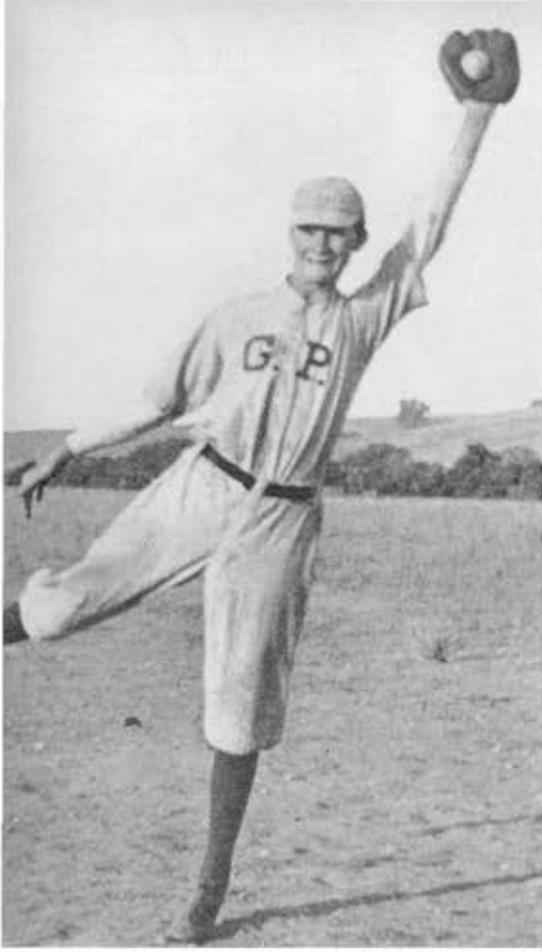


**February 29, 1960**

## **THE WEBB OF MYSTERY**

He is the very silent partner in the Yankee firm, but Del Webb has a history as colorful as any of his ballplayers. In fact, he played so hard he had to quit for good

By [Joe David Brown](#)



When a man is half owner of the fabulous Yankees, hobnobs with the top people in both Washington and Hollywood, controls one of the nation's biggest construction companies, heads or sits on the board of 43 corporations, has a partnership or major interest in 31 companies, belongs to 14 clubs and has so much money that he almost never has to touch the dreary stuff, it puts one's teeth slightly on edge to call him unknown. Yet it's an abashing fact that an overwhelming number of people still have never heard of Del E. Webb or, if they have, find his name only vaguely familiar and disembodied.

Nobody is more indifferent to this phenomenon than Del Webb himself. A quiet, unassuming, impressively well-preserved and well-integrated gentleman of 60 who claims Phoenix, Arizona as home and lists his occupation as contractor, Webb feels that publicity doesn't matter much either one way or the other. He prefers to duck it if he can. When his manifold interests do thrust him into the limelight, however, he tries to follow the advice given the beleaguered maidens in the old Chinese fable and submit gracefully. More times than not it works, and Webb not only finds himself relaxed but actually enjoying himself. In rapid-fire order not long ago, for instance, he was the honored guest at a reception given by the city fathers of Albuquerque, New Mexico, where he is building a 14-story office building; the co-host of the annual Old Timers Game at Yankee Stadium in New York; and then a player and honored guest at another old-timers' game at a ball park in Modesto, California which is named in his honor.

At least several times a month, Webb usually finds himself making a speech somewhere. He is no orator, having a monotonous and somewhat tedious delivery but, happily, this is partly offset by his sincerity. He stands 6 foot 4 inches tall, looks as lean as a range rider at 200 pounds, and when he is at his best he exudes the same sort of level-eyed, laconic western charm, somehow suggestive of sagebrush and wide-open spaces, that catapulted Gary Cooper to movie fame. "Let Del shake a man's hand once," said an associate, "and he will go around claiming Del as a friend for the rest of his life."

Nobody can deny that Webb is a thoroughly likable man. "Del just looks like...well, dammit, Del looks like a man you can trust," is the way a friend put it. Observing Webb's horn-rimmed glasses and neat appearance, one columnist said he looked like the president of the Civic Betterment League. A reporter said he looked like a junior college chemistry professor. Others have described him as looking like a banker, an insurance adjuster and a veteran airline pilot. A West Coast newspaperman probably came closest to the mark when he said, "Del reminds you of someone from your home town."

