



JAMES ARCHER

The Greatest of all Catchers

Essential Points in a Catchers Work—American League vs.
National—The Part that Batting Plays—
Meyers vs. Archer

By F. C. LANE

The problem of “Who Is the Greatest Catcher on the Diamond” involves some difficulties peculiar to itself. It is always a task to select the greatest representative of any sport among the many candidates who are clamoring for recognition. This is peculiarly the case in choosing the greatest players at any position in baseball and refers, if possible, more strongly to that of backstop than to any other corner of the diamond. Not only is the catcher's task more difficult than that of any other player, save perhaps the pitcher, it also requires a greater array of diverse talents than any other position, bar none. And in the present instance the problem is still further complicated by the records of certain catchers with remarkable ability in batting and the like which, while important, is not absolutely essential to a good catcher. How-

ever, the following article marks a serious effort to analyze the subject in all its angles, and in its inevitable conclusions, we believe, many if not most of the close students of baseball will agree.

THE American public thinks in big numbers. A champion is always a man of consequence, be he President of the United States or the best man of his weight in the boxing ring. The man who is at the head of his profession has always a host of followers, and any effort to discover the leader in any field where such a leader is not already recognized, is a fascinating study for the typical American.

No subject is so much discussed as baseball and it is only natural that the American characteristic to always admire the biggest of everything, the largest buildings, the highest mountains and the richest millionaires should find real zest and enthusiasm in a study of the greatest ball players. A man may be a baseball star before the view of the whole world, but what the public wants to know is whether or not that star is the greatest of his type in his own department of the game. And as there are nine positions on the diamond and no two very much alike, it follows that there are nine men somewhere, who are the champions of their positions.

Who is the greatest catcher?

This question is always with us. It stays in the background most of the year though it makes its presence felt in many thousands of heated discussions by fans when they are comparing the merits of two rival backstops. It is one of those great, vague, intangible questions which are never more than half solved, but when the curtain finally rings down on the grand panorama of organized baseball the question assumes all at once a vital reality in the labor of selecting an annual All America Nine. It is then for the only time of the year that this little proposition receives some of the attention it merits and is answered, though in a rather indefinite way at best. For it is answered by a variety of hard-worked scribes who, in the press of other duties and the labor of selecting eight other all stars as well, are, in the nature of things unable to give the matter their most careful study.

So, in spite of all the preliminary examination which has been given it this season, we believe this problem like most other problems in baseball, will bear a good deal closer investigation than it has yet received.

Before any attempt at selecting the greatest backstops from the score or more capable candidates presented by the sixteen big league clubs, it is absolutely necessary to take at least a brief survey of those qualities which go to make up the ideal catcher. For it is only by a clear understanding of what should be expected from him that it is possible to see how far a catcher measures up to the logical requirements of his position.

At no other position on the diamond are there so many duties as devolve upon the catcher. It is really a staggering total when one comes to consider each detail of the work which falls to his lot and it is not surprising in view of the complexity and difficulty of his labors that there are so few really star catchers.

Roughly, the talents which a catcher is supposed to possess may be divided into two main divisions. First, that part of his work which is mainly mechanical. Second, that part which requires deep insight into the intricacies of baseball, a keen and quick thinking brain.

As the mechanical part of his labors is more easy to recognize and understand, we shall discuss it first. If the typical baseball machine had been the invention of a single individual, it would have been one of the greatest triumphs of creative skill. Even as it is, the result of many improvements gained through the experience of years, it is no less a most admirable contrivance. In no one of the intricate mechanisms which are the symbol of twentieth century progress is there a more excellent balance of cogs and fly wheels than find representation on a well balanced ball team. Every infield position is essentially different, but all blend together and harmonize for the best interest of the whole. The outfield varies widely from the in-

field, but is no less admirably geared to the machine. The pitcher is the main-spring of the whole, but the catcher is so much a necessary adjunct that the two work together in a harmonious unit called the battery. The mechanical construction of a baseball team gives the catcher one advantage of position in which he excels every other man on the diamond. He is the only one who faces all the others, the one best fitted to control the work of the whole machine through his signals. The catcher corresponds most closely to the quarterback on a football team, and whatever opinions have differed as to the relative importance of certain positions on the gridiron these opinions have unanimously agreed that quarterback is the keystone of the whole structure.

