

# Is Baseball on the Level?

By Gen. Charles H. Taylor

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Illustration from Photograph

I HAVE been interested in the game of baseball for more than half a century. In my school days in Charlestown it was a favorite pastime. It was played with a rubber ball, which was thrown at the base-runner, if hit he was out.

I have watched the growth of the sport with a great interest. I believe with John Morrill, one of the best ball players in the country in his day, that it is the only outdoor game for a spectator to really enjoy. Other sports are interesting to many, but in no other pastime can each spectator watch every move with certain understanding of what has happened.

Baseball is intensely American. It reflects all the manhood and vigor of this splendid nation. It takes brains to play the game. The game is scientific in the extreme. It abounds in what is known as inside play—the contestants working with each other with one common aim in view. Signals are used and the men are drilled in these signals as soldiers in an army. Woe be to the man who slips up in his part in one of these signals. The battery, *i. e.*, the pitcher and the catcher, constitute the offensive in baseball. It is their aim to find the weaknesses of their opponents. An immense responsibility depends upon this pitcher. He must have a splendid physique, have no end of pluck and courage and possess command of the ball. The catcher must have perfect fighting qualities. It is no mean ability to receive the ball and in a twinkling hurl it to an infielder in time to head off a base-runner. It is up to him to watch any bases that are occupied and lose no chances to catch any man who happens to take too much ground.

I call to mind one of the finest catchers that ever lived—Charley Snyder—who was a wonder at this sort of thing. He was a phenomenal thrower and his ability to catch men off the bases was wonderful. In one game on the Boston National League grounds in the early days when the Boston and Providence clubs were such warm rivals, with the bases filled and no one out, he caught men napping at first and at third and thereby put his club out of jeopardy.

In a certain game some of the old-timers were astounded to note that the shortstop played very close to second base and wondered what on earth he was thinking about. But they found out when the batsman drove a line ball directly over second base and the fielder was so near that he was able to catch the ball. That infielder was a Boston boy—Arthur Irwin—recognized as one of the brightest men in baseball. He played on many champion teams. He was not a mere mechanic, he was a scientist, working out plays and combinations that were in advance of his time.

Some wonder why it is that many of our finest people go to ball games day in and day out. They say that they can see nothing in the game. To me there is nothing prettier than to watch an outfielder try to gather a ball, giving chase with all the speed at his command, finally making one last desperate plunge that actually consummates the play, while the stands fairly quake with the tokens of appreciation.

There is seemingly no limit to the number of phenomenal plays that can be made. As with the outfielders, so with the infielders. It is amazing how an infielder can face the hottest of



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grounders, gather them cleanly, and dispose of his man at first. What is there, too, that can equal the enthusiasm of a crowd when the batsman succeeds in making a hit that snatches a game out of the fire?

It is a great relaxation, this baseball. One forgets business and bother in a game of ball. All cares are laid aside. Some people would rather lose a meal than miss a game and I must say I cannot blame them much.

Then baseball is but in its infancy. The attention paid to it is growing with each year. Already some of the spacious stands are too small to accommodate the throngs. Not a season passes by that does not see an increase of the seating capacity of the stands. It is estimated that last season 25,000,000 attended professional games. There is no question at all that more than that number will be chronicled this season.

A short time ago a Mr. John W. Herbert wrote a long article denouncing baseball as a stupid game, proceeding to contrast it with football.

His arguments are hardly worth considering, because the paper in which they were printed, *The Boston Transcript*, has shown by other writers how feeble his position is. The selection of football for comparison was simply laughable. There are a great many people interested in football, but it has no comparison for the spectator with baseball. It is rare that half of the people at a football game can see the plays. It is absolutely certain that not more than ten per cent. of the spectators thoroughly understand the technical points of the game, and these have to start the applause and let the crowd know when something has been done that is worth cheering.

I think two of the writers in *The Transcript* on baseball at different times are really worth quoting. One made these interesting statements:

"Baseball is not merely an interesting and scientific game. It is the game which calls into play the dominant traits of Americans in its demand for agility, quick thinking and tremendous exertion and excitement. It is peculiarly popular

and fascinating to us because it means a contest, a personal hand to hand encounter. Baseball has all the elements of the personal battle which makes every red-blooded American itch to see (even if he never yields to the temptation) a glove contest; it is ideal and peculiar in that it affords an individual contest and a team contest at the same time. From the moment the first ball is pitched it is a struggle between the batter or base-runner and some one man of the opposing side, in which both teams are engaged. One's every action depends upon that of his opponent and the fate of the contest is so uncertain that at any moment a bit of carelessness or of luck (and the presence of luck is a fascinating factor) may lead to disaster. Football has many of the characteristics of baseball, but its season is short and it is too complex in its actual workings to satisfy the average American crowd. Baseball fills all the conditions demanded by the American boy, and it is from first to last exciting, daring, contentious and strenuous."

Another made this admirable summary:

"The immense and growing popularity of baseball is a wholesome and hopeful feature of American life. It is a splendid sport, altogether worthy of its undisputed title as the national game. Its

value as an educational force alone is incalculable. In the schools the playing of baseball promotes a vigorous, all-round physical development and cultivates the valuable qualities of alertness, resourcefulness, self-control and self-confidence. As a form of public entertainment the game is peculiarly free from demoralizing associations. The baseball habit is at the worst an innocuous indulgence. The popular fondness for this clean sport is a symptom of national health."

Even to this day one occasionally hears the query, "Is baseball on the level?" and I answer with all the fervor at my command, "Absolutely and unquestionably. No sport is more so." No one conversant with the machinery that controls the game would think of asking such a question. There are today almost forty professional organizations working in harmony to uphold and uplift the national game. That means over 300 ball clubs, and assuming that there are fifteen players associated with each club—a total of 4,500 men—a good-sized army. As long as the game is played there will be doubting Thomases who will insist that the game is "fixed". The way that the games are patronized well shows the confidence people have that the game is honestly played and conducted.

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