Webb is not a convivial man. He used to drink, but he quit overnight 17 years ago when he came down with an unexplained fever. Up until then he had been known to take as many as 20 hookers of bourbon a day. He has never drunk tea, coffee or carbonated beverages. He abhors tobacco smoke and usually posts a neat "No Smoking" sign in any room he occupies for long. Visitors looking for Webb's office in his Phoenix or Los Angeles headquarters are sometimes told: "Go down the hall until you see a bunch of

cigarette butts outside a door—that's his office." Webb's offices in both Phoenix and Los Angeles are furnished identically right down to the carpet on the floor and the rack of souvenir World Series bats in a corner. By Webb's orders, all building plans, equipment and supplies are kept in the same place in both headquarters, an idea Webb borrowed after seeing how standardization added to the efficiency of chain grocery stores he had constructed.

Personally, Webb is not as well organized as this might indicate. Like most busy men, he creates a mild chaos when left on his own. He frequently is the despair of his two secretaries because he mislays papers and loses tickets, cancels plane reservations without letting them know and sometimes forgets to advise them of his plans. He also forgets to carry keys to his own offices and on two occasions while working late at night has been locked in and had to break his way out. But when it comes to business, Webb is almost fearsomely well organized and attentive to detail. This is fortunate, because his interests are so varied and so far-flung, his corporate structures so numerous and interlocking, that even he probably could not sit down and rattle them off. When asked how much he is worth, Webb smiles and shrugs, "I don't know. There's no way of telling." The only positive way he could tell would be to sell everything at once. In this unlikely event, Webb's associates estimate, roughly, that he might wind up with \$30 million to \$35 million.

To keep tabs on his empire, Webb requires every corporation and company in which he has a stake, every foreman of every construction project being handled by his company to file a daily report. These reports come from the Yankees and from a toy shop, from ranches and oil wells, from farms and drilling companies, hotels and motels, restaurants, investment companies, a brewery, a box factory, shopping centers, housing developments and even a playhouse. The reports give a breakdown of sales or attendance, report progress or accidents on construction projects. They even give the temperature and general weather conditions.

Webb sifts the reports carefully. "I may go broke someday," he said recently, "but if I do I'll know why. And that's not a joke. There have been many businesses which have gone broke, and it was weeks or months before anybody realized it. But aside from that, daily reports are a good thing in three other respects. In the first place, if people think the boss is taking an interest, they will, too. In the second place, it helps the employee on the scene get a clear idea of what's going on, too. And the third good reason for a daily report is that it furnishes a permanent record; it gives the accounting department something to refer back to if necessary."

## IT'S ONLY MONEY

Money, as such, no longer interests Webb. For example, after deciding to join Larry MacPhail and Dan Topping in buying the Yankees back in 1945, he telephoned his financial manager from New York, "I've decided to join the deal for the Yankees. Where can I get some money?"

"Why don't you step around to the Chase National Bank?" the financial manager said. "They're holding a million dollars' worth of bonds that belong to you."

A few years ago after finishing a round of golf with Bing Crosby and Hollywood Writer Jimmy Grant, Webb was playing gin rummy in the locker room. Grant had written a film script based on the life of Heavyweight Champion John L. Sullivan which Crosby had read and told Webb he liked. As they dressed, Grant and Crosby began discussing the script again and, suddenly, Crosby had an inspiration. He called out to Webb, "Hey, Delbert, let's make Jimmy's picture ourselves so it's done right."

Webb, absorbed in his gin game, appeared not to hear. "How about it, Delbert?" Crosby prodded. "Why don't you help finance it?"

Webb looked up casually. "All right. How much do you want?"

"Oh, about \$100,000," Crosby said.

Webb called the locker room attendant, asked for a blank check, made it out for \$100,000 and handed it to Crosby. Then he went back to his gin game.

The film, *The Great John L.*, produced by Bing Crosby Productions, Inc., made a substantial profit.

#### COFFEE SHOP MAN

Webb is usually not, however, given to ostentation. There are a couple of Cadillacs in the fleet of cars he keeps in Phoenix and Los Angeles, but Webb prefers to drive a Ford which has a company emblem on the door. At one time his company kept two private planes, but as soon as commercial airlines had established scheduled flights throughout the Southwest, he sold them. He has no particular interest in food, being primarily a steak and potatoes man, except that he does like large and gloppy ice-cream desserts. "If the dessert is good, Del thinks any meal is fine," said an associate. Although he has a half interest in Navarre's, one of the finest restaurants in Phoenix and, perhaps, the Southwest, Webb does most of his eating in the coffee shops of his two sprawling motor hotels.