This mere advantage of position is in a way a mechanical advantage, but as most of its benefits are derived through a use of real brain work, we will examine it under that head.

Second, the most obvious part of a catcher's duties lies in merely stopping the ball, as it is hurled by the pitcher. In fact, many people seem to consider that is about all a catcher does. It is true that a catcher must handle every ball that the pitcher throws except the majority of those which are hit into the diamond or go as foul flies. It is true that he is kept busy all the time in catching these throws and does most of it in a machine like way which comes from long practice and which anyone can acquire. But it is not true by any means that anyone can become a star backstop even in that department, which is the most easy and mechanical of all his work.

No statement is commoner than that a certain catcher cannot hold a certain pitcher. This statement merely means that the art of stopping the pitcher's throws is difficult. Spit ball pitchers are notoriously hard to hold. A spit-ball swerves so violently in its course that it is generally impossible to figure exactly where it is going to strike. The men who catch Ed Walsh and Marty O'Toole certainly have their troubles. Speed pitchers are also often hard to catch. Walter Johnson's lightning ball not only travels with terrific speed, a constant menace to the catcher's fingers, but it also jumps violently—oftentimes



Ainsmith at the Bat

in the most disconcerting way. And in passing it is only fair to state that no pitcher who becomes a star in the majors is very easy to catch, while the bush leaguer is still harder because his control is not so good. The most careful twirler in the world sometimes lets loose a wild ball, and it is here that the star catcher shines. It isn't his fault that the throw gets away from him, but it may mean the loss of a game, and a star catch by him at a critical time is often of the utmost importance. Mere backstopping, then, mechanical as it seems, is never easy, and it does offer opportunities for talent of the highest order.

Third: Another feature of the catcher's work which looks equally mechanical, is the handling of foul flies. This needs practice to say the least. I watched Ty Cobb once, chasing foul flies with a catcher's mit, for fifteen minutes and although he was very fast he missed

more than he caught. He lacked the experience and continually misjudged the ball. In contrast to his work Bill Sweeney, while he did not appear by any means so flashy, handled such flies in the most matter of fact and methodical manner imaginable. It is by no means as easy as it looks to chase these illusive high ones, subject as they are to the influence of all manner of twisting air currents. It is particularly difficult to gather them in when they fall just within the bounds of the playing field. It then requires speed and judgment of distances as well as practice, and some good catchers prove inefficient here through lack of these very qualities. Chief Meyers, for instance, is so slow of foot that he misses, in the course of a season, many flies which a faster man would succeed in getting under. This part of the catcher's work is by no means unimportant, for it is just as desirable to retire a batter on a foul fly as it is to strike him out or to get him on an infield grounder.

Fourth, not much actual fielding falls to the lot of the catcher outside of chasing foul flies. What fielding he does is generally difficult. True, most bunts are taken care of by the first or third baseman or by the pitcher, but some inevitably fall to the catcher's lot and are almost invariably difficult to handle since he has to turn ordinarily after he has scooped up the ball to throw it to first base. Of course, he also captures his share of the flies which fall within the limits of the diamond.

Fifth, a very important part of the catcher's work, a part where many otherwise capable backstops fall down hard, is getting the runner at the plate. It is when a fast man is darting toward him and the ball is coming at some difficult angle from the outfield, that the catcher's nerves are keyed up to the very highest pitch; in such circumstances it all devolves upon him whether or not the run will score and a run (needless to say) often means the game. It is here that activity of the highest type is required of the catcher. He must be cool and make no misplay of any kind and he is dealing not with seconds but with tenths of seconds or hundredths of seconds. A ball may reach him ten feet away from the plate, the runner may slide in a cloud of dust at a most difficult angle, but it

is distinctly up to him to clap the ball upon that slippery and elusive runner before any part of his person comes in contact with the all important plate. And in this hurried manipulation of the ball which must be executed with mathematical precision the catcher also has to observe and allow for the peril of the runner's spikes as well as to guard against having the ball knocked out of his hands. A close play at the plate is about the most important play in baseball.

