

Marvellous Growth of Baseball

*Phenomenal Advance of the National Game as Traced by a
Very Conservative Authority*

THE wonderful interest manifested this year in baseball is aptly shown in the fact that the New York Evening Post, a staid old financial daily, which seldom devotes any space at all to events other than "big" news items and the chronicling of financial doings, devoted a column and a half to an editorial on "The National Game." The editor's opinions are worthy of reproduction here :

Two or three years ago it seemed as if the popular enthusiasm for professional baseball had reached its height; as if the bulletin-board crowds could not be larger, the attendance much greater, and the popular newspapers could give no more space to record the doings of star pitchers and phenomenal batters. But the craze continues, if craze it can justly be called. It has become a part of our American life that can no more be overlooked than the enthusiasm for cricket and football in England. Interest in it is no longer confined to the masses, but has taken hold upon serious classes—men who a few years ago would not have dreamed of spending an afternoon in the open air to watch a game, and fifteen years ago thought of professional baseball players as mere rowdies who played, honestly or dishonestly, to entertain the trifling or the idle. Now, the great throngs that watch the local teams comprise men of standing in ever increasing numbers. The new grandstands at the Polo Grounds are to accommodate 50,000 people, and so great is the attraction of the game that no one feels that the management has gone too far in its building plans.

Significantly, the magazines have this summer been devoting unusual space to a discussion of the game and its merits. From these articles, as well as from the

observation of experts and the public, it appears that the wonderful development of the popular interest in the sport is based upon some solid reasons. The play itself has been scientifically worked out to an amazing degree, and the speed and accuracy of the players have been developed in a manner that strikes one who remembers only the game of fifteen or twenty years ago as something extraordinary. In the never-ending contest between pitcher and batter the interest of the game has not been allowed to suffer. There are still "pitchers' battles," but not too many; the race of heavy hitters has not died out. But more than that, the caliber of the players has improved. It is not yet necessary to think of them as being all students of Shakespeare and the fine arts, to note that there are men among them of uncommon abilities and unusual tastes, and that the standard of personal conduct among them has been rising with every year. For this the managers are largely to be thanked; they have learned that to carry drunken rowdies on their payroll is not the way to make money and to please the public.

But it is also true that the large salaries paid have lured into the baseball arena men who seek its rewards as a stepping-stone to more serious professions. A classic example of this—the one usually cited—is Governor Tener of Pennsylvania. This, it seems to us, is rather hard on the game; it is, however, true that every team in the major leagues has its college men, who are utilizing the winters of rest and the odd intervals between games—if the strain of the contests is not too great—to qualify for the law or medicine or for some permanent lifework. These men, together with non-graduates of charac-

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ter, have helped to remove the stigma that attached to the baseball player of old, quite as much as the greater stringency of the umpires. The baseball team of today is, moreover, a little democracy in itself. A Cuban writer has recently called attention to this. After seeing Lajoie, a Frenchman; Abbatticio, an Italian, and Hans Wagner, a German, play ball, he wrote:

"In New York I heard Irish fans cheer the brilliant work of an English player, and in Cincinnati I saw Germans go wild when Mitchell, an Irishman, cleaned up with a triple. Spaniards cheer Americans, Frenchman enthuse when a German makes a great catch or throw, and I have even seen an Indian, a stoic in everyday life, toss his blanket when a favorite player made an especially fine play. Then came the first indication that baseball is at some time to be an international sport. The purchase of two Cuban players, born and bred on the island, men of Spanish descent, convinced me that baseball is reaching out and gaining more friends and devotees every year."

But the democracy of the game is at its best on the bleachers and in the grandstand. There a wealthy banker straight from downtown by the "Wall Street subway special" hobnobs with the office boy for once, on terms of perfect equality. Both "root" together for their favorites, and both are equally dismayed with the men on either side of them if those favorites fail to live up to their reputation and opportunities. It is this spirit of democracy which makes the baseball crowd so interesting. A writer in the Independent who sought to explain the fascination of baseball found it in the crowds. "Anything," he says, "at which ten thousand people are look-

ing is worth looking at." The reasoning is quite faulty, for it would exalt prize-fighting or bull-baiting, as well as the cock-pit. It is baseball which creates the crowd—a typically American contest, usually full of interest and excitement, giving every opportunity for the American love of prominent figures, and quickly decided. To our minds, there will be no checking its hold upon the public if the same spirit prevails as today, when public and press have faith in the honesty of all concerned, and tone and temper of players and public alike improve.

How important the latter is appears, if one but considers the aggregate number of the spectators who annually witness at least one game of professional baseball. It is the professional player and not the college man that the boys in the back lots imitate.

"The openness of baseball saves it from suspicion and the grounds for suspicion. Each player is at all times visible and the game has 10,000 umpires"—thus the Independent. But if some of those 10,000 umpires are themselves rowdy and loud-mouthed, the effect on players and those near them may be of the worst, and if the player assumes the manners of a blackguard, the evil of the example is not to be lightly passed by. Since professional baseball gives every evidence of having come to stay as a popular institution, the need of the hour is that it shall present to the impressionable youths that clamor to see it higher and higher standards of play and of sportsmanship, and—is it too much to ask?—good manners. Fortunately, as we have said, the tendency is in the right direction today, both with players and public, and this fact deserves recognition.



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