Webb has no desire for possessions in the ordinary sense. Someone once remarked that it took a fortune to keep the late Mahatma Gandhi in poverty; similarly, it takes two fortunes to keep Webb unencumbered with possessions. He maintains suites in the Waldorf Towers in New York, in the Beverly Hilton in Beverly Hills and in the HiwayHouse, his luxurious 250-room motor hotel in Phoenix. Each suite is completely stocked with everything he needs: suits, haberdashery and toilet equipment. Webb seldom stays in any one place for more than a few days at a time. As he shuttles back and forth he simply steps on a plane with nothing except a brief case or, perhaps, his golf clubs. He is probably one of the best-dressed men in the country, but his faultlessly cut suits are so conservative and he wears them so casually that most people never give them a second glance. Webb hasn't the slightest idea how many suits he owns, but when

pushed for an estimate he set the figure at between 150 and 200. Neither does he have any clear idea of the number of custom-made shirts he owns. He does know how many pairs of golf shoes he owns, though, because for some reason he recently counted them: 52.

Baseball fans who know Webb only as a rich contractor and an absentee co-owner of the Yankees are sometimes amused when he says, as he often does, "There are only two things I know anything about and try to talk about—baseball and construction." Actually, the statement is true to a considerable degree. For almost half his life—until he was 28, to be exact—baseball literally dominated everything he did. His obsession with the game was so great, in fact, that it came perilously close to making a bum of him.

Delbert Eugene Webb was born May 17, 1899 in Fresno, California, where his father, Ernest G. (Griff) Webb, was a contractor and operated a sand-and-gravel business on the side. The elder Webb was an avid baseball fan and as a young man had won local fame as half of a reversible battery with Frank Chance, later the Peerless Leader of the Chicago Cubs. With this background it isn't surprising that Webb can't recall a time when he wasn't playing baseball. By the time he was 13, a bean pole of a kid weighing 130 pounds and standing 6 feet 3 inches, he was considered one of the best first basemen around Fresno, and if he was lucky, sometimes got as much as \$2.50 a game by playing on a pick-up semipro team.

When he was 14 and in his first year at high school, his father's business went broke. Webb, the eldest of three boys, had to go to work as a carpenter's apprentice to help support the family. He continued with his ballplaying on the side, however, and at 15 was the captain, sparkplug and best all-round ballplayer on the Modesto (California) Merchants. When World War I came, Webb was a full-fledged carpenter and he went to work in the Oakland shipyards and played on the shipyard team. "I was lucky," Webb recalled recently with a grin. "I drew down \$8 a day as a carpenter. The other players didn't have a trade and they got only \$4." By now, Webb had attained his full 6 foot 4 inches, weighed 180 pounds and was known all up and down the West Coast as a pitcher with a mean fast ball.

After the war, he left the shipyards and became a drifting semipro ballplayer, working as a carpenter only for firms which had a ball team. This was the pattern of his life for years, except for a brief interlude in 1919, when he married Hazel Church, a childhood sweetheart. The marriage ended in 1953—34 years later—when Mrs. Webb established Nevada residence and divorced Webb on grounds which have never been disclosed. The Webbs have remained friends and usually have dinner together when he is in Phoenix. Said a friend: "Del probably sees Hazel more now than he did the last few years they were married."

With today's efficient scouting and extensive farm systems, a ballplayer of young Webb's ability almost certainly would end up by being signed somewhere. But 30-odd years ago he had to settle for the next best thing, and for Webb, at the time, that was good enough. He played in the Alameda winter league, the Standard Oil league, drifted in and out of

outlaw leagues where he played under a phony name. For a time he was in a winter league where Ty Cobb and Harry Heilmann were players and Rogers Hornsby and George Sisler managers.

During the years he drifted from Idaho to California and back again, Webb pitched every chance he got. As a result he soon had a chronically sore arm. At times it hurt so much that he couldn't clench his fist and for long periods at a time he even had to eat with his left hand. Webb thinks now that his arm's effectiveness was probably gone as early as 1921, but he persisted in playing ball until a fateful summer day in 1927. On that day he was scheduled to pitch in an exhibition game for the inmates of San Quentin Prison. Those were Webb's drinking days, and he awoke late and with such a hangover that he missed the boat carrying the rest of the team across to the prison. When Webb finally did make his way across the bay, a trusty, who was moping about and obviously sick, helped him find the dressing room. Webb asked for a drink of water and the prisoner brought him a pitcher and a glass. A few days later Webb was laid low with a particularly virulent case of typhoid fever. Twice he almost died and his weight dropped from 204 pounds to 99. He was in bed for 11 weeks and it was a year before he was able to work.