Sixth, and last, but by no means least, the good catcher must have a quick and strong throwing arm. One of the most important of his duties is cutting off a base stealer at second base. This is a hard throw under the best possible circumstances, and it is needless to say that the best possible circumstances are not the usual ones. In spite of all the pitcher's caution a fast man has a great lead and is well down to second before the catcher gets the ball. He must grasp it instantly and throw it fast and accurately to the second baseman. He seldom has any appreciable time to gauge the throw and must do it almost instinctively. And if he does it right it means that he possesses not only one but two very important qualifications. Many accurate throwers are not speedy. Most speedy throwers are not accurate. A star catcher must be both. And this combination, in its proper balance, is one of the rarest talents in baseball. Cutting off the runner at third is not so important, largely because it happens by no means so frequently. This throw is much shorter but to counterbalance that advantage it has to be made even more quickly and (needless to say) many errors result from the catcher's tremendous effort to get the ball there in time.

Any one who has seen Chief Meyers shoot the ball into left field in a most commendable but ill-fated attempt to locate the third baseman will realize the difficulty of the task.

The danger in filling a catcher's position is not part of the backstop's talents to be sure, but the ability to guard against that danger unquestionably is. In all amateur baseball the man who stands behind the bat is universally considered to have the most perilous position, and what applies in amateur baseball, with its lack

of proper training and experience applies, with relative importance to professional baseball. The danger from foul tips is one that not even the clearest brain and most active hands can always guard against. A catcher is protected pretty well by his mask and pad and shin guards. But for all that a ball which nicks the bat and is deflected from its course like a bullet is not a pleasant thing to face at a yard's distance. Few catchers go through the season without seriously damaged fingers, the result of stopping swift or wild pitches. Catching presupposes broken fingers as an inevitable adjunct. Chasing foul flies often spells danger, for it is by no means pleasant to collide at full speed with a steel and concrete stand. And the danger of being spiked at the plate is so serious that it has resulted, in recent years, in the universal adoption of shin guards as a necessary part of a catcher's costume. The catcher who successfully contends against all the perils of his position must be alert and vigilant to the last degree.

The second great division of those qualities essential to the star catcher embraces all those faculties of mind which distinguish the star from the mediocre player. First and foremost of these important qualifications is the catcher's ability to coach the pitcher. Many pleasant stories have been written of the art of outguessing the batter. In all these stories a vivid picture has been drawn of the silent duel at all times going on between pitcher and batter. When the pitcher puts over a strike he is said to have outguessed the batter. When the batter raps out a safe hit or gets his base on balls it means, according to these articles, that he has been victor in the little guessing contest. As a matter of fact all this is true enough, save for the important correction that it isn't really the pitcher who does the guessing half as much as the catcher. In the duel, then, the batter is not opposing his wits against the player who is facing him in the box so much as against the man who is standing directly behind him with a catcher's mask on his face. The conflict of guesswork should be written batter vs. catcher rather than batter vs. pitcher, for nine times out of ten it is the catcher who takes the leading part and the pitcher



Meyers, the Formidable Indian Catcher and Batting Star

merely follows his signals to the best of his ability.

Clarke Griffith once told me that given twirlers with some natural ability the strength of a club lay not in its pitchers but in its catchers for good catchers would make pitchers. No one knows better how to develop a pitcher than Clarke Griffith himself for his long years of experience in the box have given him a bulge in that particular over any other manager in the game. And it is a significant fact in Griffith's remarkable success at Washington, that he spent a great deal of time in the developing of some fine young catching material as a most necessary and important factor in developing his pitching staff. Walter Johnson this past season had a more remarkable record than ever owing partly to added experience, partly to the shrewd management of Griffith, and very largely to better catching. George Stovall in narrating his troubles as a manager of St. Louis laid special emphasis on the catching department. "I have three great young pitchers," said he, "but I lack a good experienced catcher to coach them.

