Cover of Steve's article in Maple Street

THE GREATEST GAME EVER PLAYED
Seizing the 1921 pennant
by Lyle Spatz and Steve Steinberg

The test for the 1921 pennant was one of the most thrilling in New York Yankees history, and was the most captivating for the team since 1904. A six-day span saw three games against the Cleveland Indians at the finish line of the season, splintered by the surge from the New York Yankees, the Giants, and the Banks for Baseball supremacy in New York by Lyle Spatz and Steve Steinberg. (Reprinted by permission of the University of Nebraska Press.)

That four-game showdown at the Polo Grounds would that with the Yankees leading by a winning percentage of a mere .002. Uncertainty hung in the air. "There is no telling from one inning to the next just what a Yankee pitcher will do these days," wrote Henry Sandreger on the eve of the series. He went on to predict that the teams with the stronger—me the "less inferior"—pitching would win the series. The Cleveland Plain Dealer admitted it did not know who would win the American League pennant. But the paper did know that the Indians would fight until the last out of the series. "The Indians are a team which never quits. They do not know how to lose."

They would have to know how to win without their leader on the playing field. The Times announced that Tris Speaker probably would not play in New York. The Yankees would be without Frank Baker, his brother had died on Tuesday. This came on top of the deaths of his wife a year before and his mother-in-law earlier in the year.

A World Series-like atmosphere permeated this series. The Yankee clubroom was besieged by ticket-hunters, but the reserved seats were sold out early in the week. About 20,000 grandstand and bleacher tickets would go on sale before each game on a first-come, first-served basis. A crowd estimated at between 35,000 and 40,000 fans turned out for the first game on Friday, September 26.