

The Protective Association of Professional Baseball Players: A Profile of an American Labor Force

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At 3:00 P.M., Sunday, 11 June 1900, three representatives from each National League team met at the Sturtevant House in New York City to form the Protective Association of Professional Baseball Players (PPA). The players had contacted Samuel Gompers for organizational help, and he had sent an organizer and an application to join the A.F. of L. At this moment, baseball players stood ready to affiliate with America's leading labor organization.

The action to organize themselves and confront the baseball club owners suggested that these players identified with working class efforts to maintain control of their labor. An extensive search of the 1870, 1880, and 1900 Manuscript Censuses of the United States, city directories, baseball biographies, and baseball encyclopedias helped to identify 43 of the 71 players who actively participated in PPA meetings. This group of players represented a myriad of social backgrounds, but those with working class origins predominated. Twenty-four of the identified players (56%) had fathers who did manual work; eleven of these fathers worked in skilled laboring positions; six worked in semiskilled jobs; and seven held unskilled laboring jobs.

Nine players' parents worked in non-manual occupations, and comprised only twenty-one percent of the player sample. Five held low level official, clerical, or administrative jobs. Three operated proprietorships, and only one of the players' fathers held a professional position.

The ethnic composition of this group of men and their geographical origin also indicated that they had close ties with the working class. Thirty-nine percent came from the homes of Irish immigrants, the ethnic group that made up the bulk of America's labor force during the last half of the nineteenth century. The German population of America provided thirteen percent of the players. Players of Czechoslovakian, Scottish, and English parents comprised another six percent. Twenty-five of the forty-three players grew up in manufacturing oriented cities that contained a population of 2,500 people or more. Only sixteen or thirty-six percent came from rural towns or cities whose economies revolved around an agricultural base.

This profile suggests that a majority of the players active in the PPA were not products of the middle class. Coming from working class backgrounds and ethnic groups, and having grown up in the industrial towns and cities of America, most PPA participants could readily identify with Samuel Gompers and the A.F. of L. This profile also seems to indicate that a majority of the general population of major league baseball players in 1900 may have come from working class origins. However, this latter suggestion needs more evidence for verification.