

# John McGraw: His Influence in the Development of Scientific Baseball

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Basestealing, the sacrifice bunt, hit and run, and aggressive “inside baseball” are necessary offensive weapons for any team, lend a form of excitement to the game, and require a high degree of skill and teamwork to execute. The above plays are today utilized at every level of baseball and are especially effective at the high school and collegiate levels where complete and diverse playing skills in players are emphasized.

The origins of “inside baseball” and specific offensive plays can be traced to John McGraw and the Baltimore Orioles of the 1890s, the perennial powerhouses of the National League. It was this team led by “heady” players such as McGraw, Hughie Jennings, Willie Keeler, Wilbert Robinson, and Manager Ned Hanlon who initiated and executed several innovative offensive maneuvers which later became the foundation for McGraw’s success as the New York Giants manager from 1902 to 1932 (10 pennants, three World Series Championships, and 11 second place finishes), teams which were instrumental in establishing professional baseball as a popular spectator sport in the United States in the early part of the 20th century.

The impact of McGraw’s influence was to a large degree responsible for the emerging popularity of “inside baseball.” Not only was he and other managers such as Connie Mack responsible for the introduction, development, and refinement of “inside baseball” but they simultaneously worked to promote major league baseball. “He was a great calculator,” recalled Eddie Brannick of McGraw 65 baseball seasons later. “He was good at upsetting a town. Everything he did was calculated to draw people into the park.”

The style of “inside baseball” was refined and perfected by the Baltimore Orioles of the 1890s and remained dominant until the advent of the “long ball” during the 1920s. Prior to

the 1890s plays such as the bunt, the hit and run, the squeeze, and double steal were executed largely by players on an individual basis with little thought and emphasis on technique. Manager Hanlon and other Oriole players devised plays which so thoroughly confused opponents they threatened to bring them before league headquarters. John Ward, the manager of the New York Giants, protested, "It wasn't baseball but a new game the Orioles were playing. "

McGraw's record clearly documents his abilities in the "technical or scientific" aspects of the game as well as his talents in getting the most out of his men.

National League President John A. Heydler remarked in 1927:

When John McGraw came from Baltimore to New York, the National League was tottering. It was close to bankruptcy. The fight being waged by the new American League threatened tire very life of the old circuit. But McGraw saved the situation. He put New York back on the baseball map. He built the Giants into the most powerful machine in baseball.

What would John McGraw be worth to baseball today?



**The session on Sport and the Media was chaired by Charles Kerr and included Joan Chandler and Thomas Littlewood as speakers.**