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HIST 225 Section 35- American Dreamscape Entry

Honor

Abstract:

Christopher “Christy” Mathewson (August 12, 1880-October 7, 1925) was a world-renowned professional baseball pitcher who captured the hearts of thousands of fans. He was not only a baseball idol, but also a hero of World War I and an honorable Christian man. Christy was famous for his exceptional success in pitching and his signature pitch known as the “Fade Away”. In 1936, Christy was inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame with the highest honor as one of the “Five Immortals”.

Full Entry: Christy Mathewson: Fame, Sacrifice, and Christianity

Christy Mathewson’s life fulfilled the American Dream like none other as a legendary baseball player, Christian, and war hero. As both a strong Christian man and professional baseball star, he was a role model among fellow Christians and in the sports world.

As a graduate from Bucknell College, Christy’s professional career began in 1899 when he played for the Tuanton Baseball Club of the New England League before joining the Virginia League, and ultimately the New York Giants^{1,2}. During the next 17 seasons of playing for the Giants, Christy quickly rose to the top with numerous records through his outstanding pitching³. At the World Series Game of 1905, Christy pitched a record of three shutout victories to win the championship for his team⁴. This success was considered the “most incredible mound performance of all”⁵. He also pitched two no-hitter games in his career in 1901 and 1905⁶. Christy’s pitching success allowed him to play at the 1911, 1912, and 1913 World Series games⁷. In the Washington Post, Christy’s pitching success was reported as being the cause of the “revival” of baseball⁸. His games began to attract over 18,000 spectators⁹. There was a series of games where he prevented a single person to score¹⁰. The “Fade-away” was Christy’s signature pitch that no one could top¹¹. Christy reported that the pitch made him tired and sore, so he “saves it for the pinches.”¹². Newspaper headlines and articles called him the “premier pitcher of the world” and the “greatest pitcher the game of baseball has long produced”¹³. His final stats concluded 2,502 strike outs, 837 walks, and 80 shut outs in a total of 4,782 innings, earned him a place in the prestigious Baseball Hall of Fame in 1936¹⁴. In addition to being inducted into the Hall of Fame, Christy was inducted as one of the prized “Five Immortals”, which is the highest honor one can achieve in baseball¹⁵. Christy’s outstanding talent captivated the World and forever changed baseball.

At 38 years old, the baseball idol voluntarily traded his fame and fortune in baseball to serve for the country in World War I¹⁶. During his time in the war, he was a Chemical Corps Officer of the Gas and Flame Division of the American Expeditionary Force¹⁷. Between performing trench inspections for chemical gases and undergoing practice drills involving chlorine-based mustard gas, Christy developed tuberculosis and an honorable discharge from the military¹⁸. Upon

military discharge, Christy stayed involved in the world of baseball as much as he could before tuberculous pneumonia took his life at the age of 45 on October 7th¹⁹. Upon Christy's death, he was remembered by the world as both a baseball idol and a war hero²⁰.

Christy's strong faith radiated from him in all that he did in life. As a quiet, reserved, humble, gentleman both on and off the baseball field, he lived a very respectable life. According to the Washington Post, "Matty is absolutely without a trace of conceit. He's a big, fine, clean-living fellow, a great ball player, and a good business man, and as popular as pay day among the men who work with him at the Polo grounds."²¹. Another newspaper said Christy "was a symbol of the highest type of American sportsmanship."²². Christy was such a well-respected role model for Christians, as his success in baseball was being recorded in Christian newspapers, and he was mentioned in preachers' services as an example to follow. Pastor Christian F. Reisner in his sermon spoke of Christy as a "modern masculine Christian"²³. In a sport full of scandals and conceited athletes, Christy's faith set him apart from all other athletes.

