

# The History of Baseball

## *The Spectacular Career of America's Foremost Game*

In Three Parts

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### PART I

By Harry J. Casey

The history of any nation or any event is always valuable and instructive. It is surprising how long some historic details remain fixed in the public mind, and it is equally surprising how rapidly many others fade from view and are completely lost. In the career of our own national game, accurate information of its origin is even now indefinite and uncertain. It is not too early to make an earnest effort to unravel some of the problems which beset the seeker for information in the primitive annals of the sport. Although several admirable attempts have been made in this direction, the publishers of the *Baseball Magazine* have felt that a brief, concise, graphic and comprehensive survey of the whole history of baseball would satisfy a long-felt want. It is with this end in view that the following article is presented—the first of a three-part series which deals with the principal events in the history of baseball from its origin to the present time.

ON the twelfth of October, 1492, when Christopher Columbus set foot on the soil of the American Continent, his appearance was greeted by a wild howling and whooping—the American Indian for the first time had been seen and heard by a white man.

Today, should Columbus suddenly be transported from the nether world, and be brought to view once more the country he discovered, no doubt he would be somewhat startled at the changes the processions of the centuries have brought. The tall buildings, the roaring trains, the whirling autos, to say nothing of the garb and language of the inhabitants of his long-sought new

world, would surely amaze the dignified old Genoese sailor. But had such transportation been effected not on the identical day of his first appearance, but in the year 1911, and had the rejuvenated Christopher been dropped in New York, on Sixth avenue near 154th street, at 2.30 in the afternoon, he perhaps might have felt the least bit natural. An unholy howling would have greeted his ears; his dazed brain would grasp again the picture of an Indian, bloodthirsty and whooping; he would perhaps draw forth his trusty sword and rush down towards the Polo Grounds, and if he managed to dodge taxis and cops, throw himself at the fence, hew down the gates

and enter, prepared to lay about him. Then the most severe shock of all! He would see 40,000 individuals, banked about a bright green plot, where a dozen

**We have heard a great deal of the "Sport of Kings." Baseball is the "Sport of Republics."**

of pounding palms—and all because a man with a little stick, for all the world like the end of a sweep, hit a tiny white ball, which another chap hurled at him, some hundred yards or so down the field.

Then without a doubt the venerable Christopher would have closed his eyes in terror and confided once again his spirit to his Maker. The modern American game of baseball would have proved too much for him, just as it bedazzles the understanding of the cold, dispassionate Englishman of today, who wonders how a whole people can go mad over a play, not at all as sensible as cricket, "don't you know."

Are we as a people abnormal? Does our love of baseball, our national sport, bespeak a racial degeneracy? Not a bit of it. Every great country has idolized the athlete, from time immemorial. The deified ball player stands on a par with the winning gladiator of old Rome, or the flattered victor of the Olympic games. All peoples have their sport to which they turn with the same interest and enthusiasm they devote to more serious pursuits. As a nation, we go in for business and the collaring of , the almighty dollar with a thoroughness heretofore unrecorded in the annals of the world. What

**One great feature of baseball is its democracy. This has been the principal factor in its remarkable popularity.**

In its every detail the modern game of baseball is distinctly and thoroughly American. Its quick action, its intrinsic brilliance, its sudden shifts of fortune, its constantly

recurring panorama of the under dog battling from the mist of defeat and emerging a victor, its every essential dovetails perfectly into some chink or cranny of the American heart.

"Tis said, "Horse racing is the sport of kings." Equally true might we epigrammatize: "Baseball is the sport of republics." We have no king here in the United States. His majesty the horse wins some attention, but baseball reigns supreme.

The liberty and equality of it are truly American. From his coign of vantage on the topmost row of the bleachers Mickey Flanagan, tattered street urchin, argues with

Reginald de Vere, son of a millionaire. No line of caste or class prevents the gilded youth

**The origin of baseball, though less than a century distant, is already lost in obscurity.**

from assenting gravely when the ragged Mickey declares, "Dat guy dere couldn't hit it with a broom." The finest men of the land, presidents, trust-heads and bishops, foregather daily in the grandstand wherever baseball is played. They appreciate the value of the game, the safety valve of the race, at times predisposed to be too energetic.

