazier and Robinson-LaMotta.

Well, sports fans, take a look around right here in the summer of 2015 and recognize that we are in a time that sports fans years from now will be reminiscing about (or, more likely, checking out on a future iteration of YouTube). We are surrounded by historic sports performances and performers. Serena Williams is closing in on a calendar grand slam at age 33. In men’s tennis, two of the top three all-time players and three of the top eight in terms of majors won (Federer, Nadal, Djokovic) will also be playing at the U.S. Open.

While Jordan Spieth’s effort to be the second person in history to win the first three of golf’s majors in a calendar year fell a bit short at the British Open, that should not detract from the thrill of Spieth opening our eyes to what is possible. The Monday finish at St. Andrews helped underscore the consequential nature of Spieth’s effort. If the crowd around my proverbial office water cooler (which these days, of course, includes a flat screen TV) to watch Spieth play the 16th through 18th holes was any indication, the GNP of the United States took a serious hit.

In baseball, Mike Trout’s two consecutive All-Star MVPs (the first player to be so recognized) at age 23 have made it less necessary to look for archival footage of Mickey Mantle in 1954. And if we can tip the calendar back slightly into 2014, we get Madison Bumgarner with a Sandy Koufax/Bob Gibson/Christy Mathewson-esque performance in the World Series, and the Giants making their historical mark with a third World Series title in five seasons. Back to the present calendar year, the Chicago Blackhawks, a team that went 49 years without a Stanley Cup, have now won three in six seasons. Tom Brady has led his team to more Super Bowls than any quarterback in history (while in 2015 tying the quarter-

back record for wins with four) and Peyton Manning holds the career NFL passing touchdown record. We get to watch them for at least another season this fall.

Even sports that have been given up for dead have resurrected themselves in this magical year. One hundred years ago, the most popular sports in the United States were boxing and horse racing. After the longest Triple Crown drought in American thoroughbred racing history—38 years—American Pharoah silenced the cynics who said that it could no longer be done, that only the great horses of a bygone era could do it. Even boxing experienced a jolt of relevance for a brief moment as the world fixed its attention on Mayweather-Pacquiao. Yes, the fight didn’t live up to its hype, but for the first time in as long as I can remember, I was jammed into a public

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establishment, elbow to elbow, with others who felt a sense of excitement for boxing. In fact, I skipped out of a black tie dinner to watch the fight, which made me sort of the Don King of the bar. And the week before the Mayweather-Pacquiao bout, heavyweight champion

Wladimir Klitschko (who has now been the heavyweight champion longer than anyone other than Joe Louis) fought on U.S. soil for the first time in seven years—at Madison Square Garden, no less, with a bit of Hollywood glamour present in the person of the boxer’s fiancée, Hayden Panettiere.

In basketball, LeBron James has now appeared in the NBA finals in five straight years, moving into Russell/Cousy territory. And while we will always remember the 1999 U.S. Women’s World Cup soccer squad with a great deal of joy, the U.S. women’s team of 2015, with its monster performance in the World Cup final in Vancouver, will be role models for years to come.

So let’s leave the cynical lament of olden times and promises of better things to the politicians and instead soak up the present sports scene with gratitude. As Carly Simon sang, and as Carli Lloyd showed, these are the good old days. ■

Bob Latham is a partner at the law firm Jackson Walker, L.L.P., and a World Rugby board member. A compilation of his best columns titled “Winners & Losers: Rants, Riffs and Reflections on the World of Sports,” is available in the Media Zone at SportsTravelMagazine.com.