
Youth Baseball in Chicago, 1868-1890: Not Always Sandlot Ball*

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The persistence of myth in our history of sports is perhaps the most durable aspect of our culture. One of the most difficult jobs of the professional historian is to eradicate the fanciful stories and notions that permeate our culture's common understanding of its sports past. Ken Burns's notable 1994 PBS series, *Baseball*, did the public a great service in revealing some of the best-known myths about our baseball past, such as the fiction that Abner Doubleday invented baseball in Cooperstown, a false bit of history well known among baseball aficionados but not so well known to the general public.

As laudable as Burns's epic series was, it had an unfortunate tendency to disseminate some myths of its own that do not hold up under scrutiny. Perhaps the most egregious problem with Burns's series was his representation of an Edenic past for youth baseball. The first episode, "First Inning, The 1840s-1900: Our Game," is opened and closed with the same photograph of a youth sandlot game to not only illustrate baseball's origin in a children's game but also to illustrate the game's innocence and purity before it was taken over by the captains of commerce.

The last segment of the first episode, called "A Little Boy's Game," is designed to contrast the "purity" and "amateur spirit" of the child's game with the corruption and venality of major league professional baseball. At one point the narrator intones, "Athletic games carry men back to their days of childhood. There is indeed morally a home base in all of them, as there is literally in baseball."¹

After presenting this moral dimension to youth baseball, Burns then relates that in the 1890s major league baseball was in trouble due to the "jealously and greed" of the owners. The final image is of the episode's opening photograph of the children's pickup game, projecting an aura of innocence, and over it the narrator piously says, "It would take a new generation of baseball players, stars who would

come to represent the best and worst of the new twentieth century, to rescue the national pastime."²

Undoubtedly, Burns was influenced by professional historians such as the late Harold Seymour, one of the principal disseminators of the idea that the nineteenth century represented an Edenic time for youth baseball, a time when children played sandlot baseball for the sheer joy of it, uncorrupted by adult concepts of organized competition.

Seymour has been rightly eulogized for his three-volume history, called *Baseball*. His first two volumes, subtitled *The Early Years* and *The Golden Years*, were the history of organized baseball from its origins to 1930. In 1990, instead of coming out with his final volume and taking Organized Baseball to the present day, he surprised many in the world of baseball research by producing *The People's Game*, a history of the game outside of Organized Baseball—among boys, high schoolers, college men, women, blacks, servicemen, and prisoners. Probably the most evocative chapters of Seymour's study are the ones in which he captures the flavor of boys baseball and conveys its sense of being innocent, young, and pure. He describes nineteenth-century boys baseball as being primarily "scrub" games played by "sandlotters," in which the equipment could be no more than broom handles and a heavily taped, ragged ball and the grounds merely a cleared empty lot. He frequently evokes his own involvement in the game as a youth in the Flatbush neighborhood of Brooklyn in the 1920s to describe some of the age old practices of the sandlot.

Seymour also contrasts the innocent past of youth baseball with the more nefarious present, writing, "The spontaneous, unguided character of the sandlot scrub games of past generations contrasts sharply with that of the overorganized, oversupervised, and overindulged youngsters of recent times."³ Seymour's compelling images of nineteenth-century boyhood and the youthful love of baseball present a powerful, moving picture, but his picture of youth baseball is woefully incomplete, as he gave organized youth baseball scant attention.

What the preceding means is that the last refuge of romanticism in baseball history appears to be youth baseball. And unfortunately for Burns and Seymour and those other fans of the game who passionately cling to baseball myths, historical truth always proves to be more prosaic, more nuanced, and more complex than the over-romanticized images that capture their imaginations. This is particularly true with regard to the question of the level of organization in youth baseball. There were times in the nineteenth century, particularly during the post-Civil War baseball fad, when youth baseball was as organized and competitive as anything seen today. The players hardly could be seen as innocents either, as their games could be as mean and nasty as any that ever took place on the adult level.

This paper examines youth baseball as it was played in Chicago during the late nineteenth century, concentrating on two periods: the early 1870s and the late 1880s. This paper sets out to provide a fuller and more realistic understanding of the game as it was played by youth at this time, one that does not reflect the romanticized images currently conveyed in the popular history of the game.

Junior Club Organization

How was youth baseball organized in the nineteenth century? One place to look would be in the secondary schools. Baseball was certainly the first sport adopted by the high schools, and in places this adoption certainly preceded the emergence of extracurriculum in the schools in the 1880s. Yet an examination of organized youth baseball yields unmistakable evidence, as will be seen, that the primary organizing impetus of youth baseball came not from students in educational institutions, but from youth in the system of amateur team competition.

The amateur baseball nines of the 1860s and 1870s were organized along the lines of American fraternal organizations with a formal club organization. They had constitutions, bylaws, and officers—primarily president, secretary, and treasurer. Members paid dues and met regularly to conduct business. Baseball clubs with large memberships might include a “first nine” (the club’s nine best members), “second nine,” and even a “third nine.” There were also junior clubs of younger players that were auxiliary to senior clubs.⁴

Competitions were arranged by the club secretary, who usually would issue a written challenge, such items often appearing as a notice in the newspaper. If such a challenge was accepted, the teams would play a “match game” or a series of match games, often a best two out of three series. If a team played out of town, the secretary would make the travel arrangements. A team was led by a captain, whose job was to train the team as well as to direct and lead the team on the field.⁵

The junior teams of the day patterned their organization after that of the senior teams. Major cities had dozens of junior teams. For example, in 1858 there were at least sixty junior teams in the New York City area alone.⁶ The ages of the players on junior teams have not been well defined in the professional histories of the game. In his chapters on boys baseball, Seymour in *The Peoples’ Game* never gives ages and refers to “boys” forming junior teams, suggesting that the ages of junior teams could range from our current middle school through high school levels, which is technically correct because any team whose members were under 21 years old was deemed to be “junior.”⁷

However, Seymour’s use of the term “boys” to refer to members of junior teams clouds the issue somewhat. In practice, the use of “junior” in the name more often than not implied a roster of players in their late teens, who are nowadays called “young men.” The teams that formed their own national organization of junior clubs in 1860 were rightly described by historian Melvin L. Adelman as “young men.”⁸

Another sport historian, George B. Kirsch, did much to clarify definitions by pointing out that early baseball was organized into three levels—boys (16 and under), juniors (young men under 21), and seniors. Kirsch is the only baseball historian known to this researcher who has recognized three levels of organization.⁹ He describes a formal level of organization for boys baseball, noting that “whenever a group of boys, young men, or adults joined to form a cricket or baseball club,

they sacrificed some of the freedom of informal play for the social and athletic benefits of organized sport.”¹⁰ He describes a sophisticated level of organization, in which a club drew up a constitution and elected officers, and applies this structure to boys teams as well as to juniors and seniors.¹¹

Most baseball historians, however, reflecting their overreliance on sources from the eastern United States that generally referred only to senior and junior teams, have conveyed the idea that there were only two levels. Chicago and its suburbs in particular were rich with amateur club and school teams. Stephen Freedman in his exploration of early amateur baseball in Chicago reported a virtual explosion of amateur club activity in the immediate post-Civil War years. “The flowering of baseball in Chicago”—according to Freedman in his groundbreaking article from 1976, “The Baseball Fad in Chicago, 1865-1870”—“represented but a single expression of the sudden nationwide interest in the sport that was manifested to the greatest extent in America’s urban centers.”¹²

A look at youth baseball in Chicago reveals that in the 1860s and 1870s participants had developed a far more nuanced system of organization based on several age-group levels than is recognized in the general histories of baseball. As in the eastern U.S., there were originally three levels of organization: pony (14 and under), junior (17 and under), and senior. Later, even younger levels of competition would develop. Freedman does not mention any of these levels in his superb portrait of baseball in Chicago. His only recognition of youth baseball is the observation that teams were organized out of the schools.¹³

High school-age players were generally organized into junior level teams, although many of the first- and second-year students were either spun off from the junior team to form a “junior pony,” or simply “pony,” team, or formed separate pony teams themselves. In Chicago, the age level for junior teams set at 17 years and under was established formally during the 1867 season. In December 1866 delegates to the Northwestern Association of Base Ball Players unanimously adopted a resolution to define junior clubs as consisting “wholly of members under eighteen years of age.”¹⁴ Pony clubs in Chicago were limited to players aged 14 and under.¹⁵ Both pony and junior clubs played regular competition from May through September.

