

Occupations of Pullman Athletes, 1880-1900

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It was toward the end of the nineteenth century that George M. Pullman, railroad entrepreneur of the Gilded Age, built a model town to attract and retain the skilled mechanics required in the production of railroad cars by the Pullman Palace Car Company. The model town of Pullman was considered to be both an economic and social experiment; sport and recreation were important in the design of the experiment. This investigation attempted to examine the occupations of athletes in Pullman, Illinois from 1880 to 1900. A list of 530 athletes was obtained from two Chicago newspapers, the *Chicago Times* and the *Chicago Tribune*. Hyde Park and Chicago directories provided the occupations of 304 worker-athletes who participated in the various sports offered in the community.

Membership on Pullman sport teams was held predominantly by worker-athletes in blue-collar occupations. Sixty percent of Pullman athletes were blue-collar workers. Athletes were likely to be from blue-collar ranks in the sports of track and field athletics, baseball, cricket, rowing, and soccer. Only in football, shooting, and cycling did white-collar worker-athletes outnumber their blue-collar co-workers. The great majority of athletes employed in blue-collar positions were skilled mechanics. Seventy-five percent of Pullman's blue-collar worker-athletes were skilled craftsmen. Unskilled and semi-skilled blue-collar workers were poorly represented on Pullman sport teams while a disproportionately large number of skilled craft foremen were worker-athletes. Skilled craftsmen were prominent in

soccer and baseball, unskilled workers in athletics and soccer, and craft foremen were prominent in baseball and cricket.

Company white-collar workers played on all the various sport teams in Pullman and comprised approximately one-third of all athletes. The vast majority of these worker-athletes were clerics and semi-professionals as opposed to managers and professionals. Low white-collar worker-athletes outnumbered high white-collar worker-athletes five to one. Low white-collar workers played on all Pullman sport teams in not too differing proportions. High white-collar workers participated in athletics, baseball, cricket, rowing, and shooting.

Town commercialists played a significant role in Pullman sport. Representing ten percent of all worker-athletes, Pullman businessmen participated in all sports except football. Proportionately they were most active in cycling and shooting.

A feature of the sporting life in Pullman was the instability of the worker-athlete population; 299 worker-athletes played on Pullman teams less than five years and over 200 of them were but one year on a team. The average length of time an athlete competed wearing the Pullman banner was estimated at two and a fifth years. Long term participation in Pullman sport was not dominated by either blue or white-collar workers. Most Pullman athletes participated in only one sport; 34 athletes played on two or more teams. Multi-sport membership did not seem to be related to the number of years an athlete participated in Pullman sport or to the type of occupation the athlete held.

Pullman sport essentially was blue-collar sport. It remains to be seen whether blue-collar aristocracy in sport was isolated to the small industrial town of Pullman during the Gilded Age.