And that makes all the difference in the world."

Practically every pitcher of note will admit the tremendous part catching has played in the success of his career. Such great pitchers as Walter Johnson, Joe Wood, Nap Rucker and Grover Alexander have all spoken most highly of their obligations to good catching. Vean Gregg, the great Cleveland twirler, summed up the situation thus: "I generally take a catcher's signals as he gives them, but once in a while I do not agree with him about the kind of ball that ought to be pitched. When I don't agree with him, I want to have something to say about it at a critical time in the game."

Some pitchers take the initiative in mapping out the little campaign against each batter far more often than others, but it is hardly an exaggeration to say that a catcher does at least nine-tenths of the calling for balls and strikes. It is he who is master of the situation. It is his brain which is pitted against that of the batter. So it follows as a matter of course that for some years the pitcher has largely usurped some of the more important honors which are the rightful property of the catcher. In order to remain master of the situation a catcher must study the batter as he would a book. No element of the game is more important than this. It is a factor which alone is sufficient to distinguish the star from the near-star. It is at all times of far more consequence than batting or fielding records. The great catchers have invariably been those who had a clear, and for the most part, exact understanding of the strong points and the weaknesses of practically all the opposing batters in the league, and who combined with their knowledge of the subject a sound judgment as to the best method of outwitting the individual batter.

In close harmony with his work of signaling the pitcher, the catcher is also the logical member of the team to signal infield and outfield. It is generally he alone who knows what kind of ball is coming over the plate next, and he also knows to what part of the field that ball is likely to be driven if the batter hits it. So, to a considerable extent he is responsible for the position of the fielders. Of course it is not to be inferred that

the catcher directs all, or even a large part, of the arrangement of the fielders. The batter has generally some known aptitude for hitting the ball either to left or right field and the players instinctively arrange themselves accordingly. But the catcher does, nevertheless, have an important part to play in this little proceeding at many critical moments in the game.

Third: since it is so essential for a catcher to know the batter, it follows as a matter of course that mere length of service is important. The new catcher, however brilliant, cannot know from actual experience, the peculiarities of the men who come to bat and cannot direct the campaign of the battery against those players so well as an older star. Experience, then, in the case of the catcher is of even more consequence than it would be at any other position on the diamond.

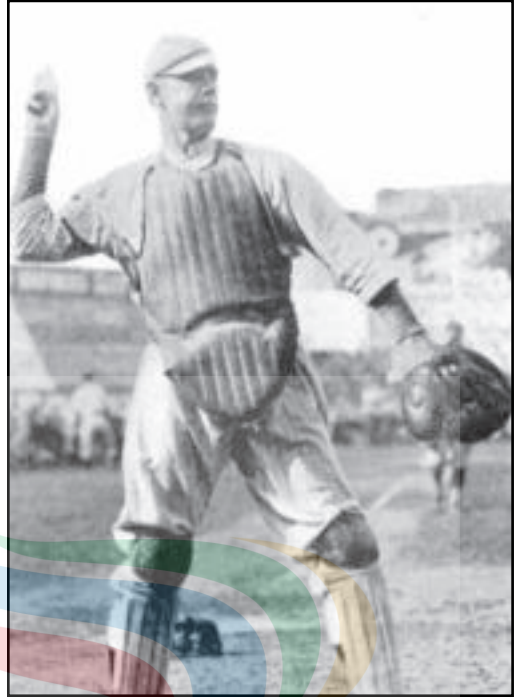
Fourth: Ira Thomas in a long conversation I had with him on the subject gave unusual value to still another qualification. He said, "In my opinion one of the strongest features in the work of a good catcher is his conversation. A catcher who is always talking naturally gets a good many ideas from the other men on the team as to what would be the best method of dealing with a certain batter and also gives those other men his own ideas. In this way through a more or less continuous conversation the team has on the whole a far clearer idea of how to combat another team. The catcher helps his teammates and they help him, so it works both ways and both ways, incidentally, help the club." This novel idea of the usefulness of a catcher is unquestionably apt and not a little of the remarkable success of the ex-world's champions was doubtless due to the shrewd brain and long experience of Thomas, coupled with his unusual conversational powers.