Junior ball clubs, having less experienced and presumably less skilled members, often served as the auxiliary teams for the leading amateur clubs in Chicago, notably the Aetna Juniors, Athletic Juniors, Atlantic Juniors, Eureka Juniors, Excelsior Juniors, and Resolute Juniors. (Most Chicago amateur clubs took their names from famed clubs on the East Coast, especially those in the baseball hotbed of Brooklyn.) Other clubs that were stand-alone junior clubs—that is, not literally junior to a senior club such as the Ortives, Actives, and Olympics. Some of the city’s notable amateur clubs started out as junior clubs, such as the Actives, which was a championship junior club in 1869, but by the following year was competing as a senior club. Junior teams not only competed against each other, but also occasionally against senior clubs and against high school and university nines.¹⁶

Because the ages of most junior club members generally ranged from the mid- to late-teenage years, the determination of the difference between a club of young senior players and a club of older junior players was often a matter of the sayso of the teams themselves. There were examples of second nines of senior teams successfully posing as junior teams. In an open letter to the *Chicago Tribune* in the fall of 1869, the Actives made the complaint, "We the Active Base Ball Club [have] proof that the said Aetna Juniors are the second nine of the Aetnas, and we don't propose playing any senior club for the junior championship."¹⁷

The Actives went on to win the junior championship that year and subsequently played the Crescent Juniors of Sycamore (from the northwestern part of the state) for the "junior championship of the Northwest."¹⁸ But there was a dispute regarding those matches as well. The *Chicago Tribune* asserted that the Crescent Juniors "are by the regulations a senior club. Most of them are over 18 years of age, and some of them are large enough to belong to any senior club."¹⁹ A few days later a vigorous letter of dissent was received by the paper from a Crescent Juniors partisan, who claimed "the average age of the Crescent Juniors is not quite 18 years. If we are large it is not our fault, as boys in the country are expected to be somewhat overgrown."²⁰ Notice the imprecise language as to age limits. This is common in newspaper reports of the day. Despite what is said in these accounts, juniors had to be under 18 years of age. There were no hard and fast lines that separated pony and junior clubs. The Favorites, for example, were all "pony age" but competed as a junior club.²¹

Pony Clubs

Chicago, it appears, developed a unique level of baseball organization called "pony." Like their older counterparts, the teams were formally organized into clubs. The formal name of the Baltics pony team, for example, was the Baltic Baseball Club. Following the practice of senior teams, each pony team had a formal constitution, conducted meetings with rules of order, and elected officers to handle the day-to-day business of the team. The Baltics, as they conducted their 1869 season, showed a level of organization typical for the era but substantially different from late twentieth-century youth baseball, in which adult supervision and direction are the norm.

Each contest that the Baltics played required the formal issuance of a challenge and the reporting of the game results to the newspaper. The Baltics also made annual tours through neighboring states during the summers and played a great number of teams, all of which required planning and scheduling beforehand.²² There was thus considerable business communication that had to be handled by the young teams, and in Chicago it was handled by the teams' secretaries, who would arrange matches with other teams, find suitable playing fields, and make the necessary travel plans for the players.

Throughout 1869 the Baltics' secretary, or sometimes the president, issued challenges in the newspapers for match games. Typical was one near the end of the season: "We, the Baltic Base Ball Club, of Chicago, having only been beaten

by one club this season, and that being a junior club, do hereby claim the pony championship of Chicago. Any club, or clubs, wishing to dispute this will please send challenges to Charles J. Hatfield, No. 148 Sedgwick street."²³ In trying to schedule a Fourth of July holiday game, the Baltics put a notice in the *Chicago Times* indicating they wanted a "country game," and asked for offers "stating the amount of gate money guaranteed."²⁴

When in 1869 the Baltics claimed the championship of the state, the club issued a challenge in the *Chicago Times* to the Northwestern women's team, the Dianas:

It having been announced in *The Times* of the 11th that a base ball club composed of young ladies connected with the Northwestern Female college, at Evanston, was in regular practice, the champion young club of the state, the 'Baltics,' have forwarded the following nearly worded [challenge] to the Dianas:

Dear Ladies: In behalf of the Baltic Base-Ball Club, I would challenge the Dianas to a match game of baseball, to be played on their grounds at Evanston when convenient to the challenged club.

Hoping that as ancient Diana was goddess of the chase, so may you, the modern goddesses, consent to become the protecting deities of our national game in this vicinity, and, with goodness that goddesses and the ladies, their equals, are famous for, accept this challenge.

Yours, with great respect.

E. T. Marks

President, Baltic Base-Ball Club, Room 6, 180 South Water street.²⁵

The Dianas were not interested, and the *Times* reported: "While the ladies of the college are quick to appreciate the pluck that animated the above gentlemanly cartel, they wish it to be understood that it is older game they are seeking. . . the Dianas...hold themselves in readiness to contest a friendly game with any regular senior organization."²⁶ If the Dianas did meet any older male team it was not reported in the newspapers. This is one of the earliest known instances of college women taking up baseball.²⁷

Besides the Baltics, notable other pony teams were the Eclipse, Gazelles, Buckeyes, Emmetts, and Pontiacs. In 1869, for example, the Baltics won the championship of the city and beat the Gazelles from Evanston for the championship of the state, or so the claim went.²⁸

In New York, junior teams were likewise organized into various age levels, but the more youthful teams were not called pony, and the competition at the lower levels seemed less intense than in Chicago. Like the pony teams in Chicago, New York clubs with players in the age range of 14-15 elected officers and posted challenges in the local newspapers, notably the *New York Clipper*, typically listing age levels as "not over 15," "under 16 years of age," and "under 15 years of age." The following notice was characteristic: "The Uncas of this city wish to play the Eckfords of Seventh Street and Third Avenue, or any other club, the members of which are not over 15 years, taking the average."²⁹

Identity of Chicago's Youth Baseball Players

Who were these young men in Chicago aged 17 and under who comprised these youthful baseball teams? By examining the backgrounds of the correspondents who listed their names as secretaries or other respondents in published newspaper challenges, a limited sense of the players socio-economic backgrounds can be discerned. One should keep in mind, however, that such a survey is self-selective in that the correspondents who were either elected secretary, president, or designated to issue the published challenges might tend to be on a higher educational scale than their teammates.

Of the backgrounds of the 12 secretaries that could be ascertained, half were sons of entrepreneurial businessmen—a packinghouse owner, head of a real-estate firm, owner of a tannery, a book printer, a building contractor, and a manufacturer of windows and doors. Of the remainder, two were sons of clerks, one the son of a tinner, and another the son of a railroad conductor. Only one boy was identified as coming from a laborer's family.³⁰ Clearly during the baseball fad of the early 1870s, Chicago's baseball youth represented a population group somewhat high on the socio-economic scale.

An examination of backgrounds could again be made for 1888-1889, when newspapers again began publishing youth baseball game challenges. The backgrounds of the 35 boys that were identified show a socio-economic standing considerably lower than players in the 1870s. Only two boys appeared to have silk-shirt backgrounds, one being the son of a lawyer and the other the son of a building contractor. Ten boys came from families with a lower-level white-collar background, eight of them being sons of clerks. Ten boys were sons of skilled artisans (four sons of carpenters), and five boys came from families that owned small businesses (such as bakeries and butcher shops). Eight of the boys came from bluecollar backgrounds; their fathers were described as "laborers" and "drivers."³¹

The names of individuals published in the newspapers



Figure 1. African American boy accompanies some tough looking youth players as they arrive for a game in St. Louis in 1888. He does not appear to be a team member, but the accompanying text said about the contest, "the color line was obliterated, as each club had a colored player." Credit: *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, August 19, 1888.

give some evidence of the ethnicity of the players. Most of the names were English and Irish names. The color line of amateur ball on this level does not appear to have been as strong as on the professional level, judging by the occasional mentions and illustrations of blacks playing on white teams (see figures 1 and 6).³²

Most young players in the nineteenth century simply did not attend school during this time, and in Chicago some 30 percent of the school-age population was not attending school in the early 1870s, meaning some 26,000 youths between the ages of 6 and 21.³³ In the late 1880s, about half the school-age population was not attending school, meaning some 145,000 youths between the ages of 6 and 21.³⁴ Ideally, these youths were in the work force. Whether employed or just hanging around the parks, they were playing baseball in droves in the innumerable amateur clubs that were formed around the city and suburbs.