The strife and turmoil of the diamond mould young Americans for success in the sterner fields of life, as witness the senators, governors and leading lights of the pulpit who made their start, heroes on some bush league nine.

Volumes might be written, and have been, telling why the game is American and why Americans love it. But the fact needs no recorder. More interesting perhaps is the story of the sport's development; its winning of the much-wooed mistress, American fancy; its origin and history.

Just where and how baseball had its beginnings has been the subject of controversy for half a century. One faction claims the game is English in origin; another, equally strong, asserts it is American first, last and always.

An unprejudiced conning of all available evidence amply proves, it seems to us, that baseball sprang from an old

English game called "Rounders." This assertion leaves open to harsh criticism and calls into question the decision of a specially appointed baseball commission, which, after earnest and comprehensive investigation, brought in a verdict that baseball was undoubtedly American in origin.

As these estimable gentlemen were particularly appointed to prove the Americanity of the pastime their findings may be justly said to have been somewhat biased.

As pertinent to our assertion that the game derives its being from across the seas, we will quote from an old English sporting authority of 1825 the rules of the game of rounders:

**"ROUNDERS.** This game is played with a ball and bats, or sticks something of the form of a policeman's truncheon. A hole is first made, about a foot and a half across and a half a foot deep. Four other stations are marked with pegs stuck into the ground, topped with a piece of paper, so as to be readily seen. Sides are then chosen, one of which goes in.

The many attempts to fix the definite origin of the game have been colored by patriotism and distorted by personal opinion.

There may be five or more players on each side. Suppose that there are five. One player, on the side that is out, stands in the middle of the five-sided space, and pitches the ball toward the hole. He is called the feeder. The batsman hits it off, if he can; in which case he drops the stick, and runs to the nearest station, thence to the third, and all around if the hit has been a far one. The other side are scouting and trying to put him out, either by hitting the batsman as he is running, or by sending the ball into the hole, which is called "grounding." The player at the hole may decline to strike the ball, but if he hits at it, and misses twice running, he is out. When a player makes the round of the stations back to the hole, his side counts one toward

the game. When all the players are out, either by being hit or the ball being grounded, the other side get their innings. When there are only two players left, a chance is given of prolonging the innings, by one of them getting three balls from the feeder; and if he can give a hit such as to enable him to run the whole round, all his side come in again, and the counting is resumed. A caught ball also puts the striker out."

The great historic question has been, "Was baseball of English or American origin?" In the light of all evidence, we are compelled to admit that baseball is English in its origin.

The apparent similarity in the way of playing this game and the fundamental principles of baseball, should be a clincher to the argument. The feeder symbolizes the pitcher. The batter hits the ball and runs the bases; a fly caught is out; the scouts or fielders can put a man out by hitting him with the ball or by grounding it at the home station. In the old American game, of three old cat and town ball, from which the "American origin" advocates say baseball comes, the batsman was out if one of the fielders hit him with the ball. In rounders, as in town ball, the entire side had to be put out before an inning was completed.

There is also a rule which calls an out when the striker misses two swings, a prototype of the strikeout of modern baseball. There were no regular specified number of players to a side, neither were there in town ball, and old records show that the teams brought together by Abner Doubleday, who is the commission's accredited founder of the game, had sometimes eleven

The striking similarity between baseball and the old English game of Rounders is too obvious to be disregarded.

and twelve men on them. The age of baseball is shrouded in far more gloom than its origin, Some games, similar

indeed, were played in the early years of the last century, as we know from old newspaper clippings of interviews with the men who were boys at that time; but

**The decision of an especially appointed baseball commission that baseball was of American origin is entitled to every respect and will not lack supporters. It was, however, undoubtedly biased by national patriotism.**

college records of the time show no such reports. The first club of which there is any true history is the old New York team, which played in the late thirties, but no records remain of their games or opponents.