As near as any man can point to a single, well-defined turning-point in his life, Webb believes this was his. He was sick, broke, 28 years old, with nothing much to show for his life except a so-so record as a drifting ballplayer. "That did it," Webb said. "I guess a fellow couldn't like baseball any more than I did, but I knew I had to swear off the game forever." (16 years later, in a similar mood, he stopped drinking.)

#### OFF IN A MODEL A FORD

Webb's doctor advised him to move to a warm, dry climate if he could, so when he had recovered, he scraped together \$100, packed his tool kit and wife in a model A Ford and headed for Phoenix. Webb's first job was hanging doors at the Westward Ho Hotel, then under construction. He had no way of knowing it then, but years later he was to build a million-dollar annex to the hotel.

Six months after he arrived in Phoenix, Webb was a carpenter foreman working on a new store for the A. J. Bayless grocery chain. He was also unhappy and had decided to move back to California. He drew his \$70 paycheck one Friday and went home and helped his wife pack their model A. Then he went to the bank to cash his check. It was refused because of insufficient funds. This was the second biggest break of Webb's life. Chafing, he stayed in Phoenix until Monday and then took his worthless check to the store owner and asked if he would make it good. The owner agreed on condition that Webb would take over and supervise completion of the store. The original contractor had gone broke but a warrant was out for his arrest. Webb took on the job and that was the birth of the Del E. Webb Construction Co. in July 1928.

After the store was completed, Webb contracted to build another. Then he built a small clapboard office, hung up a sign, and his wife moved in as secretary while he scouted for more business. He built garages and filling stations, chain stores and theaters. It was a

desperate struggle at first, but if a contractor had to be struggling Phoenix was probably a better spot than most. It had already started its slow climb from a parched desert town of 29,000 to a thriving modern metropolis of 330,000. There were other contractors in Phoenix, but Webb outstripped them all. When asked the secret of his success he invariably replies, "I applied the rules of baseball to business."

## REWARDING OF BOLDNESS

This has the hollow thud of a ripe platitude—except when Webb says it. For once his analogy is accepted, evidence can be dredged up to support it. There is boldness, for example. On one early bid, Webb had to list his equipment for a job building an overpass on an Arizona highway. He wrote down: one cement mixer (one-bag size), 10 wheelbarrows, 20 shovels and 10 picks. He got the job anyway.

There is showmanship. A short while after Webb started in business, Gypsy Smith, the noted evangelist, accepted an invitation to come to Phoenix and conduct a revival meeting. There was not a building in town big enough to satisfy the seat demand. Webb came forward and asked to be allowed to build an auditorium which would be cheap and yet serviceable. He had his workmen throw up a hasty framework, and then 300 civic-minded citizens, most of whom had never built anything bigger than a chicken coop, pitched in and completed the 6,000-capacity building in seven hours. The publicity Webb received was worth more than his fee would have been if he had built a permanent structure.

There is calm in a crisis—Webb never tightens up in a clutch. Contracting is a risky business and when bidding is close and competitive it can be a sort of financial Russian roulette. In his struggling days, Webb almost bid himself out of business a couple of times. "It's mighty tough to keep your word when you see nothing but red ink staring you in the face," Webb said, "but I just wouldn't do anything else."

Webb was a past master of the art of getting a jump on what he considered the other team, i.e., other contractors. When news was passed around that a new business was coming to Phoenix, most contractors were content to wait until a representative arrived. But Webb would grab a plane and go to the company's headquarters. As a result he has built an overwhelming majority of the chain stores in Phoenix. Sears, Roebuck and Montgomery Ward have massive stores right across the street from each other. Webb built them both at the same time.

## A HAPPY TEAM

Besides honing a fine edge to his natural competitive spirit, baseball taught Webb the value of having a happy team. Even his rivals admit that he has surrounded himself with one of the most loyal, closely knit and talented groups of executives in the business. Webb picked most of his key men when they were young, brought them along rapidly, paid them well—and worked them hard. R. H. Johnson, 46, a vice-president and head of the Los Angeles office, started with the company as a timekeeper 25 years ago. L. C.