Urchins, Ragamuffins, Rowdies, and Marauders

Youth baseball in the nineteenth century not only mirrored the pattern of organization of their elders, but also reflected the social problems evident in urban America during this period. Games were marked by extreme verbal abuse and physical violence involving both players and spectators, as well as the customary questioning and abuse of the umpires. It was not uncommon for players and fans alike to protest decisions by mobbing the umpire and yelling and gesturing in a threatening manner in an attempt to browbeat him into changing his mind.³⁵

In June 1871 in New York, in a most notorious example of violence erupting at a youth game, two junior teams, with players who were of indeterminate age but probably in their late teens, met at the Union Grounds in Manhattan. These two teams, the Flyaways and the Silver Stars, were expected to compete for the championship and were meeting for the first time in the season. According to the *New York Herald* the game was a battle royal:

There were assembled about four hundred of the lowest, most vile rowdies, thieves, and pickpockets the east side ever produced, and before the game was half finished, they had kicked up one beautiful fight, tried to start half a dozen others by spitting tobacco juice in each other's faces, and making use of the most vile, obscene, and profane language imaginable. To make matters still worst the players of both clubs gathered up their bats and rushed into the crowd for the purpose of having a hand in the row themselves.

Whenever the umpire gave a decision and did not exactly suit the Flyaways the players of that club would all gather around him and by means of threats and rather demonstrative gesticulations try to make him reverse it; and if he chanced to decide a close point against the Silver Stars, the crowd of roughs would immediately commence cursing him and threatening to "mash his head."³⁶

Undoubtedly, such behavior influenced that of the younger clubs. In Chicago, for example, the Baltics in early 1870 suffered a rare defeat to another pony team,

the Buckeyes, in a volatile game. The Baltics, obviously upset at being handed a surprise defeat, complained to the newspaper in an open letter:

The game as far as played resulted against the Baltics by a score of 18 to 16, but they here protest against the game being counted as one for the pony championship, since not only the umpire decided unjustly in favor of the Buckeyes throughout, "not seeing" when any of them were out, but having sharp enough eyes to call a Baltic out if the ball came within three feet of touching him; but they played a pitcher and some three other men not members of their nine, but selected on purpose to win the championship from the Baltics, besides having gathered a crowd of two hundred ragamuffins, who yelled at and stoned the Baltics whenever attempting to play, and finally compelled them to withdraw from the game, in the midst of the last inning, to prevent themselves and everything they had from being "cleaned out."³⁷

As usual in conflicts of this nature, a few days later an open letter appeared in the newspaper giving the Buckeye side. The Buckeyes of course denied the accusations, and even pointed out that their team was "much inferior in size and age" to the Baltics, yet partly conceded the Baltics' point about the umpiring, saying "it was as impartial as could be expected, there being such a crowd of urchins in and around home plate."³⁸

The public grounds where these teams played their games were not always the serene pastoral environment one might imagine. One regularly used grounds in Chicago was located at Lake and May streets, just west of the downtown section, which apparently for a while had been taken over by hooligans. According to the *Chicago Times*, "the complaint is made that the grounds corner of Lake and May streets are controlled by bands of marauders who will neither play themselves nor allow anybody else to play."³⁹

When the newspapers of the era refer to ragamuffins, urchins, marauders, reprobates, vagabonds, and such, it is easy to forget that there was a large number of children and young men in the city at the time who neither went to school nor worked.⁴⁰ Urban historian Paul Boyer relates that Chicago and most other cities of the United States in the mid-nineteenth century were populated with a high proportion of recently arrived unmarried young men, with "ill-defined status and uncertain future" who, as one reformer feared, were free to indulge in "every degree of wickedness, from the slightest excesses to the foulest villainies."⁴¹ Some 67 percent of Chicago's population in 1850, Boyer noted, was under 30 years of age, and of that figure half were in the 15 to 29 age group.⁴²

Regarding "vagabonds," the *Chicago Times* in 1869 read, "The city is full of them. They may be seen in every ward, upon every street, and avenue, and public thoroughfare." This contemporary news account took note of these young men's idleness, and suggested those not in the work force were probably no better than hooligans. Continued the article, "standing on the street corners, and idling away their time in saloons, may be seen a class of young men whose daily lives are a puzzle to the most ingenious and industrious penetrators of character and avocation . . . they have no visible means of support; they have no homes; they were never known to do a day's work."⁴³

Of particular concern was the social menace of the “street urchins,” as the neglected and abandoned children of the urban poor were known. Each city had thousands of these urchins—New York City at least 10,000—which social reformer Charles Loring Brace called “street rats’ who gnawed away at the foundations of society, and scampered away when the light was brought near them.”⁴⁴

What should not be forgotten is that ruffians also played baseball. In one of the few first-person accounts of a schoolboy’s pursuit of baseball in Chicago, Edward Halsey recalled a rich boy, Robert Waller, who played some ball with a gang of poor toughs, “the Clark street boys.” Halsey related, “[Robert] was about fifteen years old, dressed well and carried a watch, which in those days was not the thing even for boys of his class. Robert with his coat off was playing with a lot of boys in Superior Street near Clark . . . Astonishment was expressed that he had dared to risk himself and his good clothes and his watch with that bunch of hostile boys.”⁴⁵

A decade and a half later, youth baseball players were involved playing in an even more rapscallion environment than were their counterparts of the early 1870s. The *Chicago Tribune* on August 26, 1888, provided a revealing portrait of youth baseball in the city in a feature story that was colorful, whimsical, and a tad exaggerated. The story appears to have been patterned after a similar story that appeared in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* a week earlier, both in the narrative format of the story and in choice of illustrations (see figures 2 and 3). Both stories conveyed the message that youthful baseball players were not Little Lord Fauntleroy types, but rough little street urchins who wore patched, shabby clothes, smoked and swore, were not adverse to carrying out minor theft, and spoke a lower-class street English, filled with des’s, dem’s, and dos’s.⁴⁶



Figure 2. Youth baseball spectators presented in the same pose by both the *Chicago Tribune* and *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* in August 1888. The St. Louis kids seem to be better dressed than their more urchin-looking Chicago counterparts. Credit: *Chicago Tribune*, August 26, 1888; *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, August 19, 1888.



Figure 3. Youth baseball melee drawn in the same cartoonish fashion by both the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* (right) and the *Chicago Tribune*. The St. Louis players obviously are much older than their Chicago counterparts. Credit: *Chicago Tribune*, August 26, 1888; *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, August 19, 1888.

The *Tribune* noted that a policeman was generally present at the games, and that while the “little chaps may expend a great deal of force in yelling and sometimes do a little hard swearing, there was little fighting and quarreling” compared with the games of older youth, a comment that suggests that it was common for older-youth games to be marred by fighting and quarreling.⁴⁷

Yet the *Tribune* reporter could not resist exaggerating his account of a game between the Young Rivals and White Diamonds. The Young Rivals had been taking challenges from clubs with players between 12 and 16 years old, but the pairing of this match appears to involve boys aged 12 to 14 or so. The reporter related that during the match the empire was driven from his post and beat up and the game ended up in a furious melee (see figure 4).⁴⁸ His story followed the same pattern as that of the *Post-Dispatch*, which told of a game involving older teams, the Slobs and the Brick Tops. There the umpire was not beaten up, but was subject to



Figure 4. Violent abuse of the umpire was considered a part of the youth baseball culture in the nineteenth century, as evidenced by this obviously pummeled unhappy urchin. Credit: *Chicago Tribune*, August 26, 1888.

violent verbal attacks (“kick ‘er lung outin’ him”; “smash him one in the jaw”) and was mobbed by a hostile crowd before “peace at last being declared.”⁴⁹

The *Post-Dispatch* account, however, related that the game ended in a melee when the Brick Tops, upset with the outcome, attacked the empire. The paper continued:

With this they fell upon the umpire, smiting him hip and thigh. He retaliated and the Slobs rushed to his rescue. Into the midst of the melee plunged the Brick Tops. They became fused together, a seething mass, from which bubbled oaths and fierce objurgations. The crowd at this became enthused and plunged into the fray. The melee grew denser. Teeth were knocked out, shirts tom off, and they had a good session generally.⁵⁰

Both papers illustrated their features with hyperbolic cartoons of an all-out fight labeled in each story as “the usual wind-up” with swinging bats and a pile of bodies in a free-for-all (see figure 3). Each reporter closed his story with a whimsical turn. The *Tribune* reporter told of a 14-year-old who was deputized to hold the one-dollar stake threading his way through the melee and absconding with the money. The *Post-Dispatch* account had the “youngster followers” of the Slobs making off with the masks, bats, and balls.⁵¹

Both the *Tribune* and the *Post-Dispatch* accounts are perhaps more mythically true than literally true. The stories appeared to have been juiced up to make for more exciting reading for the newspaper buyers. Nonetheless, behind the exaggerations lies a germ of truth to the idea that youth baseball in the nineteenth century was not played by youthful innocents.