The American Dream for Christy was not only what he achieved in his life, but the respectable life he lived as a Christian. *Pitching in a Pinch: Baseball from the Inside* stated Christy was "the first truly national hero of the national game, and arguably-with an appeal across all social classes-the first truly national hero to emerge from American sports."²⁴. Christy's kind heart appealed to everyone making him one of the most popular role models of the time. A quote by *New York Herald* writer Grantland Rice in 1923 confirms Christy's respect as he was recognized at a public sporting event during his final months of life. "A king walked out of the shadows of the past into the brilliant spring sunshine of the Polo Grounds yesterday as 30,000 loyal subjects paid him tribute of a roaring acclaim that no crowned monarch could ever know."²⁵. Christy fulfilled the American Dream by upholding a reputable Christian life within fame, fortune, and military service.

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¹ "CHRISTY MATHEWSON DIES UNEXPECTEDLY," *New York Times (1923-Current File)*, October 08, 1925, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/103499766?accountid=11667>.

² *Christy Mathewson Dies*.

³ "LEAGUE BASEBALL GAMES," *New York Times* (1901, Jun 09), <https://search.proquest.com/docview/96084037?accountid=11667>.

⁴ *Christy Mathewson Dies*.

⁵ Larry Eldridge, "World Series '80; The Nation's No. 1 Sporting Event," *Christian Science Monitor, NewsBank*, October 15, 1980, https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AWNB&t=stp%3ANewspaper%21Newspaper&sort=YMD_date%3AA&fld-base-0=alltext&maxresults=20&val-base-0=christy%20mathewson&docref=news/13E3052C083DAA38.

⁶ *Christy Mathewson Dies*.

⁷ Bud Maloney, "Christy Mathewson: 'Big Six' was pitching legend for ages," *Evening Tribune (San Diego, CA)*, October 9, 1984: BASEBALL-10, *NewsBank*, <https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AWNB&docref=news/11792FA82E2B459A>.

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- ⁸ "ONE OF GIANTS' STARS," *The Washington Post (1877-1922)*, Jul 31, 1904, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/144484685?accountid=11667>.
- ⁹ "GIANTS WIN THE FIRST," *The Washington Post (1877-1922)*, Oct 10, 1905, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/144582320?accountid=11667>.
- ¹⁰ "CHAMPIONS OF WORLD," *The Washington Post (1877-1922)*, Oct 15, 1905, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/144533850?accountid=11667>.
- ¹¹ Leslie Heaphy, "Mathewson, Christy (1880-1925), baseball player, manager, and executive," *American National Biography (2000)*, <https://doi.org/10.1093/anb/9780198606697.article.1900138>.
- ¹² Christy Mathewson, *Pitching in a Pinch: Baseball from the Inside* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), ix-xi.
- ¹³ "BEST BASEBALL PITCHER," *The Washington Post (1877-1922)*, Nov 05, 1905, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/144557864?accountid=11667>.
- ¹⁴ Heaphy, *Mathewson, Christy (1880-1925)*.
- ¹⁵ *ibid.*
- ¹⁶ Mathewson, *Pitching in a Pinch*, ix-xi.
- ¹⁷ Richard Gurtowski, "Remembering Baseball Hall of Famers Who Served in the Chemical Corps," *Army Chemical Review*, no. 3-05-2 (2005): 52-54, <http://www.wood.army.mil/chmdsd/images/pdfs/Jul-Dec%202005/ACR-Fall05.pdf>.
- ¹⁸ Gurtowski, *Remembering Baseball*.
- ¹⁹ *Christy Mathewson Dies*.
- ²⁰ *ibid.*
- ²¹ "MATHEWSON'S BRAIN HAS MADE HIM SUCCESSFUL MAN," *The Washington Post (1877-1922)*, Sep 05, 1909, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/144935326?accountid=11667>.
- ²² *Christy Mathewson Dies*.
- ²³ Bob Gaines, *Christy Mathewson, The Christian Gentleman: How One Man's Faith and Fastball Forever Changed Baseball* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 187.
- ²⁴ Mathewson, *Pitching in a Pinch*, ix-xi.
- ²⁵ Gaines, *Christy Mathewson*, 193.