

# Lee Richmond, Brown University, and the Amateur-Professional Controversy in College. Baseball

RONALD A. SMITH

Penn State University

J. Lee Richmond is little remembered in professional or intercollegiate baseball history. He did, however, pitch the first perfect game in the Major Leagues in 1880. More importantly, Richmond's fluid movement in both directions between amateur and professional baseball in 1879 and 1880 created the first major controversy in intercollegiate baseball. That dispute led to more than a half-century of debate over the question of college player participation for money during summers while retaining amateur eligibility.

Richmond pitched for the Brown University baseball team in 1879. While the collegiate season was in progress, Richmond agreed to pitch for the Worcester team in the professional National Association. In an exhibition game, Richmond threw a no hitter against the National League Chicago White Stockings. He returned to the Brown team and helped defeat two of the college powers, Harvard and Yale. This apparent amateur-pro conflict seemed relatively unimportant to Richmond, but Yale, particularly, was upset that they should have to face a professional pitcher.

When the students from Amherst, Brown, Dartmouth, Harvard, Princeton, and Yale met in December of 1879 to form the American College Base-Ball Association, Yale was adamant that it would not participate in the League if Lee Richmond was on Brown's team. Yale was unsuccessful in retroactively making pro players ineligible, and thus dropped out of the Association. Yale need not have been so concerned, for Richmond decided not to play in League contests with Brown when he signed to participate again with Worcester, who had joined the National League in 1880. Richmond did play some exhibition games with Brown that spring.

By the week of his graduation at Brown, Richmond had already played over a month in the National League. During that week of high living at Brown, Richmond also pitched the first perfect game in Major League history, beating the third place Cleveland Forest Cities 1-0 and keeping the Worcesters in second place. That was the high point of his professional career though he pitched for the next three years. In four Major League seasons, Brown had a 76-99 record. He continued his education by achieving a medical degree. Richmond practiced medicine before becoming a physical education professor at the University of Toledo. Besides pitching the first perfect game, Richmond left a legacy for college baseball.

For the half-century following Richmond's foray into pro baseball while participating in college baseball in 1879, an intercollegiate controversy of large proportion developed. Charges of summer baseball professionalism were volleyed back and forth among colleges in the 1880s and continued into the 1890s. One of the major issues at the 1898 Brown University Conference, which faculty, alumni, and students of "Ivy League" colleges attended, was that of summer baseball. Both financial aid to athletes to attend colleges and receiving pay for playing on summer teams was condemned. Yet the practice continued into the early 1900s and well after the NCAA was formed in 1906.

The tendency to accept hypocritical attitudes toward amateur sport seemed almost logical in America in 1880 as it did over a century later. The underlying basis for modern amateur sport is an upper class attitude, given to the world by British aristocrats. The attitude was that amateur sport played by the elite social class should not be contaminated by those from below. The masses, according to the practice of the British leaders of society, must not be allowed to soil the sport of their betters. As long as gentlemen controlled sport, the pure amateur could exist. But in America there never was a true aristocratic class such as that in Britain. In America, though the concept of equality was never fully carried out, the pervasive belief was always in the nation's psyche. The professional athlete was never completely condemned as he was by the British aristocrat. A college student, such as Lee Richmond, could earn money in a sport during the summer and not be a social or athletic outcaste as he likely would have been at England's Oxford or Cambridge Universities. Yet, the concept of amateurism had some meaning for the leading elite colleges in America. In American colleges, there was an ambivalent attitude about the equality of man. There appeared to be a strong need among collegians to set themselves apart from the rest. While mouthing the more elitist concept of amateurism, American colleges nevertheless went quickly to professionalize and commercialize their games. Hiring coaches, hiring players, placing greater emphasis on the outcome of contests rather than stressing the act of participation, along with ambivalent attitudes toward summer baseball for pay showed that the amateur spirit was more mouthed than practiced.

The acceptance of the practice of paid summer baseball, then, while claiming that college sports were amateur, was part of the hypocrisy which has existed in college athletics almost from the beginning. Colleges wanted it both ways. In America it was expected that the better educated collegians should have the same amateur sports as the British, but to allow a significant part of the professional spirit and practice to invade the games was an accepted practice. Lee Richmond of Brown was one of the first to experience this phenomenon in American colleges.