In summary, youth baseball in the urban centers of nineteenth-century America appears to have been played in the midst of a population permeated with disreputable idle young men, street urchins, and ruffians; baseball played in the public parks and playgrounds could not possibly have been isolated from them. And despite the very middle-class nature of the game, with its “gentleman” traditions, it is also evident that some of the menacing aspects of urban city life were part and parcel of the game itself

Grade School Nines as Amateur Clubs

There were many amateur teams in Chicago of grade school age, and competition was vigorous among them. Some of these amateur teams represented local grade schools, and for their contests the grade schools got more ink in the newspapers than the city’s lone public high school, Chicago High. The Haven School regularly competed against two grade school amateur teams, the Socials and the Unions; the Jones School competed against the Oneidas, the Pioneers, and the Rapids. The line separating a school nine and amateur nine was thin, as in late June of 1870 when the Jones School team transformed itself into an amateur club, the Star Juniors, probably to play through the summer. In the spring of 1871, the Jones School again fielded a team under the school’s banner. One example of one grade school playing another occurred in May of 1870 when Dore School met Foster School.⁵²

New York and Brooklyn newspapers likewise reported on grade school competition, which as in Chicago involved mostly games between schools and amateur clubs rather than school-on-school competition. In 1870, the *New York Clipper* wrote, "In a game played at Central Park between the Uncas Club and picked nine of St. Bridget's school, the U's were victorious by a score of 14 to 7."⁵³ A "picked nine" in nineteenth-century terminology usually meant any selected nine players from a certain pool, sometimes the best players, sometimes not.

The Chicago grade schools in the 1870s were not provided with playgrounds, let alone baseball fields. The city council responsible for financing the schools at the time rejected the advice of the school board president that a playground be constructed by each school. Chicago schools' historian Mary Herrick relates, "The city council could see no sense in such extravagant waste of money for expensive land—just for a place for children to play."⁵⁴ Grade school youngsters were thus forced to play in the parks where "marauders" could be found.

There were numerous grade school age amateur baseball clubs that followed the pattern of their older brethren, issuing challenges via the newspapers and setting up games through a secretary or manager. A new competition emerged in 1871 for teams with players 13 years old and younger, and again the same type of organization based on the club model was evident. For example, during that year the *Chicago Times* reported the following:

The Green Jackets claim the 13-year championship, and hereby challenge any club that disputes their right. Address No. 220 Polk Street.

The Northside Empires have reorganized, and want to receive challenges from all clubs whose members are under 14 years of age. Address W. A. Purcell, No 126 Dearborn Street, Rm 2.⁵⁵

Baseball games in the early 1870s were not always conducted with strict guidelines as to age and ability levels. In June of 1871, the Star Nine of Harrison team, whose members were 12 and 13 years of age, beat the Mutuals, whose ages were 22 to 24. As usual they issued a challenge: "The victorious nine desire more worlds to conquer, and yearn for challenges addressed to W. Wheeler, No. 84 West Harrison Street."⁵⁶

These young teams also claimed pieces of city land as grounds, as the following notice in the summer of 1871 suggests: "The Pioneers got revenge out of the Amateur Jrs. in the afternoon, beating them 16 to 2. Right here it should be noticed that 'the Pioneers are anxious of receiving challenges from all clubs whose members do not exceed 13 years.' Application should be made on their grounds in the alley, between Kinzie and North Water Streets."⁵⁷ The Pioneers was one of the more prominent 13-year-old teams and garnered considerable attention in the newspapers.⁵⁸

Further evidence that many of these boys' games were more than sandlot contests was an item involving an umpire who was supposedly bribed by the Pioneers. Reported the *Chicago Times*: "The Pioneers defeated the Red Stars, 65 to 43, but the latter claim the umpire was bought up by the Pioneers. It is a serious charge."⁵⁹

Even during the peak years of youth baseball in Chicago, there were most certainly sandlot games being played in the city, and surely many of the game reports that appeared in the newspapers were probably of scrub contests, the mere fact of their being reported by the paper suggesting a greater significance than they had. Halsey's memories were definitely of the scrub variety:

Of all our boyhood games, baseball was the one that called forth the highest praise. My usual functions in the field were left-field or shortstop. I never aspired to the position of catcher, although at one time I did make some advances in the direction of the pitcher's work. Those were the days of the straight underhand pitch . . . I worked up enough ability to [play on] my college class nine one season as a left fielder. I played I believe only one match game.⁶⁰

Young Mr. Halsey, who was 14 years old at the time of the Great Chicago Fire, obviously was not that accomplished as a player, but there was a role for him in scrub games. One cannot imagine him belonging to any of the teams that regularly reported their championship runs in the newspapers. Halsey lived in a suburb north of the city, Lake View, which lacked even the parks that Chicago provided:

At that time in Chicago boys from well to do families necessarily found their recreation in the streets, which were all hard packed dirt roads. The school houses provided only rooms in which scholars sat at desks and learned lessons and then recited them. There were no playgrounds, nor gymnasiums, nor tennis courts. Neither were there public parks with ballfields and golf courses. And there were no country clubs, nor city clubs. There was a great lack of such things. Yet there was a great compensation because those boys of earlier Chicago were thrown on their own resources to provide their own entertainment and in the doing of this brought out the best that were was in themselves. Finding recreation on the streets they became 'out of doors' boys about as much as if they had lived out in the country or on the farm.⁶¹

Unlike the grade school boys in Chicago who avidly formed teams, Halsey made no mention of ever being a part of a grade school team, or even mentioned the existence of one. But the considerable level of organization seen in the 1870s is reflected in Halsey's acute observation that the "boys of earlier Chicago were thrown on their own resources." And yet clearly it is young Halsey who played only passable baseball on the hard dirt streets that is typically representative of the type of unorganized youth baseball that historians have often evoked.

At this time, there was virtually no negative commentary from adult observers of Chicago's highly active youth baseball scene. The city's newspapers seemed to relish in reporting every amateur game. But some newspapermen had second thoughts about the whole enterprise. The following comments by a *Chicago Times* writer in 1870 are instructive:

It became customary during last season to publish the scores of games played between the less known clubs of this city—clubs with barbaric,

comic, stupid or overridiculous names, and whose scorers did write most villainously, and spelt at random. We gave the results of games between drygoods clubs and schoolhouse clubs, and nines from the Protestant and Catholic Orphan Asylums. Nothing was lacking but a club made up of babes of the breast. A report of one of these games would be left at the office, stating that the Young Americas had beaten the Hopefuls by a gigantic score. The next day the Captain of the Hopefuls, aged from 4 to 9, after climbing our eighty stairs with great difficulty, would appear panting, and claim that his organization had the great score, and the others, the small one. He would frequently argue for half an hour as to the viral importance of a correction, and would denounce the unscrupulous mendacity of the Young Americas. Repressing a strong inclination to give him five cents to buy marbles with, we promised to correct, and he went downstairs exultant.⁶²

Fortunately for such newspapermen, baseball in Chicago went through the natural cycle of all fads, hastened a bit by the Great Chicago Fire of October 1871. In the spring after the fire there were still large numbers of reports relating to amateur teams, but only a third as many as in the previous year. Within a couple of years the Chicago newspapers' practice of reporting on all amateur games essentially ended for a long time—for something like fifteen years—as the focus increasingly turned to the professional game, and particularly the Chicago White Stockings.⁶³

How much the steep decline of newspaper coverage of amateur baseball during the early 1870s actually reflected an ebbing of the fad and how much it reflected a changing approach to sports coverage is difficult to determine. Perhaps both factors were at work

Youth Baseball Resurgence

In any case, during 1888-89, the city's newspapers began paying much greater attention to the activities of amateur teams, especially youth teams.⁶⁴ The *Chicago Tribune* began extensive coverage of amateur games in the late summer of 1888.⁶⁵ The *Inter-Ocean*, in particular, gave amateur competition a lot of coverage, and the Sunday paper beginning in 1889 would use an entire broadsheet page to cover notices of game results, challenges, and disputes.⁶⁶