Still another application of this conversational ability on the part of a catcher is well illustrated in the case of Street. Street was long one of the greatest catchers in the American League although he was a notoriously weak batter. Part of his supremacy lay in the fact that when behind the bat he always kept up a running fire of conversation with the batter in an effort to rattle that unfortun-

ate individual. It stands to reason that when a man is facing a pitcher at a critical moment it is not going to make his nerve any steadier to have a tantalizing voice behind his ear pouring forth a constant strain of disconcerting remarks. Street won the nickname of "Gaby" on this account and no little of his success as catcher was due to his constant, irritating flow of language.

In addition to all these important factors in a catcher's work a good backstop should have the qualifications which go to make up the able ball player as well. To be sure, it is not so important that he be a good batter as it is that an outfielder should be one, but a heavy hitting catcher is a great asset to any club. Within reasonable limits his hitting counterbalances whatever defects he may have as a catcher, but only within limits. "Nig" Clark of Cleveland was called the greatest of catchers when he broke into the big leagues because he batted for the tremendous total of .358. But Clark, outside his heavy hitting, was also a good catcher. On the other hand, Ted Easterly of Cleveland and Chicago was always a good hitter, batting this season for .311, but he was never considered a classy catcher, and Cleveland, who certainly needed a good catcher as badly as any club in the circuits, allowed him to drift to Chicago in spite of his heavy and timely batting. Batting, then, is important to a catcher, but not absolutely essential. Gaby Street was acknowledged the greatest of American League catchers when he batted for .202. His remarkable abilities in other lines more than balanced his defects at the bat. Base running is also important, though neither Chief Meyers nor Larry McLean are hired for their speed on the paths. The importance of fielding ability we have already dealt with.

Stars of the first magnitude are divided fairly evenly between the two big leagues, but they are not by any means divided evenly with regard to any individual position. There is not an outfielder in the National League who can compare with the three stars of the American: Ty Cobb, Joe Jackson, and Tris Speaker. The American League is supreme in the outer garden. But behind the bat the American League during the season just past was by no means



Cady, the Best of the World's Champion's Catchers

the equal of the National. Fully a half dozen formidable catchers ornamented the roster of the older organization while there was scarcely one in Ban Johnson's circuit. This is not to say that capable catchers are not found on various clubs in the American League, but simply that the National League catchers fairly surpass them.

Glancing through the lists of the American League we find a dearth of first class material. Boston is a wonderful team but she did not win the championship of the world on the work of her catchers. Carrigan has always been a heavy hitter but this season was by no means his best. He took part in eighty-seven games and batted for an average of .263. Carrigan has at all times been a good dependable catcher and one who might be expected to rap out a safe hit at almost any critical time during a contest. In fact, he has generally deserved a place in the front rank of American League catchers, but there was nothing particularly brilliant in his record for 1912. Cady, although but a recruit, was given the responsible posi-

tion of catching throughout the World's Series games. He acquitted himself very creditably in this by no means easy task, and his record was consistently good. In the forty-three games in which he officiated behind the bat he maintained a batting average of .279, while he led the league in fielding with an average of .994. A fielding average, however, is an uncertain quantity at best. It may mean a great deal. It may mean absolutely nothing. The most that could be said of Cady is that he is a catcher who has acquitted himself in a very commendable way and shows much promise for the future. But he has a slow throwing arm at best and hardly shows class to rank with the leaders of his position.