Jacobson, 47, was a carpenter down to his last \$10 when he applied for a job in 1938. Webb, who liked his looks, persuaded him to take a job as a timekeeper at \$25 a week rather than a carpenter at \$46, gave him a raise almost every week for a year, finally made him a vice-president, then general manager, and in 1943 gave him a quarter interest in the company and made him a partner. Webb's executives travel almost as much as he does, make up their schedules a month in advance, and twice a year get together and as far as possible hammer out a plan to pursue for the next six months.

By the early '30s Webb's company was doing about \$700,000 worth of business a year. By the mid-'30s it had reached the \$3 million class and was operating in 12 states. In 1936 Webb established a Los Angeles office and announced: "Arizona isn't large enough to furnish all the business our company is equipped to handle." This rather grandiloquent statement almost turned out to be premature, because in the very next year Webb almost lost his shirt building a Los Angeles high school. Webb's executives are still touched when they recall that when things looked blackest and the pressure was heaviest, Webb's chief concern seemed to be that he could not pay them a bonus that year. He made it up to them the only way he could: took them to dinner at an expensive restaurant.

#### A BOUNTY OF BLESSINGS

Fortunately, a steady flow of new contracts made up for the losses on the school, and it was the expanding company's last major crisis. In the limping '30s the most bountiful blessings flowed from Washington. Webb practically commuted there at times. He met Franklin D. Roosevelt early, and an immediate rapport was established when F.D.R. learned that Webb, like himself, had been bedridden for a long period and considered that it had changed his life. Webb was a good friend of Ed Pauley, California oil millionaire and Democratic power; and later one of his closest friends was the late Robert Hannegan, Democratic national committeeman. Through Hannegan, he became a friend of Harry Truman. Webb liked Ike early and still does. At a Dodger-Yankee World Series game the President attended in 1955, he inquired for Webb and was told that he was seated in the celebrities' box across the field. As the President's limousine made its traditional circuit of the field after the game, Ike had it pause in front of Webb's box, alighted and walked over and shook his hand warmly, congratulating him on the Yankee victory.

By 1940 Webb had powerful connections and an established reputation in Washington. But all the contracts he had ever received—or could even possibly have dreamed about—seemed piddling by comparison with the ones he received when World War II began. His first major war contract was to build Fort Huachuca, one of 50 maximum-size Army posts planned for the nation, on 149 acres of Arizona desert waste. The project had to be completed in 90 days at a cost of \$3 million. Webb finished the job on time and then contracted to add additions as they became necessary. Eventually the total cost of the camp amounted to \$22 million.

After Fort Huachuca, Webb received contracts to build air fields, Army camps, hospitals, Marine bases, radar schools and ordnance camps all over Arizona and California. All had to be built speedily and usually in isolated, sun-baked regions. The Japanese Relocation

Center at Parker—spoken of locally as "the part of Arizona God forgot"—was a typical example of the kind of project which strained the company's ingenuity and endurance. Webb was instructed to erect buildings within three weeks with 3,000 separate units to accommodate 10,000 Japanese internees who, in the early post-Pearl Harbor hysteria, were removed from their West Coast homes and sent into the desert. Both the wisdom and the morality of this project have since been seriously questioned, but at the time it was a job to be done, and Webb did it remarkably well. The half-mile-square site for the camp had been chosen purely for its isolation with no other consideration involved. When the company's huge construction caravan rolled up to the site at 3 o'clock one afternoon, the temperature was hovering around 120°. The area was devoid of shade and covered with a growth of mesquite six feet tall. The construction boss telephoned Webb and reported the hellish conditions and told him he couldn't even estimate how long it would take his men to clear the area of mesquite, if they could do it at all. Webb instructed him to sit tight. Fortunately, he had a fleet of Caterpillar tractors working on another project at Blythe, California. He phoned the foreman of the Blythe project and told him to send the tractors to Parker at once. They arrived at 6 o'clock in the morning and had plowed up the mesquite by mid-afternoon. Webb then threw 5,000 workmen into the Parker project on a double-shift schedule. The job was completed in less than three weeks. Webb then signed another contract to expand the camp to accommodate another 25,000 internees within 120 days.

