

The Most Sensational Play In Baseball

How Neal Ball Became Famous in a Day—A Greater Feat
by an Old-Time Star—Paul Hines and His
Wonderful Triple Play of 1878

By SMITH D. FRY

Batting will always take precedence in the public eye over fielding. A long hit with men on bases is the dream of every professional player. There is no man in baseball who would not rather hit for .300 than to field brilliantly, and the crowd shares this sentiment. But there is one fielding stunt that is the most brilliant and spectacular play in baseball. It happens but once a generation, but when it does happen it is written bodily into baseball history. This is the triple play unassisted. Neal Ball vaulted all at once into the limelight by performing this rarest of all plays. But an even more remarkable feat was the triple play of Paul Hines many years ago.

INSIDE of three seconds Gandil and McBride pulled off a very brilliant triple play in Washington, June 16 last, and since then there have been paragraphs galore concerning triple plays.

It is needless to detract from the good work done by one man, while giving credit to another for good work done. It was all right for Jake Stahl to give credit to Neal Ball for the splendid brilliant triple play unassisted which was made by Neal Ball at Cleveland on July 19, 1909; a play of which Stahl was one of the victims.

But it was not wise nor was it necessary for Stahl to add: "They say that Paul Hines made a similar play, back in 1878, in a game in Providence, but most baseball authorities deny it. *I don't believe it.*"

In the first place it is incorrect to state that "most baseball authorities deny it."

"Uncle Nick Young" is pretty good "baseball authority," and he speaks of the splendid triple unassisted by Paul Hines as "a play concerning which I

never before heard any doubt expressed."

"Doug" Allison, one of the best catchers that ever played the game, still lives and was a witness of the great play made by Paul Hines, and vouches for it enthusiastically. It was not in any sense similar to that made by Neal Ball, but vastly more difficult.

Ball took a ball on the fly, twenty feet rear and right off second base, thus putting out the batter. He hastily touched second base, thus putting out the runner trying to come back from third. He then dived into Jake Stahl, as he came running from first.

It was all done quickly, splendidly, and must always stand out in history as a record play. Nobody should ever try to detract from it. But let us see what Paul Hines did.

Excepting only the prodigy from Georgia, the incomparable Tyrus Raymond Cobb, there has never been a center fielder to compare with Paul Hines. He was fleet, excelling Billy Sunday, as

was well known at the time. He was perfect as a fielder of fly balls. Nothing but an uneven field would enable any ground ball to get past him. He was in the forefront at the plate, a batter feared by all pitchers. It is useless to minimize the pitchers of those days. When Hines was batting against Bond, Manning, Radbourne and the peerless Clarkson, he was facing as puzzling and baffling pitching as the game produces to-day; and he batted all of them.

"Home Run Baker," one of the greatest of them all, was never more in the limelight, nor half so long.

Senator Nelson W. Aldrich is one of the well-known men of to-day who saw Paul Hines make his great triple unassisted, and there are many persons yet living in Providence who remember having seen the play. But writing in Washington City makes it impossible for the narrator to seek them all. First, let us hear from Mr. N. E. Young ("Uncle Nick"), for many years President of the National League, the "Grand Old Man" of baseball. He was seen in his office and said:

"Everybody in the baseball world knew that Paul Hines made that triple play unassisted. No baseball authority ever denied it. Paul Hines was one of the most modest, unassuming and gentlemanly men the game has ever known. He was the most graceful athlete that ever stepped to the plate. His batting record is phenomenal. Two of the best catchers ever known reside in Washington, Charley Snyder and 'Doug' Allison. They both saw the play. Go and see them, and you can set history straight for all time."

Charley Snyder, well and prosperous, was seen in his place of business, asked about the play, and he promptly said:

"I certainly saw Paul Hines make his great triple play, unassisted. I was catching for Boston. We had men on first and second, with no one out. Burdock, one of our best batters, came to the plate. Burdock slammed the ball out into left field, and it looked good enough for three bases. Burdock was chasing himself, though, for a home run, and he might have made it. But—the unexpected happened.

"Paul Hines swept like a whirlwind from deep center into short left field, and

he caught that ball. I should say about knee high or lower. The ball was going like a rifle shot, but Paul gripped it, held it as only one man out of a thousand could have done, and ran on to third base. Both of our runners had gone past third base and were already congratulating themselves on having made runs. It was a triple play, unassisted, and was so declared by the umpire. The side was out. No player, Billy Sunday nor any other, ever rivaled the speed made by Paul Hines on that run. It was almost impossible for any man to have reached that ball; and then to have held it, as Hines did, was another almost impossibility. But, with it all, the cool baseball brains of the man was shown by his continuing on to make the triple play by running to the base without once slackening his speed. I've seen some base ball, but that was the feat of feats; Pat Hines' triple unassisted."