Washington was very fortunate in possessing not only one but three good catchers. In fact, the catching department at the Senatorial City was easily on a par with that of any other club in either league. That however, was owing to the fact that all three of her dependable catchers were unusually good although no one of them was by any means entitled to first place. Williams easily led in all-around work, being particularly strong at bat. His fine average of .318 gained in fifty-six games would be a most valuable asset to any catcher. He also led both Henry and Ainsmith in fielding with an average of .978. Henry and Ainsmith were two of the best catchers in the game but suffered heavily through their weak hitting. Ainsmith batted .226 in sixty games while Henry in sixty-three contests had an average of only .201. It requires remarkable catching ability to offset such weakness at the bat. It is true that Street when he was also a Washington catcher was a poor batter, but his great abilities as a catcher did more than make up for these defects. While Ainsmith and Henry are exceptionally capable and both have remarkable ability in lining a ball to second base, neither is of so high an order of catching excellence as to overcome this handicap. The strength of Washington's catching department lay, then, rather in the uniform excellence of her catching staff than in any superior ability on the part of a single star catcher.

At Philadelphia the passing of Ira Thomas proved a heavy loss. Thomas

was never a flashy or brilliant catcher, but no one excelled him in intimate knowledge of the game or in shrewdness and all around ability in handling his position. Thomas this season took part in forty-six games, batting for .210 and fielding for .971. General slowing up on his part as well as his failure to regain his batting eye led Connie Mack to use Lapp most of the season. Lapp took part in ninety games, batted for .292 and fielded for .958. He has always been a good batter and a good catcher as well, though not a brilliant one.

At New York Sweeney suffered somewhat in the general disintegration of a once great club. When at his best Sweeney has no superiors in the American League and it is doubtful if there was a more consistent performer than he last season. He took part in no games, batted for .268 and fielded for .955. While his work suffered noticeably at times and was never over-steady, it was generally of a high order and sometimes even brilliant. If the other members of the club had all done as good work as Sweeney, New York would have landed considerably above the bottom position in the percentage column. At Detroit Stanage fairly parallels Sweeney and proved on many accounts about the best catcher in the American League. Such stars as Joe Jackson and Ty Cobb place him in the front rank. He took part in 119 games, batted for .261 and fielded for .941. In all these five clubs are found one or more catchers of good, sterling ability who nevertheless are in no case entitled to the maximum of notoriety. But if the catching department in these five clubs is not much above mediocrity it is even less in the three remaining clubs. Probably St. Louis suffered the worst in this respect. She had no catcher whom she could depend upon save Stephens. Stephens was never accused of being a star. His work, so far as the records are concerned does not appear worse than others. He took part in seventy-four games, batted for .252 and fielded for .954. But Stephens at best is a second string catcher and his participation in so many games was merely due to the fact that there was no other catcher at St. Louis who was even so well fitted for the position as he.

The backstop position at Cleveland was

also an uncertain quantity throughout the season. O'Neill was the leading catcher so far as there was a leading catcher in Cleveland, took part in sixty-eight games and fielded for .961. His poor batting average of .215 marred a record which was by no means brilliant in any particular. Easterly caught part of the season for Cleveland but was finally let go to Chicago. Carrisch proved a heavy hitter and showed much promise. He took part in only twenty-four games and is thus ineligible for any honor rank.

At Chicago the veteran Sullivan broke into thirty-nine games, fielded for .975 and batted for .162. This mournful average is alone sufficient to dispose of whatever claims Sullivan might have. Easterly, through his varied career at Cleveland and Chicago, showed that he is a batter of much promise, but his catching ability by no means equals his work with the stick. While he batted for .311 in ninety-three games (which is a good average for an outfielder let alone a catcher) his work behind the bat was far from brilliant. Easterly is a mechanical player who has little talent for the finer points of the game.

In this survey of the American League there is no name that stands out with any great prominence. Ainsmith and Henry largely nullify their bids to fame by weak hitting. Easterly bats brilliantly but is next to a failure as a catcher. Stanage and Sweeney are on the whole about the best with the odds possibly in favor of Stanage, but neither in batting, fielding, or all around generalship do these catchers compare with the leaders in the National League. In fact the failure of the American League to produce catching material which would measure up to that of the National was particularly marked last season.