Webb's company did \$100 million worth of work for the Government alone during the war years and employed 25,000 men. Its wartime contracts gave it the equipment and financial stability to bid for bigger and bigger contracts after the war and raised it to a Goliath in the field.

Nothing irritates Webb quite so much as whispers that he obtained his Government contracts through some undercover political chicanery. Since he always talks as if he had just been injected with truth serum, he admits that his sole purpose in going to Washington was to try to obtain business for his company. He made many close personal friends in Washington, but he also is proud of the fact that he is a salesman for his business. "We can build as well or better than anybody else, so why shouldn't we get the business?" he asks.

Since Webb's success has astonished and disgruntled many of his oldtime competitors, one is most apt to hear the whispers in Phoenix. A typical—but nonvicious—example occurred during the 1949 sports award dinner held there. The humor at these affairs, as is well known, is usually raw or goatish anyway. For instance, Giants Owner Horace Stoneham was introduced as a man who had inherited the Giants and a cellarful of whisky from his father and had been in the cellar ever since. Then Phoenix Merchant Robert Goldwater, brother of U.S. Senator Barry Goldwater, introduced Webb as "an ignorant sonuvabitch who built a million dollars with a hammer and a nail and a case of whisky thoughtfully distributed in Washington." Webb sportingly laughed along with the gag, but he wasn't amused.

Although as far as the startled sports world was concerned he came shooting out of the blue, Webb did not buy into the Yankees on impulse. He first began to consider the idea of buying a ball club as far back as 1942 when he heard the Oakland Oaks were for sale. In the nearly 15 years which had elapsed since he swore off baseball, he had not attended more than three or four games. In fact, he was so uninterested that when Judge Kenesaw Landis, who vacationed near Phoenix, invited him to two World Series games, he saw one but ducked out of the other. He thought of adding a baseball club to his interests only as a business proposition, a hedge against inflation and, possibly, taxes. Webb told his lawyer to get a price on the Oakland club and let him know. Some time later when the lawyer called to tell him he could get the club for \$60,000, Webb was frantically pushing work on Fort Huachuca and too busy to think of anything else. He told his lawyer to forget the matter. Quite a while later, as he tells it, when visiting one of the bases he had built, Webb ran into Larry MacPhail, who was then on Under Secretary of War Robert Patterson's staff. Webb and MacPhail had met many times previously in Washington, and Webb mentioned how he had been interested in the Oakland team. MacPhail said something to the effect that if Webb was interested in acquiring a ball club he ought to buy a big one, like, for instance, the Yankees—which he had heard the Ruppert estate would have to sell because of tax problems. MacPhail said he was thinking of getting a group together to make an offer and asked Webb if he was interested. "Count me in," Webb said.

#### AN OFFER FROM TOPPING

Dan Topping, whom Webb had also met before, was one of the people MacPhail mentioned in the group he was getting together. Webb was building the El Toro Marine base when he encountered Topping, then a Marine captain. They discussed the Yankee deal, particularly reports that Ed Barrow had refused to discuss a sale with MacPhail. Topping said that if he had a chance he thought he could swing the deal. "If you can," Webb said, "count me in."

Shortly after this Webb told Judge Landis he was thinking of buying the Yankees and asked him what he thought. Said Landis: "If you want to worry when you're making a putt; if you want to worry when having your dinner; if you want to worry when you're going to bed, then go ahead and buy the Yankees."

There are as many versions of how the deal was finally set up as there are participants, but the next word Webb had came one Sunday morning while he was playing golf at the Phoenix Country Club. He was on the 7th green when he was summoned to the clubhouse to take an urgent long distance call from Topping. Topping said that Barrow wanted to meet Webb and asked if he could come to New York immediately. He said he was pretty sure that Barrow would sell the club to him, Webb and MacPhail if he did. Webb left for New York as soon as he could change clothes. The next day Topping took Webb around to meet Barrow. Barrow shook Webb's hand and looked him up and down. "That's a good handshake you've got there—and I hear you're a good man. You'll do." Some details had to be worked out, but the bargain was struck then and there.

When Webb first bought into the Yankees he was adamant about its being a purely business proposition. Sometimes he still says the same thing—but now and then the skinny old semipro ballplayer pops up out of somewhere and makes him a little schizophrenic. In his sentimental mood he likes to talk about how young fellows nowadays, even major leaguers, do things that wouldn't be tolerated one minute on the Ambrose Tailors or Modesto Merchants, like hooking a base on the outside instead of the inside, or pitchers not taking a position on the mound so they can readily pick off a player on first. And always, always, when he talks about baseball one phrase keeps popping up, "The kids all over the country," as if baseball is something held in trust for kids—which, of course, it is.