The young amateur clubs of the late 1880s still retained some of the same organizing principles as their counterparts fifteen years earlier. The formalized organized club still served as a basis for a team, and challenges were still posted in the newspapers, providing such information as age range specifications, requirement of uniforms, possible dates, and name and address of the contact person. Whereas fifteen years earlier the contact person was usually the club president or secretary, the contact person of the late 1880s was the manager, captain, or simply a designated player. More often than not no title of the contact was given in the challenge notice.⁶⁷

Typical of the organization of a late 1880s club was that of the Emerald Maroons, a 16-year-old club. The club in its notice listed as officers a secretary/treasurer (who played first base), captain (who played left field), and manager

(who was a nonplayer or at least a nonstarter). The addressee listed in the notice was that of the manager.⁶⁸

Unlike the teams of the early 1870s, the teams of the late 1880s did not use the term “pony,” and when they used the term “junior,” they did not specify a particular age range but used the term in a broad and generic sense. For example, in 1889, there was the Young Whitings Junior team, with players averaging 12-13 years old, and the Young Whitings team with players averaging 15-16 years old.⁶⁹

Typically, in a challenge of the late 1880s, a team would give a two-year age range or an average age figure. There were commonly challenges issued for teams with players’ ages averaging 16 years, such as the Aladdins, Keystones, and White Caps; for an average of 15 years, such as the Pirates, Young Ashfords, and Mike Kellys; for an average of 14 years, such as the Young Pickets and Gordons; for an average of 13 years, such as the Young Stars, Sunflower Juniors, and Favorites.⁷⁰ There were even challenges issued by teams as young as those with a nine-year age average (Anchor Boys) and ten-year age average (Young Mascots).⁷¹

Grade school challenges also appeared that sought competition from other grade schools, unlike in the early 1870s when it did not matter whether the opponent was an amateur club or a school club. This is a significant difference. No longer was the amateur club considered the model for organization by the grade schools, and the focus on other grade schools for competition showed how the primacy of school identification in team organization had taken hold. Among the schools issuing challenges were Bowen, Taylor, Columbus, Harrison, Webster, and Humbolt.⁷²

The explosive growth in coverage did not go unnoticed by the public, as one player from yesteryear commented:

The American boy readily absorbs the rudiments of the scientific game and in this present era of baseball enthusiasm, a boy that does not belong to a club of players is a queer fish. In Chicago, there are innumerable small boy clubs. I notice a great many of the paragraphs in the paper reporting the age of the players as being under 15 years.⁷³

In the late 1880s appears the first extensive evidence of betting on games by youthful players. A number of challenges contained information on the size of the stake. The South Side Comets, a nine averaging 14 years, stated they would not play for under \$2. The Young Sparrows of uncertain age challenged the Half Moons for \$5 a side, and the Models, a club averaging 18 years of age, posted a challenge of \$10 to \$15.⁷⁴

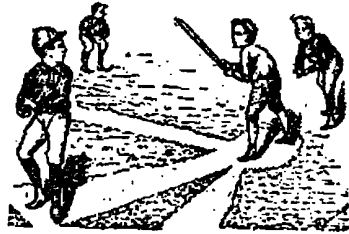
Challenges from largely older youth teams also contained the requirement that the opposing team be a uniformed team, which suggests that teams drew distinctions between what they regarded mere sandlot competition and more organized competition. For example, demanding competition from uniformed teams were the Diamond Baseball Club, with an average age of 17, and the Calumets, whose average age was 18.⁷⁵ To be uniformed conferred not only certain status baseball-wise but also in socio-economic terms. The evidence in the *Chicago Tribune* from 1888 shows that urchin teams appeared not to be uniformed.⁷⁶ An

advertisement the same year from a clothing store, however, clearly showed a uniformed youth team (see figure 5).⁷⁷ The advertisement may be an idealized presentation, considering it was a promotion for the store's goods, but it implies nonetheless that uniformed youth teams did exist, probably among the better-off middle- and upper-middle class teams.

The youth baseball explosion of the late 1880s extended a few years into the early 1890s, and then the newspapers again lost interest and the fad ended. The number of items relating to youth baseball ebbed more and more every year. The last such items were published in the *Inter-Ocean* in 1898.⁷⁸

At the height of the youth baseball explosion, in 1890, an eight-team league called the Boys League, comprising uniformed teams of players in their late teens, was formed. League rules specified that players had to be under 19 years old, except for three players who could be over the age limit. Games in the Boys League were often played as openers for games in the City League, one of Chicago's major amateur circuits.⁷⁹

There is evidence that the youth baseball explosion in Chicago in the late 1880s and early 1890s was not an isolated phenomenon but was also occurring in other cities of the Northeast, such as St. Louis and Brooklyn, as evidenced by *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* reports on grade school nines and teams organized by age levels—for example, "11 to 13 years," "average age 13 years," "average 14 years," and "players from 15 to 17 years of age." These teams were organized into clubs, elected officers, and issued challenges in the newspaper.⁸⁰



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Gives a Ball,
Bat, Belt, and Cap with
Every Boy's Suit.

Short Pants Suits, ages 4
to 14, reduced in prices to
insure quick sales.

Big Boys' Long Pant Suits,
ages 12 to 18, marked down.

Sailor Suits, \$1 to \$5.

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Kilt Suits, \$2 to \$10.

Star Shirt Waists, Straw
Hats, Hosiery, Neckwear,
for the Boys.

If you want the most in-
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saw send 25c and 2c post-
age for Huntington's Al-
manac for 101 years.

Putnam Clothing House

131 and 133 Clark-st.,

113 and 117 Madison-st.

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Figure 5. Uniformed youth baseball team at play as illustrated in an 1888 clothing store advertisement, which gives evidence that some well-heeled youth baseball teams wore uniforms. This ad appeared in various Chicago papers. Credit: *Chicago Tribune*, June 15, 1888.

High School Nines as Amateur Clubs

The post-Civil War baseball fever that gripped the nation would eventually bring secondary schools in regions throughout the country together in competition. In the 1860s and 1870s, however, secondary school students had yet to develop the whole array of sport and club activities termed the extracurriculum. Thus, in the absence of school publications such as yearbooks, magazines, and newspapers, and such customs as fight songs, cheers, and school colors, the bonds that linked students in identification with their schools were weak. Thus, the movement toward the creation of baseball teams as representative of the schools developed in fits and starts over two decades.

Seymour gives the flavor of early high school ball by relating the adventures of high school teams as presented in two dime novels written by William Everett, *Changing Base* (1868) and *Double Play* (1870). In the former, in a school modeled after Boston Latin, the students form a team to play against a pugnacious Irish nine, and in the latter, a high school team is challenged by an amateur team, the Wide Awakes, in a nearby town.⁸¹ As in these books, high school youth largely competed during that period against club teams.

Throughout New England; especially in the famed boarding schools, baseball teams were being formed during the early 1860s. Phillips Exeter in New Hampshire organized its first team in 1859, Williston Seminary (Williston Northhampton Academy) in Massachusetts in 1860, and Phillips Andover in Massachusetts in 1865. The first outside competition for the academies took place in 1866, when Andover played against Tufts College and against an amateur team, Lowell Club.⁸²

Worcester High School in Massachusetts has traditionally been recognized as the first secondary institution to form a team that competed against teams outside of the school. The year was 1859. The amateur baseball club was so preeminently the model for organizing a baseball team that many early high schools patterned their baseball organization after amateur clubs. Thus, the Worcester high schoolers thought they were forming just another amateur team in the town rather than a team designed to represent the school in competition against other high schools. When Worcester High formed the "Worcester High School Baseball Club," the team included two players who were not enrolled in the school. The idea that all the members of the team should be representatives of the school had not yet taken hold. Worcester's first opponent was a community club called the Eaglets.⁸³

Among the nation's public schools, Philadelphia Central was another pioneer, forming a team in 1863 and playing local amateur teams, namely the Olympics and the Minervas. But again the model for the team was the amateur club, and the high schoolers formed the Active Club within the school to play other amateur clubs. In the 1870s, Philadelphia Central competed against local academies, but there was no other public school to compete against until Central Manual Training was founded in 1883. In Boston, the English and the Latin schools were competing against each other as early as 1870.⁸⁴

An examination of high school baseball developments in two different kinds of communities—Chicago (representing a large urban center with several secondary schools) and Evanston (representing a small college-centered community with one high school)—demonstrate in microcosm how baseball became a part of the high school extracurriculum.