In the National League, however, there was not a club which did not have at least one good catcher. Meyers of New York took part in 122 games and batted for the remarkable figure of .358. This record alone entitles the Indian to the closest possible scrutiny. At Pittsburg Kelly, the high priced partner of O'Toole, hit tremendously, fielded faultlessly and showed great all around promise. His batting average of .318 and his fielding average of .990 tell an excel-



Roger Bresnahan, Whose Recent Managerial Troubles By No Means Obscure His Great Talents As a Catcher

lent story of his ability. But Kelly took part in but 39 games. It seemed the settled policy of Manager Clark to put his faith in veteran stars rather than in young players who were comers. Gibson, therefore, was the main reliance of Pittsburg behind the bat. The veteran, who has had one of the most remarkable records as a catcher in the history of baseball, lived up to his high reputation, for in the ninety-four games in which he officiated, he fielded for .990. His hitting average of .240, however, was a severe handicap to his all around record. At St. Louis Bresnahan showed that he is still great for in the twenty-eight games in which he participated he batted for .333 and fielded for .974. Bresnahan had no superior as a catcher, but he is getting to be too much of a veteran to participate actively in a season's campaign. The bulk of the work, therefore, fell upon Ivy Wingo, who caught in ninety-two games, batted for .265 and fielded for .957. Wingo shows every promise of becoming a great catcher. He is a hard and willing worker and when he has gained a little more experience will undoubtedly rank very high.

At Cincinnati Larry McLean took part in ninety-eight contests with more or less credit, fielding for .973 and batting for .243. Larry is generally a heavy hitter, usually hugging the .300 mark. This year, however, his batting suffered a serious slump. McLean has a great throwing arm, but he is very slow and might well be matched with Meyers in a championship slow race. At Philadelphia Manager Dooin took part in fifty-eight contests, and while he was hardly the leading catcher of the team in number of games, he was the undoubted leader in ability. Dooin, when in his prime, was one of the greatest catchers in the game and he is still great so far as experience and generalship go. In the fifty-eight contests in which he took part he batted for .234 and fielded for .958.

Brooklyn had a rather unenviable record in 1912, but that record was not due to her catching department. Miller, while in no sense a brilliant catcher, was a hard working and able player, taking part in ninety-four games, batting for .278 and fielding for .975. His steady, reliable work was at all times a dependable quality and he proved a valuable man. The unhappy Boston club ended, as usual, in the cellar. But this was not due to her catching department. Kling, while his success as a manager was made impossible by the chaotic state of affairs in the ownership of the club, proved that he is still a great catcher. In seventy-four games he fielded for .958 and batted for the fine average of .317. In his day Kling was unrivaled as a catcher. When the Cubs were the strongest team in the world he was at all times a power in that club, but long years of service have lessened his speed. While his paper average is still remarkably high, Kling is a little too much of a veteran to compete any longer for the highest honors at his position, which were once so indisputably his own. At Chicago, the brilliant work of Archer in 118 contests in which he took part by no means receives justice even from his good average of .283 at bat and .966 in the field. For Archer alone of National League catchers is entitled to dispute with Meyers of the Giants for the highest laurels of his position.

The great superiority of the National catchers over those of the American

League is very apparent in the records. Scarcely a club in the National but has on its payroll a catcher able to compete on an equality with the best backstop in the American League, and there is no catcher in the American League who is the equal of Archer or of Meyers with no mention of such men as Kling, Gibson or Bresnahan.

Archer, without any question, has the greatest throwing arm of any catcher on the diamond. He is not only tremendously fast and accurate in shooting the ball to second base but he also possesses the rare talent of being able to throw the ball like a bullet from almost any position. His celebrated quick, snap throw is the terror of base runners and the deadly precision of his rapid fire delivery plays havoc with the speed men opposing him. In all the natural talents which make up the star catcher Archer is in a class by himself. He is fast, quick, aggressive, brilliant at all times. He is easily the peer of catchers.

