



THE WHITE HOUSE  
HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

## NEW Podcast Episode Explores Long History Between America's Pastime and the Presidency

As Washington, D.C. Hosts All-Star Game, A Look at Baseball in the Nation's Capital

**July 17, 2018** (Washington, D.C.) —The White House Historical Association today released the latest episode of *The 1600 Sessions* podcast, [“America's Pastime and the Presidency”](#), exploring the rich relationship between the White House and baseball, and the history of the sport in Washington. This month, the Washington Nationals are hosting the 2018 Major League Baseball All-Star Game, a tradition stretching back to Franklin Roosevelt's first term as president.

In observance of the historic game, White House Historical Association President **Stewart McLaurin** speaks with **Curt Smith**, author of *The Presidents and the Pastime: The History of Baseball and the White House* and former speechwriter for President George H.W. Bush; **Fred Frommer**, former *Associated Press* reporter and author of *You Gotta Have Heart: A History of Washington Baseball from 1859 to the 2012 National League East Champions*; and **Phil Hochberg**, a sports lawyer and former stadium announcer at the D.C. Stadium from 1962-1968.

McLaurin notes the earliest connection between baseball and a president: during the election of 1860, a political cartoon circulated of “Lincoln on a baseball diamond, holding a bat and a baseball and declaring a home run over his political opponents in the race.” However, as Frommer notes, the White House became more involved with the sport under Andrew Johnson, who hosted teams at the White House after they had played nearby. In fact, one of the first baseball fields in Washington was near the White House grounds: “it's now known as the Ellipse, and a team called the Potomacs played there. And they had really good rivalry with the other team in Washington, known as the Nationals, the precursor to today's team.”

Then in 1910, President Taft started the cherished tradition of the President throwing the first pitch at baseball games: “In the old days they would stay in the president's box a couple of rows or one row behind the field and they throw the ball up for grabs for players that both teams to fight for it...whoever would get that ball would bring it over to the president and the president would sign it.”

The perception of baseball as a formal gentlemen's sport slowly was rebirthed as a sport for all Americans. Frommer shares that Ms. Coolidge had a role in this turnover, being an aficionado of baseball herself and wanting more women to be able to share in the love of the sport.

Hochberg gives insight into the All-Star game, revisiting Washington this month for the first time since 1969. “The other leagues didn’t have All-Star games. People here couldn’t see national league stars and this was their first chance to see these stars of the other league... This was serious.” As a former announcer, Hochberg fondly recalls, “It was a tremendous thrill to be able to introduce the president of the United States.”

As a speechwriter under President George H.W. Bush, Curt Smith gives a perspective on America’s pastime from inside the White House: Smith explains seven weeks after September 11, 2001 when Americans were in desperate need of a victory.

“Derek Jeter, the Yankee’s shortstop, says to the president [George Bush], ‘Mr. President, if I were you, I’d throw it from the pitch in rubber, not from in front of the mound, that way people will think you’re a professional.’ President Bush goes to the pitching rubber, he winds up and throws a perfect strike. “He could not have planned it and divided that plate more precisely, if he had walked the 60 feet 6 inches from the mound to home plate and lovingly put the ball in the catcher’s mitt. It was an heroic moment,” said Smith.

Throughout these fascinating interviews, it becomes clear that baseball is more than just a sport, but a rich and integral part of the history of Washington and the presidency.

## **The 1600 Sessions**

In this podcast series, White House Historical Association President Stewart McLaurin interviews luminaries, historians, and eyewitnesses to history about America’s most famous residence and office—the White House. Each episode includes a prominent guest or guests to discuss varying facets of White House history, including insights from former staff and many other topical issues.

*The 1600 Sessions* is available on [iTunes](#), [GooglePlay](#), and [Stitcher](#). To hear the full episode, visit [The1600Sessions.org](#) and learn more about White House History at [WhiteHouseHistory.org](#)

For media inquiries, please contact [press@whha.org](mailto:press@whha.org) or Jessica Fredericks, Communications Director at [JFredericks@whha.org](mailto:JFredericks@whha.org).

## **About The White House Historical Association**

First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy envisioned a restored White House that conveyed a sense of history through its decorative and fine arts. In 1961, the White House Historical Association was established to support her vision to preserve and share the Executive Mansion’s legacy for generations to come. Supported entirely by private resources, the Association’s mission is to assist in the preservation of the state and public rooms, fund acquisitions for the White House permanent collection, and educate the public on the history of the White House. Since its founding, the White House Historical Association has contributed more than \$47 million in fulfillment of its mission. To learn more about the White House Historical Association, please visit [www.whitehousehistory.org](http://www.whitehousehistory.org).