But then the level-headed millionaire takes over and baseball becomes something of a peanut business—which, of course, it is, too. A gloriously fascinating business, maybe, but still a peanut business, when compared with other things. A good hotel, for instance, costs three or four times more than the best ball club. A good tourist court costs almost as much as the Yankees. And motion pictures! A really big motion picture, says Webb, nowadays costs more than any ball club.

Webb gets annoyed because some people can't seem to understand that he doesn't have anything to do with the day-to-day running of the Yankees. "Topping runs the New York club," he says. "He's the boss. My father always used to tell me not to have a partner if you can help it. But nobody could have a better partner than Topping. He's a sincere, straight man. I have a 50% interest in the Yankees, but—and I don't particularly care to see this printed everywhere—I think I went to about 12 games last year. Topping is the boss of the ball club."

Something else that nettles Webb is the suggestion that he somehow is a behind-the-scenes power in baseball, a shadowy string-puller and manipulator. Since he seldom raises his voice, he expects people to listen when he does, but when he has a fight to wage or a score to settle he comes out into the open. He cheerfully admits that he is chiefly responsible for the decision to get rid of Happy Chandler as commissioner. "If I've never done anything else for baseball," he says, "I did it when I got rid of Chandler. There's something most people don't know: I was the only baseball owner who knew Chandler. I mean I really knew him. I had known him a long time. Those other owners, Stoneham, Griffith, Briggs—they didn't know Chandler. I used to talk to him about what he was doing. I was sitting with him one day when he called a couple of players up into the stands and held court right there. I said to him, 'Chandler, what in the hell is wrong with you, holding court in the middle of a ball park? You can't make a decision out here. You made a fool out of yourself.'

"Do you remember the time that fan came up behind Durocher and hit him, and Durocher turned around and knocked him down? Well, I got a call from Chandler. 'Del, come over here,' he said. Well, I went over and he was all excited and running around and shuffling papers and he said, 'Del, I've got to throw Durocher out of baseball forever.' I said, 'What are you talking about, Chandler? Do you have the facts? Have you weighed the facts?'

That's the way he was, always making a fool of himself. It took me about 48 hours to get enough votes to throw him out. It was the best thing that ever happened to baseball."

Webb is not a man who raises his voice often. The only other occasion on which it has happened in baseball followed the Battle of the Biltmore, the historic occasion which preceded Larry MacPhail's exit from baseball. Webb was not present when MacPhail came in, allegedly under the baleful influence of drink, and socked a Branch Rickey defender in the eye, sacked sober George Weiss and almost got himself into a brawl with Dan Topping.

"I was upstairs in another part of—the hotel," Webb says. "Dan came in and told me what happened and we went looking for MacPhail, but he had already gone out the back entrance. We went up to Weiss's room and he was all upset about what MacPhail had said. Well, after we had straightened him out, Dan and I called our lawyers and told them to draw up the papers to buy MacPhail out. We sent him word that we would give him \$2 million and he'd damned well better take it. We gave him until 6 o'clock that night.

"I was in a back room that afternoon when somebody came in and told me MacPhail was outside and wanted to see me. I said I didn't want to see him and to tell him that he had better sign the damned papers by 6 o'clock. Well, a few minutes later they came in and told me that MacPhail had signed but wanted to see me anyway. I went outside and MacPhail was standing there smiling and he put out his hand and said, 'Del, you've been a good partner to me.' I said, 'I don't want to shake your hand,' and told him what I thought of him and walked away."

A few dozen ill-chosen words about Del Webb were spoken recently by a kindly old banker: "Del Webb don't interfere with my work. He's not the type who comes around and harasses the ballplayers. He's very glad and appreciative of the fact when the team wins. When he comes into the dressing room he doesn't go around and bother the ballplayers. I think he's a pretty fair guy. He pretty well likes all the ballplayers. He thinks Mr. Topping does a good job; he thinks Mr. Weiss does a good job; and he thinks Mr. Stengel does a good job." Then Mr. Casey Stengel displayed a watch he had been given by Webb on July 30, 1959, when the Yankees were at their lowest ebb and people were yelling for Stengel's scalp. It was inscribed: "Everything considered, the greatest manager who ever put on a uniform."