I had a conversation with Hugh Jennings once in which he made this significant statement. "A manager trades a hundred players and ninety-nine of them prove failures with other clubs. One of them, the exception, proves a success. That is the manager's mistake. He has been right in ninety-nine cases, but he is wrong in one and the public forgets the many good trades he has made for the one in which he failed. I have been a manager for some years and have sold and traded many men. There is only one case in my career that I regret. That is the case of Archer. When I let Archer go to Chicago I made a serious mistake. He is the greatest catcher in the game."

The consensus of opinion among National League players as I have observed it is that Archer is the prince of backstops. Only one man stands out with sufficient prominence in the National League to dispute his title, and that man is Chief Meyers. There are no close candidates in the American League. Meyers is the rival of James Archer for the catching palm through his tremendous hitting. As a catcher Meyers is not only far from being Archer's equal but he has superiors on several other clubs. It is not Meyers' fault that he is slow. For a big man he is fast on his feet, but his great size and massive build make

him a strange anomaly in a club of sprinters like the Giants. This slowness handicaps him not only on the base paths where he is all too apt to clog the diamond, but also militates against him in the handling of foul flies. Slowness is no advantage at any position on the diamond, and while the catcher does not need to be a flying Mercury by any means, still such lack of speed as Meyers presents is a serious handicap at best. As a backstop Meyers is a capable but by no means a brilliant performer. He has a strong throwing arm which has been developed by the careful supervision of McGraw, but he, of course, is not anywhere nearly Archer's equal in this respect. As a catcher, then, in practically every department of the game Meyers is not above mediocrity, but as a batter he has few equals. A man as slow as Meyers is, must make a safe hit to reach first in safety and Meyers has made enough of this variety to total .358 points in the batting average. Zimmerman alone leads him in his league as a hitter.

How is it possible to compare a catcher who is brilliant in every department where a catcher should be brilliant, who is easily the star of his position, with another man who, while by no means a star, as a catcher, still hits for .358? To be sure Archer is by no means a weakling at the bat as his .283 per cent. average clearly shows. He is also a very timely hitter and his clean long drives won more than one game last season. But, of course, he does not parallel Meyers' work with the stick by any means.

John McGraw claims that Meyers is the greatest natural batter in the game. Considerable discount can be given this statement on the ground of pardonable boosting to his own team. There is no question of Meyers' ability with the stick but the question of natural batting talent

would involve such names as Napoleon Lajoie and Hans Wagner to say nothing of Ty Cobb, Heinie Zimmerman and various others. Be that as it may, McGraw is right in claiming that a man as slow as Meyers in getting down to first must be a great natural hitter in order to reach the marvelous figure he gained this year. But whether or not this batting talent which no one can question, is enough in itself to give Meyers the catching palm is a different matter.

If the problem were "Which catcher is the more valuable man to his team," there would be many to argue in favor of Meyers solely, however, for his heavy hitting. But the problem is essentially broader than this and with all due appreciation of the tremendously important part batting plays in baseball, it is not by any means the leading essential in the talents of a catcher. Here other things weigh more heavily and in practically all these other things Archer is Meyers' superior. Even in the question of "greatest value to the team," we would by no means be willing to concede that Meyers, giving every consideration to his great hitting, was of more help to the Giants last season than was Archer to the Cubs.

Were Archer, in spite of his great all around ability, a weak hitter on a par with Gaby Street, we would, without hesitation, say that Meyers' batting more than made up for the difference in catching ability. But, inasmuch as Archer is a heavy slugger himself and an extremely timely one as well, that he is a good waiter and a good base runner, and excels in every department of the catching art, mechanical as well as otherwise, we are obliged in justice to say that in our estimation the Chicago Nationals are stronger behind the bat than other club in either league, and that Archer is the greatest all-round catcher on the diamond to-day.