There was only one public secondary institution in Chicago in the early 1870s, Chicago High School (founded in 1856), and in the surrounding suburbs there was only Hyde Park (founded in 1869). Other high schools were not founded until the mid-1870s.⁸⁵ In 1875, Chicago High School was broken up into separate North Division, West Division, and South Division schools. They were at first two-year institutions, with the old high school building serving to provide the final two years of secondary education.

There is no evidence of interscholastic baseball at Chicago High during the 1860s and 1870s, but the city during this era boasted several private academies that did play baseball. Local academies that fielded baseball teams, and sometimes played each other as well as other teams, were Chicago Academy, Dyhrenfurth's Educational and High School, and Beleke's Academy. The earliest interscholastic contest in Chicago dates back to mid-October of 1868, when Chicago Academy beat the Beleke Academy, 18 to 7, in a season-ending game.⁸⁶

The earliest reference to Chicago High School baseball dates to May of 1870, when the *Chicago Times* reported: "A match game of base ball was played yesterday afternoon at the corner of May and Lake streets between the junior A and junior B classes of the Chicago High School." In the fall there was another report on an interclass game: "A match game was played yesterday between a nine of Mr. Howland's room (Seniors) and Mr. Wells' room (First Middles), of the Chicago High School, in which the former were victorious, by a score of 27 to 23." The following summer Chicago High School competed against the freshmen class team of Chicago University.⁸⁷

During 1873 and 1874 there were various reports of Chicago High playing amateur teams in the city, notably the McVickers (a team drawn from the employees at the McVickers Theater), the Eagles, Leavitt Street Nine, and the Highlanders (from the far northern suburb of Highland Park).⁸⁸

The pattern of adoption of baseball at Chicago High School shows that the game began as an intramural activity, where it proved to be a popular interclass contest. Eventually there came a point where the school boys looked at the amateur club, private school, and university in their community as a possible opponent and a challenge was issued. This pattern can be extrapolated to apply to the experiences of many other secondary schools.

Baseball as it was played in Evanston illustrates how the model for organization was the amateur club. In 1878, for example, the Evanston High boys formed a team called the Resolutes. There was no conception of "school colors" and no strong sense that the team was primarily representing the school. The Resolutes began the season playing a practice game with the high school freshmen, followed by a game against the Northwestern freshmen, and then a schedule that included such amateur teams as the Pastimes of Chicago, Aetnas

of Chicago, Wilmettes, and Rogers Parkers.⁸⁹ The Resolutes wore uniforms. A report in the *Evanston Index* said, "Noting the continued success of the Resolutes, the Northwestern University nine has adopted the same uniform, and appears in brown trimmed suits and brown stockings."⁹⁰

The Resolutes were not the only amateur team formed by Evanston high schoolers. Another team was the Oneidas, and like the Resolutes they played other area amateur teams. Other Evanston High teams formed around this time were the Stars and the Mohawks. That a school with only 23 graduates in 1878 would form so many teams is indicative that these teams did not consider themselves to be primarily representing the high school itself.⁹¹ These teams were formed in April and reorganized in June for summer play after the loss of members due to graduation. At the same time, the *Evanston Index* considered them to be "village clubs," understanding them to be local amateur teams representing the community.⁹² There were no reports of the Resolutes, Oneidas, or Stars playing any other high school team. By 1880, all the other teams at Evanston High had disappeared, and only the Stars remained.⁹³

These Evanston High teams could afford to invest in school uniforms, being of upper-middle and upper-class background. Of team members who have been identified, two members of the Resolutes went to college and became lawyers, one of whom ran for office as a U.S. senator from Illinois. The Oneidas, who were perhaps lower on the social scale, represented the entrepreneurial merchant class; one member became a director of wholesale grocery sales, another became an owner of a wholesale dry goods business, another a merchant, and another became an office manager at Northwestern University after obtaining a degree.⁹⁴

For young baseball players of the 1860s and 1870s to actually get their baseball experience in high school was probably rare, even if they were attending school. The experience of Hall of Famer Albert Spalding is instructive. He attended Rockford High, but he did not belong to a school team; rather, he played for a pony-level team called the Pioneers that competed against amateur teams at all levels throughout the city. His pitching ability was soon discovered by the best baseball experts in Rockford, and in 1865 at the age of 15 he became a key member of a newly formed citywide club, Forest City. Instead of going to school to play baseball, he had to leave school to play. His mother related in her reminiscences:

Albert was very fond of playing baseball, and when the club wanted to win a game they had him excused from school. That disturbed me very much, and I went to see the Principal, Mr. Blodgett, too, and asked him to intercede. I said to Mr. Blodgett, "I don't want Albert to leave school to play ball." He replied, "Now, Mrs. Spalding, I want to tell you that Albert is a studious boy and gets his lessons, and his going at 2 o'clock in the afternoon to play ball once in a while will do no harm."⁹⁵

After his junior year, young Spalding dropped out of high school to work at a newspaper, but mostly to play with the Forest City club.⁹⁶ In the following years, with Spalding pitching,⁹⁷ the Forest City team emerged as one of the top amateur teams in the nation.

The experience of high school boys playing on their high school teams was not common until extracurricular programs were developed, which in Chicago high schools was in the 1880s.⁹⁸ In the first years of the decade, the extracurriculum began with the founding of school newspapers and the development of interscholastic athletic competition in football and baseball, and later expanded to include other sports competition, yearbooks, glee clubs, student government, debating societies, and fraternities and sororities.⁹⁹

The extracurricular program in Chicago public schools, and by extension the development of interscholastic baseball competition, began in 1880-82 when the three Division schools became four-year institutions. One can imagine the considerable change in student atmosphere once the schools expanded to include junior and senior classes. There must have been increased identification by the students with their schools, and that in turn probably engendered the desire to have athletic teams to represent their schools. Suburban schools in the area were growing in population from a couple of dozen of students to a couple hundred or more—figures high enough to provide nine good men throughout the season. Because high schools at this time were considered to be largely teacher training centers for women, the student population was about two-thirds women, and the dropout rates were high, particularly that of the men.¹⁰⁰

Some of the high school teams in the early to mid-1880s were no more than sandlot outfits. An Evanston writer in 1933 noted that the baseball team in the 1880s played in vacant lots, and another said that “high school athletics was no more than sandlot baseball.”¹⁰¹ The predominant baseball activity in the schools was still intramural contests, typically played between two classes or two literary clubs at a picnic.¹⁰²

In 1884 in Chicago and its immediate suburbs of Lake View and Hyde Park, the schools of Hyde Park, Lake View, and North Division formed a league playing a double round-robin schedule during May and June. The winner of the league received a pennant emblematic of the “championship of the high schools of Cook County.” The opening game of the schedule at Lincoln Park between Hyde Park and North Division attracted some 300 spectators.¹⁰³

In the 1880s, high schools struggled to get interscholastic baseball off the ground. In a letter to the Chicago schools’ student newspaper, *High School Journal*, dated December 20, 1885, a student lamented, “For several years past there has been so-called ‘baseball leagues’ among our high schools, but very few schools participated. Let 1886 be different from this.”¹⁰⁴ Most of the teams probably had yet to wear uniforms. An Oak Park High graduate from 1884 recalled, “We had no baseball uniforms. We made one effort at it by the girls starting to make us caps, but after four were finished the attempt died.”¹⁰⁵

The first evidence that high school baseball in Chicago had finally taken hold is from 1888. Although the big-city papers ignored the activity, local newspapers, such as the *Evanston Index*, gives evidence of a remarkable resurgence at Evanston High, with considerable reporting by high school correspondents on games with Lake View High, Northwestern University, Lake Forest University, and West Division.¹⁰⁶

In the spring of 1889, interscholastic baseball rapidly picked up steam; there was a plethora of games reported in the large Chicago newspapers, involving North Division, West Division, Manual Training, Hyde Park, and Northwest Division teams. Competing against them were a number of prep schools, notably Harvard School, University School, and Brown School.¹⁰⁷

