

Before and After “The Bible of Baseball”: A Short, Illustrated History of *The Sporting News*

Steven P. Gietschier

Since the late 1920s, *The Sporting News* has been nicknamed “The Bible of Baseball,” a catchy synonym coined when the paper covered only baseball. While the phrase was useful in its day, it is no longer an accurate description of the paper’s editorial content. In fact, *The Sporting News* was solely a baseball paper for only a segment of its history. It neither started out that way does nor it appear that way today.

The first issue of *The Sporting News* was published on March 17, 1886, by Alfred Spink, a sportswriter, theatrical entrepreneur, and St. Louis Browns official. It included stories on baseball, plus wrestling, harness racing, bicycling, hunting, boxing, and the stage.

With the paper’s initial success, Spink summoned his younger brother Charles to serve as business manager. The editorial mix of baseball and other sports continued into the 1890s until Al left the paper to take a play he had written on the road. Gradually, Charles shifted the editorial focus more toward baseball and had the paper named the official organ of several minor leagues.

Charles was aided in this transition by the paper’s first non-Spink editor, Joe Flanner, a lawyer and newspaperman deeply devoted to baseball. During Flanner’s tenure, *The Sporting News* eliminated all non-baseball material and was named official organ of the National Commission. Flanner left soon after, and Charles Spink died in 1914, but his son, J. G. Taylor Spink, saw no reason to change. He made *The Sporting News* an indispensable part of the baseball establishment.

The end of baseball’s exclusive hold came in 1942 when *The Sporting News* began to cover football, hockey, and basketball. This shift led in 1946 to the introduction of a supplement called *The Quarterback* during football season and *The All-Sports News* the rest of the winter.

This arrangement remained intact until Taylor’s death in 1962. His son, C. C. Johnson Spink, eliminated *The All-Sports News* and incorporated coverage of the other major sports into the rest of the paper. Johnson also hired correspondents to cover other sports year round. He improved the paper’s appearance and introduced color photography in 1967.

Times Mirror Corporation bought *The Sporting News* in 1977 and has continued its all-sports emphasis. In 1988, the paper will publish fifty-six times, including the Man of the Year double issue, plus special issues for the Winter and Summer Olympics, baseball, football, and basketball.