

Reminiscences of an Oldtimer

Suggestions to Would-be Ball Players—The Game in the Old Days—Hints on Inside Baseball

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One Time Major League Ball Player

There was a day when John (Dasher) Troy was one of the bright lights of the diamond. Advancing age has long since driven him from his favorite haunts. But, though, as he admits, he has "had his day and that day is a long time past," still he has "seen more baseball games than any other player in the country," and remained throughout a close student and observer of the game. His observations in the form of little lessons to ambitious ball players, and illuminating side discourse to the public on inside baseball, form a series of unusual interest.

IN my last installment I touched on two of the most important qualifications for the young player who wishes to make good in the Major Leagues. These two qualifications which are indispensable are good eyesight and a quick, clear-thinking brain.

Several other qualifications are necessary for the player at any position. Speed is the watchword of modern baseball, even more than it was of the old-time game. A young athlete must be quick and active and I would specially recommend all would-be players to practice the sprint with a good deal of persistence. In track athletics various types of foot races are in order, and they all require an entirely different training. For instance, the mile runner would very likely be of no possible good at the hundred yards distance, just as the hundred yard man would be out of it at the mile. Baseball is a game of sprints. All the distances are short, but the man who can get to first a foot ahead of the other fellow has made a safe hit.

A would-be player must also develop his throwing arm. To be a success he must be a fast accurate thrower. He should cultivate the overhand throw and learn to drive the ball on a line. Practice

is the most important way of becoming expert.

Some players are star first basemen who would be lost at shortstop, for instance. There are certain qualifications which go with every position on the diamond. A player should study his qualifications very carefully, and try to determine not necessarily the position he would best like to play, but the position for which he is best fitted. Many players, even in the Major Leagues, have lost years of time trying to play a position for which they were not naturally fitted and have found out perhaps late in their career the place which they should have occupied from the first. I have no hesitation in saying that choice of position is one of the most important, if not the most important, things for a player to decide upon. Upon the wisdom of his choice here depends a great deal of his future success.

The importance of settling this question rightly is shown by the training necessary in developing a throwing arm. For instance, if a player has decided that he should play the outfield he will need to develop his throwing arm along entirely different lines than would be the case if he were a shortstop. For in-

stance, an outfielder will need to develop distance as well as accuracy in his throw. Perhaps the most important part of an outfielder's duties is getting a runner at the plate. Many outfielders will not even attempt this play on a close decision, admitting by their actions that they cannot make the play, that they are not equal to the demands of their position. Great throwing arms are not common, but there is no department of an outfielder's work where they are more needed.

Conversely, if a player had decided that he was a natural shortstop he would need to develop a very quick get-away with the ball and a fairly long throw. Speed would be in that case the prime essential and of course accuracy as well. But the shortstop would need to practice a throw from a difficult position as well as from a natural position, as he often has to make the throw under very unfavorable circumstances in a regulation game.

I have often thought outfielders injured their arms by a false method of throwing, as it is absolutely certain pitchers and catchers often do. If an outfielder will throw overhand, let his arm out at full length, and keep his arm close to his ear in throwing I doubt if he will ever throw his arm out or injure it in any way. He will certainly not do so if he has had proper preliminary training and is in good physical condition.

So much for general requirements in a player. To carry the study further it will be necessary to consider the various positions in turn. First, because it is one of the most important and most imperfectly understood, I will begin with the position of catcher.

The backstop should be at least five feet nine inches in height. Ordinarily the catcher is rather stocky of build. In fact, this type is so well understood that catchers are usually men of wide muscular development and of late years what

from this and perhaps other causes catchers have slowed up a good deal in speed so that they are scarcely better base runners than average pitchers. There is something in this theory of a stocky build, as the catcher, like the pitcher, needs to be a man of good muscular build to stand the constant strain of his position.

A catcher more than any other player on the diamond, needs to have a good working knowledge of human nature. He needs to be the type of man who can humor the pitcher and at the same time jolly the opposing batter. In a real game, if you sit near enough to home plate to hear, you will remark that the catcher is usually keeping up a steady stream of comment usually to the batter. This is done with the well understood intention of diverting his attention from the matter in hand, trying if possible, to get him to take his eye off the ball for a minute and thus get him in bad with the pitcher. His conversation is much more important than is commonly understood. In fact, some catchers consider it the most important of qualifications for the job. Street, one of the greatest of American League backstops in his day, was known as "Gabby," while Kling, who was equally great in the National League, had the nickname "Noisy," showing the importance these two performers attached to conversation on the diamond.

This point, I believe, is not generally understood and yet it is a fact that one of the prime essentials in a catcher is not height or weight or ability in any of the lines of playing baseball, but rather in his disposition and his ability in conversation to keep his own pitcher encouraged at all times and to rattle the opposing batter if possible. Later I will take up some of the other important considerations which make a catcher great in his line, as well as the main requirements for the other positions on the diamond.