What happened at Evanston High during these years is probably indicative of how baseball emerged from being a sandlot activity to being a full-fledged interscholastic sport. For example, when the 1888 team got uniforms, apparently for the first time in years, it became something of an event, with members of the team showing up in class in their uniforms to preen before their classmates. One girl classmate, after seeing a game with the players in their “striped blue and black” outfits, gushed that the uniforms were “just too lovely for words.”¹⁰⁸ Evanston reported the following year that they had “secured a lot and fixed it up for a ball ground. Located two blocks west of the school, [it] has a backstop, and will have a shanty and a grandstand.”¹⁰⁹

The person credited as being most instrumental in launching the baseball league is Henry L. Boltwood, principal and baseball coach at Evanston High. He was an early advocate of athletic competition for schoolboys, as part of his role in attending games, he said “a teacher can make every such contest an occasion for



Figure 6. Gentleman baseball players of the Englewood High School team from April of 1892 (apparently taken before they obtained their uniforms), which shows there was no color line in Chicago high schools at this time. The boy standing at the far left is a young Harold Ickes, who would in his prime serve in President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s cabinet. Credit: Chicago Public Library.

emphatic lessons in conduct, and do much to educate his boys to despise any and all unfair conduct, to avoid profanity, and betting, and to play like gentlemen”(see figure 6).¹¹⁰

A league was finally organized on a permanent basis in 1890, called the “Cook County High School Baseball League,” with Evanston, Englewood, Hyde Park, South Division, West Division, Manual Training, and Harvard being the charter members. Representatives of the league met on February 7 and formed a conference. All the accoutrements of organized high school baseball that are seen today were coming into place at this time (see figure 7).¹¹¹

In conclusion, high school baseball appeared to flourish in a few Chicago-area secondary private and public schools during the 1870s, but student involvement in baseball was not conceived as representing a high school, but rather the high school was the organizing focus for an amateur or community team. These club teams disappeared by the late 1870s, and when baseball reemerged in the late 1880s, as part of the emergence of the extracurriculum it was as though organized baseball competition was reinvented anew, as though such competition had never existed earlier in the secondary schools as an organized activity.



Figure 7. West Division High School baseball nine from the early 1890s show how smartly uniformed and equipped high school teams in Chicago had become at this time. Credit: Chicago Historical Society

Whither Romanticism in Youth Baseball?

Youth baseball in the nineteenth century was at times as much an organized affair as it was a sandlot game among scrub teams, involving vigorous competition, formal challenges, games conducted on laid-out fields, and the same urban woes that blighted the adult amateur game. Albert Spalding was not throwing a homemade baseball for the Rockford Pioneers, and the Baltics of Chicago were surely no sandlot team playing scrub games. And not all the participants in youth baseball were cuddly dirty-faced innocent kids, not in a game that involved the bringing in of overage ringers, the bribing of umpires, and the existence of crowd and team abuse of both umpires and opposing players.

The adult model of amateur teams clearly worked itself down to the level of grade schoolers in the last half of the century, and in the larger cities the explosion of amateur activity reflected an extensive level of organization that went deep into the playing population.

To fully understand the role of sports in society, professional historians must examine not only the top levels of the game, but also dig into the lower levels, the high school and grade school levels, where the game was played for far smaller stakes but reflects the social aspects of nineteenth-century America no less than the higher level game.

**I am indebted to Ray Schmidt for reading an earlier version of this article and making helpful pointers, and to Jerry Malloy for the newspaper illustrations he uncovered I also want to thank my two readers for their invaluable suggestions and comments.*

1. Ken Burns. "First Inning The 1840's-1900: Our Game," *Baseball* (film documentary), 1994. Burns has built himself something of a reputation as a romanticist. As James Collins of *Time* noted, "Burns throws the same cloak of sentimentality and earnestness over every subject he takes on." See James Collins, "Domesticated Daring," *Time*, 3 Nov. 1997.
2. *Ibid*
3. Harold Seymour. *Baseball: The Peoples Game* (New York Oxford University Press, 1990), 14.
4. George B. Kirsch, *The Creation of American Team Sports: Baseball and Cricket, 1838-72* (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1889), 158, 162-63. *Chicago Times*, 10 Oct. 1869, 11 June 1971.
5. Much of this description of the organization of an amateur club team was derived from Warren Goldstein, *Playing for Keeps: A History of Early Baseball* (Ithaca, New York Cornell University Press, 1989), 17-18. Kirsch presents a similar discussion in his masterful *The Creation of American Team Sports*, 158.
6. Seymour, 6.
7. *Ibid*.
8. Melvin L. Adelman. *A Sporting Time: New York City and the Rise of Modern Athletics, 1820-70* (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 128. Adelman qualifies himself in a footnote, asserting that junior teams could have players as young as 14.
9. Kirsch, 144. Kirsch used sources from the eastern United States dating from the 1860s, and apparently the common term used in Chicago for boys teams, "pony," was unknown.

10. *Ibid*, 158.
11. *Ibid*, 159.
12. Stephen Freedman. "The Baseball Fad in Chicago, 1865-1870: An Exploration of the Role of Sport in the Nineteenth-Century City," *Journal of Sport History* 5 (Summer, 1978): 42. See also Federal Writers Project (Illinois), *Baseball in Old Chicago* (Chicago: A. C. McClurg & Co., 1939); and for a profile of nineteenth-century amateur baseball in a rural setting, see Carl M. Becker and Richard H. Grigsby. "Baseball in the Small Ohio Community, 1865-1900," *Sport in America: New Historical Perspectives*, edited by Donald Spivey (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1985), 77-93.
13. Freeman, 58 and 64.
14. "Base Ball in the West," *New York Clipper*, 5 Jan. 1867,308; *Chicago Tribune*, 18 and 20 Oct. 1869.
15. *Chicago Tribune*, 1 June 1870; 5 and 13 Aug. 1870.
16. For reports of games see *Chicago Tribune*, 17 May 1871, 4 June 1871.
17. *Chicago Tribune*, 15 Sept. 1869.
18. *Chicago Times*, 19 Oct. 1869.
19. *Chicago Tribune*, 18 Oct. 1869.
20. *Chicago Tribune*, 20 Oct. 1869.
21. *Chicago Times*, 19 Oct. 1869.
22. *Chicago Tribune*, 30 Aug. 1870.
23. *Chicago Tribune*, 19 Sept. 1869.
24. *Chicago Times*, 24 June 1871.
25. *Chicago Times*, 22 Oct. 1869.
26. *Ibid*
27. The earliest evidence turned up by historians of women playing baseball is a team formed by students of Vassar College in 1866, followed by Smith College in 1879. The existence of a women's team at Northwestern has not been cited in the histories. See Gai Ingham Berlage. *Women in Baseball: The Forgotten History* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 1994), 12-17; Seymour. *The Peoples' Game*, 447-451; Debra A. Shattuck, "Bats, Balls and Books: Baseball and Higher Education for Women at Three Eastern Women's Colleges, 1866-1891." *Journal of Sport History* 19 (Summer 1992): 91-109.
28. *Chicago Times*, 3, 10, and 17 Oct. 1869, 14 Nov. 1869.
29. *New York Clipper*, 28 May 1870, p. 59; 18 June 1870, p. 83; 2 July 1870, p. 99; 5 Aug. 1871, p. 199.
30. The survey of 1870s names was conducted by taking all the names and addresses of all the boys listed in challenges from 1869 to 1873 in the *Chicago Times* and the *Chicago Tribune*, and then finding matches for the last names and addresses in the city directories: *Edward's Annual Directory to Names in the City of Chicago for 1869-70* (St. Louis: Edwards & Co., 1870); *City of Chicago for 1870-71*; *City of Chicago for 1871-72*, *City of Chicago for 1873*.
31. The survey of 1888-89 names was conducted by taking most of the names and addresses of the boys listed in challenges in the *Chicago Tribune* and the *Inter-Ocean*, and then finding matches for the last names and addresses in the city directories: *The Lakeside Annual Directory of the City of Chicago 1888* (Chicago: Chicago Directory Company, 1888); *City of Chicago 1889*.
32. *Chicago Times*, 18 June 1888; "Boy Base-Ballers: The Amateur Nines Who Play the Games on Sunday," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 19 Aug. 1888.
33. *Ninth Biennial Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction of the State of Illinois, 1871-1872* (Springfield, Illinois, 1872), 246. In 1871 at the peak of the youth baseball fad, the city had 88,219 residents between the ages of 6 and 21. The public schools enrolled