The cradle of the modern game was Hoboken, N. J. The first match game was played there in 1845, the two teams being chosen from a large crowd that had gathered on a vacant lot. The ball used was made from sections of an old rubber overshoe, wound about with woolen string and covered with a piece of coarse cowhide. Out of this grew the Knickerbocker Club, which was organized in September, 1845. This team, with the New York Citys as opponents, played the first regular match game in this country on the 14th of June, 1846, at Elysian Fields. These teams played under a set of rules, which had been drafted the year previous by the members of the Knickerbocker Club. Duncan F. Curry,

**The old English game of "Rounders" is doubtless the model of early baseball. Baseball, so far as known, was born at Hoboken, N. J.**

**Section 1. The bases shall be from "Home" to second base 42 paces: from first to third base 42 paces equidistant.**

**Sec. 2. The game to consist of 21**

just when baseball as baseball entered the scene of action will never be known. One interviewer has Oliver Wendell Holmes speaking of playing the game at Harvard in the twenties, but the

by it before he makes his base—it being understood, however, that in no instance is a ball to be thrown at him.

**Sec. 8. A player running, who shall prevent an adversary from catching or getting the ball before making his base, is a hand out.**

**Sec. 9. If two hands are already out a player, running home at the time a ball is struck, cannot make an ace if the striker is caught out.**

**Sec. 10. Three hands out, all out.**

**Sec. 11. Players must take their strike in regular turn.**

**Sec. 12. No ace or base can be made on a foul strike.**

**Sec. 13. A runner cannot be put out in making one base, when a baulk is made by the pitcher.**

**Sec. 14. But one base allowed when the ball bounds out of the field.**

These, the first rules of baseball, were:

**counts or aces, but at the conclusion an equal number of hands must be played.**

**Sec. 3. The ball must be pitched and not thrown for the bat.**

**Sec. 4. A ball knocked outside the range of the first or third base is foul.**

**Sec. 5. Three balls being struck at and missed, and the last one caught, is a hand out: if not caught, is considered fair, and the striker bound to run.**

**Sec. 6. A ball being struck or tipped, and caught either flying or on the first bound, is a hand out.**

**Sec. 7. A player, running the bases, shall be out, if the ball is in the hands of an adversary on the base, as the runner is touched**

by it before he makes his base—it being understood, however, that in no instance is a ball to be thrown at him.

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Previous to the promulgation of this code the rule of play for putting a player out was to throw the ball at him, as in the old game of rounders.

These rules, with very few changes, were the standard under which all clubs played until May, 1857, when, in answer to a call signed by the officers of the

The first match baseball game was played at Hoboken, N. J., in 1845. This was the origin of the celebrated Knickerbocker Club, which was organized in September of the same year.

Knickerbocker Club, the first convention of baseball players was held in New York City. At this meeting a new set of rules and regulations was drawn up and adopted. In March, the following year, the second annual convention was held, and it was decided to form a permanent organization, to be known as the National Association of Baseball Players.

With the lead set by the Knickerbockers in '45, clubs began to spring up through New York, Pennsylvania and Massachusetts, like mushrooms.

Among the more prominent were: The Gothams, organized in the spring of 1850; the Eagle, 1852; Empire, October 12, 1854, representing Hoboken; and the Excelsior of South Brooklyn, organized December 8, 1854. The Olympic Club of Boston was born the same year. In '55 the following were formed: Elm Trees of Boston, Putnam of Williamsburg, N. Y., Newark of Newark, N. J., Baltic of New York, Eckford of Greenpoint, Union of Morrisania, Continentals of Williamsburg, Atlantic of Jamaica, L. I.

**The first regular match game played in this country was between the Knickerbocker Club and the New York City Club. The date was the 14th of June, 1846, at the Elysian Fields at Hoboken.**

In 1856 — Green Mountain of Boston, Harlem of New York, Enterprise and Atlantic of Bedford, N. Y., and The Star of South Brooklyn.

In 1857—Tri-mount of Boston, Independent of New York, Liberty of New Brunswick, N. J., Metropolitan and Champion of New York, Hamilton of Brooklyn, St. Nicholas of Hoboken, and Mutual of Williamsburg.

The first officers of the Baseball Players' Association were:

President, William H. Van Cott, of the Gothams.

First Vice President, L. B. Jones, of Excelsior.

Second Vice President, Thomas S. Dakin, of the Putnams.

