

Is Baseball On the Square?

Stories of Crooked Dealings in the National Game and Their Foundation

MR. I. E. SANDBORN in the Chicago Tribune has some timely comments on the ever-recurring charge of dishonesty in baseball. Mr. Sandborn says:

Concerning the honesty of the grand old game of baseball no one who has been in close touch with it even for a short time can have any doubt whatever. When anyone who, like the writer, has been watching the sport from the inside as well as the outside for a score of years, hears the occasional doubter explaining plausibly how this or that big game was fixed or thrown he immediately knows that the doubter's knowledge of the game is superficial. There would be no occasion for setting forth these axioms at the start were it not necessary to avoid possible misunderstanding or misinterpretation of what is to be stated hereinafter.

Because of the general public's faith in its favorite pastime those engaged in it, either actively or as promoters, have become accustomed to taking unto themselves great credit for the honesty of baseball and have posed as men beyond reproach. They have fostered the belief that the game is honest because its exponents and promoters have been purged by some miracle of all human weaknesses. Some of them have carried it so far that they believe the game would become a crooked sport if it were not for their constant efforts in its behalf. It is possible a considerable part of the baseball-loving public has come to believe this constantly reiterated statement. To correct that and place the credit for baseball's good name and standing where it belongs is the purpose of this array of language.

Professional ball players, taken as a class, are no better and no worse than

any other similar group of men or athletes. Professional baseball promoters as a whole are no better or worse than the same number of business men, taken at random, would prove to be under investigation. In 100 ball players, taken promiscuously from the major league teams of today, there are just as many who would take a sum of money to "throw" a ball game as there are among 100 bank employees who would appropriate part of the bank's coin if they had the chance. There are just as many and no more. Probably there would be more of each if escape from detection could be positively guaranteed either the ball player or the bank clerk.

The ratio of men interested in the ownership of ball clubs who, if they could, would manipulate games so as to produce the greatest revenue, is the same as the ratio of business men who, if they could, would deceive their customers to enhance their business. There are just as many proportionately and no more. There is not a club owner who would refuse to take advantage of a rival in making a deal for players any more than there is a shrewd farmer who would go out of his way to avoid beating somebody in a horse trade.

Human nature is the same everywhere and what is meant by the foregoing is just this: Because a man is engaged in playing or promoting baseball he is no different inherently and morally than he would be if he remained in any other line of endeavor. No man who enters the sport experiences any change of religion or heart.

Baseball is honest because it cannot be fixed or made dishonest as long as there are honest men identified with it in any way. In that it differs from practically every other professional sport,

and in that respect it differs from almost any line of business. Those men who would yield to temptation and who could be induced to cheat are powerless in baseball, because their number is small and they could not get away with it.

It is true that opportunities often come to ball players in which the result of a ball game depends upon them. An outfielder often could toss off a game by miffing a fly ball; an infielder, by missing a grounder with the bases full. But no inducement can be offered a player to do that unless it can be known in advance that the opportunity will come to him. There is nothing to be gained by fixing a ball game unless it can be done in advance, so that enough money can be made out of the fixing to pay a lot more than the cost of it. No clique of gamblers would pay an outfielder to drop a fly ball with the bases full, and then stake their money on a certain game, because they know that in that game the outfielder might not have a fly

ball to catch and the bases might be empty if he did. No gambler would try to bribe an infielder to throw a game and then wager heavily on it, because he knows the infielder might not have the chance in that game. When the chance does present itself there is not time to make the bets.

No pitcher could lose a game deliberately unless the manager was fixed to let him stay in the game, and nothing of that sort would be attempted without the catcher and other members of the team getting on to it. Then an hour or a day afterward everybody would know it, for it is impossible to keep those things hidden away from the searchlight to which baseball is constantly subjected.

To that searchlight of publicity baseball owes some of its honesty, but the greater credit is due to the glorious uncertainty of the game itself, and to the fact that it cannot be played otherwise than on the level until every one in it turns crook.



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