- 38,035 of them, and the private schools 14,496.
34. *Eighteenth Biennial Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction of the State of Illinois, July 1, 1888-June 30, 1889* (Springfield, Illinois, 1891), 124. In 1889, the city had 285,528 residents between the ages of 6 and 21, of which 144,456 were enrolled pupils.
 35. *Chicago Times*, 22 June 1873, *Inter-Ocean*, 10 June 1889.
 36. *New York Herald*, 9 June 1871.
 37. *Chicago Tribune*, 29 May 1870.
 38. *Chicago Tribune*, 31 May 1870.
 39. *Chicago Times*, 21 May 1871. Freedman in his examination of amateur baseball in Chicago claims that most of the city's playing fields were "at least a mile from the center of town," which is not that far actually, but he paints a portrait of a rural game on the outskirts of town "free of the influence of gamblers and ruffians who operated in the inner city." This is a false picture. Most of the amateur games were played within the city, and the May and Lake field was one of the most common playing areas; Freedman, 44 and 46.
 40. Besides the previous cited references to marauders and ragamuffins, see "Vagabonds: The Vagrants and Reprobates of Chicago," *Chicago Times*, 27 June 1870.
 41. Paul Boyer. *Urban Masses and Moral Order in America, 1820-1920* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1978), 110.
 42. *Ibid.*, 109.
 43. "Vagabonds," *Chicago Times*, 27 June 1870.
 44. Boyer, 9697.
 45. Edward A. Halsey. "A Boy's Recollections of Chicago from Before the Civil War (1859) to the Great Fire of 1871." Unpublished manuscript from the Chicago Historical Society archives. [1925-26]: n.p.
 46. "The Boys of the Diamond: How Young America in Chicago Amuses Himself," *Chicago Tribune*, 26 Aug. 1888; "Boy Base-Ballers: The Amateur Nines Who Play the Games on Sunday," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 19 Aug. 1888. This researcher thanks Jerry Malloy for calling my attention to these clips.
 47. "The Boys of the Diamond."
 48. *Ibid.*
 49. "Boy Base-Ballers."
 50. *Ibid.*
 51. "The Boys of the Diamond;" "Boy Base-Ballers."
 52. *Chicago Times*, 15 May 1870, 6 and 26 June 1870; *Chicago Tribune*, 29 May 1870, 25 Sept. and 8 Oct. 1870, 11 June 1871, and 9 June 1872.
 53. *New York Clipper*, 11 June 1870, p. 75; *The Spirit of the Times*, 8 Oct. 1870, p. 124; *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 30 May 1871; 5 July 1871; 6 June 1894.
 54. Mary J. Herrick. *The Chicago Schools: A Social and Political History* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1971), 44.
 55. *Chicago Times*, 20 June 1871, 23 Sept. 1871.
 56. *Chicago Tribune*, 13 June 1871.
 57. *Chicago Times*, 4 June 1871.
 58. *Chicago Times*, 7, 14, and 21 May, 1871; 18 and 20 June 1871; 17 Sept. 1871.
 59. *Chicago Times*, 25 June 1871.
 60. Halsey.
 61. *Ibid.*
 62. "Baseball: Its Demoralizing Tendencies," *Chicago Times*, 27 Nov. 1870.

63. A survey of the *Chicago Times* from the last half of June, 1870 through 1875, enumerating the number of news items relating to local teams testifies to a sharp decline in interest in such games as well as a decline in amateur activity. News items enumerated included announcements of upcoming contests, published challenges, announcement of meetings, and reports on games. One can see interest peaking in 1871, followed by a steep decline in the years that followed. Most of the few items during 1874 and 1875 related to the Chicago White Stockings professional team.

News Items

1869 11	1873 16
1870 65	1874 19
1871 130	1875 14
1872 44	

64. "The Boys of the Diamond"; "Old Sport Talks to the Boys," *Inter-Ocean*, 2 June 1889.
65. See for example, *Chicago Tribune*, 5, 12, 19, and 26 Aug. 1888.
66. See for example, *Inter-Ocean*, 12, 19, and 26 May 1889, 2 June 1889.
67. *Ibid*
68. *Inter-Ocean*, 24 April 1889.
69. *Inter-Ocean*, 2 June 1889.
70. *Chicago Tribune*, 29 July 1888; *Inter-Ocean*, 2, 11, and 21 April 1889, 12 May 1889, 8 June 1889.
71. *Inter-Ocean*, 8 and 10 June 1889.
72. *Chicago Tribune*, 27 May 1888, 16 June 1889; *Inter-Ocean*, 26 May 1889; 9, 16, and 21 June 1889.
73. *Inter-Ocean*, 2 June 1889.
74. *Inter-Ocean*, 2, 8, and 9 June 1889.
75. *Inter-Ocean*, 12 May 1889, 27 June 1889.
76. "The Boys of the Diamond."
77. *Chicago Tribune*, 15 June 1888. This researcher thanks Jerry Malloy for calling my attention to this advertisement.
78. *Chicago Times*, 6 and 16 April 1890, *Inter-Ocean*, 6 April 1890, 11 May 1890.
79. *Inter-Ocean*, 7 Aug. 1898.
80. *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 6 and 10 June, 1894.
81. Seymour, 27.
82. See for example Axel Bundgaard. "Tom Brown Abroad: Athletics in Selected New England Public Schools, 1850-1910." *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport*, Centennial Issue (1985): 28-37; and Seymour, 41-42.
83. Curtis C. Stone. "High School Athletics: A History and Current Problems." (Ed.D dissertation, Pennsylvania State University, 1963), 80-81.
84. Stone, 85. *New York Clipper*, 5 Nov. 1870, p. 242.
85. Freedman made reference to "some of Chicago's high schools" for the late 1860s period, but this appears to be misleading as it assumes several public high schools. There was only one Chicago "high school," but there were several private institutions, including academies, colleges, and business schools, that enrolled high school-age students.
86. *Chicago Times*, 16 and 17 Oct. 1869, 28 May 1870, 28 Oct. 1870.
87. *Chicago Times*, 18 May 1870, 16 June 1871, *Chicago Tribune*, 17 Sept. 1870.
88. *Chicago Times*, 19 June 1873, 10 and 24 May 1874, 14 June 1874.
89. *Evanston Index*, 15 June 1878.

90. *Evanston Index*, 4 May 1878.
91. William Grant Webster, *The Evanston Village High School* (Chicago: privately printed, 1907), 123.
92. *Evanston Index*, 15 June 1878.
93. *Evanston Index*, 15 June 1878, 5 and 26 May 1879, 29 May 1880.
94. Webster, 45-52.
95. Harriet I. Spalding. *Reminiscences* (East Orange, New Jersey, 1910), 82.
96. *Ibid.*, 83.
97. Peter Levine. *A. G. Spalding and the Rise of Baseball: The Promise of American Sport* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 67.
98. Thomas W. Gutowski. "Student Initiative and the Origins of the High School Extracurriculum: Chicago, 1880-1915." *History of Education Quarterly* 28 (Spring 1988): 49-72.
99. *Ibid.*, pp. 55-65.
100. *Sixteenth Biennial Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction of the State of Illinois, July 1, 1884-June 30, 1886* (Springfield, Illinois, 1886), pp. XXX. For example, for the year 1885 statewide totals were as follows:

Enrollment totals	Graduation totals	Percent graduated
Females 8,677	Females 937	10 percent
Males 4,845	Males 365	.075 percent

For individual Chicago high schools the figures are even more lopsided, such as that of South Division:

Females 390	Females 20	.05 percent
Males 241	Males 8	.03 percent
101. Gerald Page-Wood. "Fifty Years Of Athletics." *The Evanstonian: Fiftieth Anniversary*, Vol. XVI [1933], n.p.
102. *Evanston Index*, 28 May 1881; *High School Journal* I (July 1884): 5.
103. *Hyde Park Herald*, 17 May 1884.
104. *High School Journal* VII (December 1887): 63.
105. Thomas H. Gale. "Early High School Days." *The Tabula* 1 (2 April 1895): 1.
106. *Evanston Index*, 5, 12, and 26 May 1888, and 2 June 1888.
107. *Chicago Tribune*, 22, 26, and 30 May 1889; 5, 10, and 16 June 1889.
108. *Evanston Index*, 28 April 1888 and 19 May 1888.
109. *High School Journal* VIII (April 1889): 67
110. Gerald Page-Wood. [letter], *The Academy* III (June 1888): 319.
111. *High School Journal* IX (February 1890): 87.