

Organized Sport Comes To Philadelphia: The Rise Of Cricket and Baseball

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Although cricket and town ball, a forerunner of baseball, were played in Philadelphia during the 1830s, cricket and baseball did not emerge as popular team sports until the 1850s. The founding of the Philadelphia Cricket Club in 1854 paved the way for organized cricket in Philadelphia. Soon afterward, the Germantown and Young America cricket clubs appeared. Those, in turn, were followed by the proliferation of dozens of minor cricket clubs. Cricket reigned supreme until the Civil War transplanted cricketers from ball field to battlefield. However, that was not the case for baseball. The New York Game was introduced in 1859. The premier club, the Athletics, was organized that year, and it dominated Philadelphia baseball throughout the 1860s. By 1862 baseball had supplanted cricket as the city's leading team sport. In discussing the rise of cricket and baseball in Philadelphia, the investigators will briefly explain the popularity of cricket during the 1850s and the shift toward baseball during the 1860s.

In order to examine the composition of organized cricket and baseball in Philadelphia, the investigators conducted a socioeconomic analysis of 333 players. By linking the players to the Philadelphia City Directories and the 1860 Census Manuscripts, they obtained information on such demographic parameters as age, race, birth place, occupation, work place, residence, personal property, and real estate. In addition to comparing the baseball players with the cricket players, they compared both with the sample of Native White Americans in the massive data base generated by the Philadelphia Social History Project. Black baseball players were also compared both with the sample of Native White Americans in the massive data base generated by the Philadelphia Social History Project. Black baseball players were also compared with white players in both sports and with the total black population in the city. Initial findings have revealed that the median age of both cricketers and baseball players was 26 years. Baseball players worked largely in blue collar and low white collar positions, while cricketers, particularly those members of the major clubs, held predominantly white collar and professional positions. Both groups worked in the Central Business District, but cricketers lived in the more prestigious neighborhoods. Cricket players also held significantly more personal property and real estate than did the baseball players or the sample of Native White Americans. Black baseball players differed sharply from the white sportsmen and the black population of the city in most of the demographic categories.