Soon after leaving Charley Snyder, the writer was in the Post-office Department, and there found the other great catcher, "Doug" Allison. He is hard of hearing nowadays, and with difficulty heard the question; but when he comprehended it his face wreathed in smiles as he said:

"Yes, I was catcher for the Providence Grays that year. I was behind the bat when Burdock came to the plate. Boston's second baseman, Sutton, made a single to begin the inning. Then Manning, who was Boston's pitcher and also center fielder, was the next batter, and he also made a single. That put Sutton on second and Manning on first. Burdock was a dangerous batter. When he came up I signaled Paul to get out into deep field for him, and he did so. But I noticed that Paul was shifting toward left, guessing the batter well. Well, Burdock hit the second ball that was pitched, and he smashed it out into left field. It looked to me like a sure enough home run, clearing the bases. But as I saw Burdock rushing around the paths I also saw Paul Hines come tearing in from deep center to short left. His speed was terrific. He came like a streak of lightning. He gauged that ball right, too. He speared it about knee high in short left, back of third. He stumbled and almost fell, but kept on running and veering around, he kept on until he reached third

base. There he halted and held up the ball. We only had one umpire in those days, and Charley Daniels, one of the best, was umpiring that day. He saw what Paul was up to, ran out toward him, and was not more than ten feet away when Paul perched on third base with the ball aloft in his hand. Daniels called out his decision: 'Three out. Side out.' And that crowd went wild.

"Then, as I remember it, Carey, our shortstop, took the ball and threw it to Sweeney, our second baseman, and he touched second base as they both shouted to the crowd: 'Just for good measure.'"

Ten years ago, or maybe twelve, Secretary Wilson made Paul Hines Postmaster of the Department of Agriculture; and in that office the narrator found Paul Hines. The great, big, broad-shouldered, gentle and kindly disposed old boy smiled, and said:

"If you've seen Charley Snyder and 'Doug' Allison, they know all about it, and I don't need to say anything; except to say that the players of to-day can't make any of us oldtimers take off our hats to them. Billy Sunday was as good as Ty Cobb. Radbourne and Rusie were some pitchers, and so was Clarkson a wizard. We played ball in those days, and we didn't wear armor plate either."

After showing his gnarled fingers and listening to urgent appeals from an old friend, Paul said:

"Well, my side of the story of course is different from the side of the folks who saw the play. It was at Providence, Rhode Island, May 15, 1878. It happened that I played what they call nowadays 'inside baseball.' I knew that Burdock was a dangerous batter. I knew also that he was inclined to pull 'em out into left field.

"Believing that any long knock into left field would be gathered in by our left fielder, I figured that Burdock might knock one into the field too short for the left fielder and too far out for either the third baseman or the shortstop. While I was guessing the batter and moving toward left field (as 'Doug' Allison told you he saw me), Burdock got his hit. I was on the move in a dog trot while our pitcher, Corey, was winding up. When ball and bat cracked I was under way instantly; and instantly I saw where that ball was going. I felt that nothing but

lightning sprinting would get me there, and I cut loose with all my might. I never ran so fast before or since. I just flew. Well, it is a wonder that I lived to tell the story. I barely got there in time to grip the ball somewhere between my knee and ankle. It was so near my ankle that I almost fell and broke my neck. Although I came near falling, I managed to keep my balance by keeping up the momentum until I could swerve about toward third base. As soon as I stepped on the base I held up the ball. Umpire Charley Daniels was quite near. He looked excited, but I guess that was because I was excited. The umpire called so that he could be heard all over the field: 'Three out. Side out.' Then there was such a noise as I never heard. The whole crowd was crazy. It was in Providence, you know; and it was a Providence player that made the play.

"Somebody motioned for me to go to second base. You know, my hearing is deficient, and I depended largely on signs in those days. Well, I ran down and touched second. Then Carey, our shortstop, and Sweeney, our second baseman, took the ball and danced around with it, cutting up monkey shines.

"Of course I never started out to make a triple play. After I caught the ball, the triple play was right in front of me, and the remainder was easy. What I should have credit for principally are the long and speedy run; catching the ball so near the ground; holding it while it twisted in my hand; and keeping my feet without breaking my neck."

Following the advice of "Uncle Nick" Young, we are making reliable history here. We have the story of two eyewitnesses, and they were probably the two best catchers in baseball at that time, Charley Snyder and "Doug" Allison. And added to the stories of those eyewitnesses we have the modestly told story of the great athlete himself, lovable and gentlemanly Paul Hines.

But the historian sought further evidence, and wrote to Charley Daniels at R. F. D., Colchester, Connecticut, and he replied thus:

"Well, well, well, so they are still trying to deny dear old Paul that famous triple play unassisted. I was the umpire on that occasion and was connected with the National League, and the American

Association many years afterward, and in active association with the game between twenty-five and thirty years; most of the time I was umpiring.

"On the occasion of the famous play by Paul Hines, Ezra Sutton was on second base, and some one else was on first base. Burdock, at the bat, hit a fly which traveled rainbow fashion to left field. There was a light wind blowing, and carrying the ball a little toward second base, but back of it. When the second baseman saw Paul tearing in after the ball, he wisely got out of the way.

"Sutton made home, from second base, and the other man was near the home plate, when Hines caught the ball about

a foot from the ground, almost turned a somersault, and rushed to third base, where he stood and held up the ball. Of course I did my duty then and made the decision: 'Three out. Side out' Hoping that this statement will help square the history for dear old Paul, I am, yours truly, C. F. Daniels, Umpire."

These statements of fact, told without rhetorical effort or other display, but merely with historic intent, should settle for all time the right of Paul Hines to the fame of making the first and greatest triple play, unassisted, ever made in the national game. Every true sportsman likes to give "honor to whom honor is due."

