



PLAY BALL—Atlanta's Mayor Ivan Allan tosses out first ball with assist from Governor Carl Sanders.

Brave New World in Dixie

By **FURMAN BISHER**
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IT wasn't a good year, really. The manager was fired. Some of the coaches got along like old hens clucking around the same rooster. The town hero, the player who stood as the symbol of the Braves, was traded like you trade a horse. As much ink was devoted to lawsuits and courtroom play, and to Grobschmidt and Roller, as to Alou and Aaron, Cloninger and Torre.

People complained about (a) parking, (b) price of hot dogs, (c) price of anything, (d) salt on the peanuts, (e) no salt on the peanuts, (f) no tickets at the reservation window, (g) wrong tickets at the reservation window, (h) why there weren't more seats when Sandy Koufax pitched, and (i) Bobby Bragan.

Several people in places of authority picked the Braves to win the pennant, or to be up there in September. They finished fifth. They had to come fast out of the shadows to do this.

For years, transient experts had been saying, "Atlanta is a major league city."

Now we knew that Atlanta officially was a major league city. We had all the aches and pains that other major league cities had. We fired managers. We had dissension in the clubhouse. We had fans who groused like hell. We were picked high and finished among the average. We had everything you want in the major leagues, from the saddle sores to the satin.

The reason we know it was for the good of all was that 1,540,000 came out to Atlanta Stadium to see what was going on. People who had never seen a baseball thrown caught the shuttle bus, or had brunch or dinner at the club and rode out on a charter.

Baseball became "society" again in Atlanta. To be seen in a box seat, or on the club level, or in the Stadium Club was the thing.

The night we knew it was "big" was the night that Sandy Koufax pitched against Denver Lemaster. That was the night that Billy Hitchcock succeeded Bobby Bragan as manager. At least 10,000 people were turned away, but that wasn't point of proof that this was "big."

In the middle of the game, rain came, and it rained for two hours. People standing around the outfield fence huddled there for an hour before surrendering their places and finding shelter. Over 40,000 of an original crowd of 54,000 wanted to see the finish, which finally came at 12:35 a.m., when Ed Mathews, the symbolic Brave, knocked a home run over the rightfield fence on a 3-2 count with two men out in the ninth inning.

No one event has had as much impact on the national image of Atlanta in 25 years as the building of the stadium and the arrival of the Braves. It brought business to the city and industry to the city and prestige to the city, and it was a thing of value to every facet of life in the city.

There was a time of political crisis last fall when we had no Governor. We could do without one far more easily than we could do without the Braves.

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