**Recording Secretary, J. Ross Postley, of the Metropolitans.**

**Corresponding Secretary, Theodore F. Lackson, of the Putnams.**

**Treasurer, E.**

**H. Brown, of the Metropolitans.**

The first match game played in New England took place on Boston Common in

the summer of '55, with the Olympics and Elm Trees as contestants. Philadelphia saw its first diamond struggle on the 11th of June, 1860, between the Equity and Winona clubs, and in February of the same year the game was played for the first time on the Pacific coast.

Before 1860, when the first rules, national in scope, were issued at the convention of the association, held in New York, the different sections of the country had their own style of play and formed their own laws. In some respects the games were entirely dissimilar. A New England writer, telling of the game, at the period just prior to the sixties, has to say:

"A meeting was held at Dedham (Mass.), May 13, 1858, of the Massachusetts Association of Baseball Players. The rules adopted in part were as follows:

"The ball was not to weigh less than two nor more than two and three-fourths ounces, nor measure less than six and one-half nor

more than eight and one-half inches in circumference. It was composed of woolen yarn and strips of rubber wound tightly and

covered with buck or calfskin. The bat was round, not more than two and one-half inches in diameter, and could be of any length to suit the striker.

**The first definite rules for the guidance of baseball players on the diamond were drawn up by Duncan Curr, W. A. Tucker, and W. R. Wheaton.**

**As will be seen, there have been some far reaching changes in the rules since that early date. Baseball has been a striking example of the theory of evolution.**

There was no diamond marked out. The infield was a square, each side being 60 feet long. The thrower, as the pitcher was called, stood in the

**These early rules endured until 1857, when they were changed by a convention held in that year in New York City, under the auspices of the Knickerbocker Club.**

players in the outside were stationed as follows:

"One at each base, a catcher, one or two to assist the latter, and several fielders, according to the number of players, from ten to fourteen, that participated in a match. The bases were wooden stakes projecting from the ground four inches. The pitcher had to throw the ball and could not pitch or toss it. The batsman was out if the third strike aimed at and missed by him was caught, or if he ticked the ball and it was caught, if he was caught out on a fly ball. As early as this date the referees, or umpires, had the power, after warning a batsman, to call strikes on good balls if he refused to 'offer' at them. If a player, while running between the bases, was hit by a ball thrown by one of the opposing side, he was out. In a match game, seventy tallies constituted the game and one out disposed of the side. There were three referees, one from each club and one from a neutral club. A peculiar rule was that which compelled the

**The first officers of the baseball players' association deserve to be remembered by every fan interested in the progress of the national game.**

catcher to remain on his feet in all cases when catching a ball. Another was that when two players occupied a base the one was entitled to it who arrived there last.

"From these rules it can be seen that the game of that date resembles the

present game much less than it did the game of 'rounders.'

"The last meeting of this organization was held April 7, 1860. At that time the name was changed to the New England Association of Baseball Players. The rules adopted at the meeting

in Dedham, May 13, 1858, were amended to some extent. The New England game, however, quickly passed out of date, and was supplanted by the New York game, so called. The introduction of the New York game marked the beginning of modern baseball. The diamond supplanted the square, canvas bags took the place of stakes, a pitched ball was substituted for that of a thrown ball, nine innings and not a certain number of runs constituted a game, three men and not one man put the side out, nine players constituted a side."

The first series of what we might call championship games took place between the years 1857-59, at the Elysian Fields in Hoboken, N. J., the great center of ball playing, where the Knickerbocker, Eagle, Gotham and Empire clubs showed their superiority. After many exciting and hard-fought games, the Atlantics of Brooklyn broke into this select circle. Their success led to the arranging of a series of three games between picked teams of the New York and Brooklyn clubs in 1858. These were known as the "Fashion Course" games. New York won two of the three, by the scores of 22 to 13 and 29 to 18, while Brooklyn won one by the score of 29 to 8.

In 1860 there was a noteworthy series between the Excelsior and Atlantic clubs, the latter being

regarded as the fastest team of that time. They met for the first time at the foot of Court street, South Brooklyn; the Excelsiors triumphed, 23 to 4.

**In view of the great discussion over the cork center ball a description of the old regulation ball is very interesting.**

**The game, even at that date, resembled the English game of Rounders more than it did the modern game of baseball.**