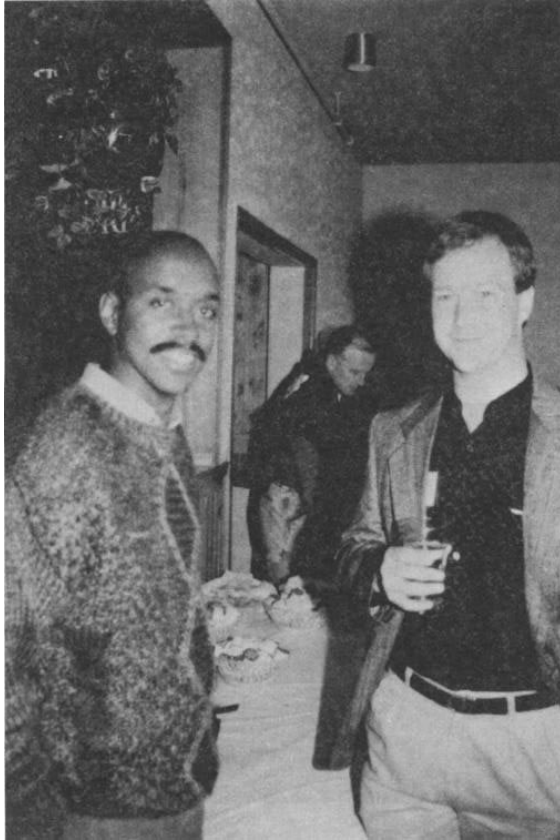


How Baseball Became America's National Game

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In August, 1855, less than a decade after the Knickerbocker rules had transformed baseball into a distinctively American game, the minutes of the Knickerbocker Club referred to it as “the national game.” But this appellation seems not to have appeared in print with reference to American sport



until late in 1856, when a series of English articles, reprinted in New York's *Spirit of the Times*, introduced the American sporting public to the concept of "national sport." At about the time the second of the three articles appeared in the *Spirit*, cricket reporter Henry Chadwick happened upon a baseball game in Hoboken and, impressed with the game's potential as a medium for healthful exercise, "decided to do all in my power to make it the national game in word and in truth." Within a decade Chadwick was able to boast: "For the first time in the annals of base ball, the game has been endorsed as the National game of ball in America."

The concept of national sport/game/pastime/amusement, as understood in Britain and conveyed in the British articles of 1856, was one that encompassed a multitude of games and pastimes. Cricket, for example, while the most popular English team sport, was not viewed as England's one and only national game, but simply as one characteristically English sport among others. Thus inclusively was national sport understood initially in the United States. Because baseball was viewed as reflecting the American character, it was seen as a "national game," one of a potential number of national pastimes.

While this inclusive understanding of national sport retained some currency into the present century, it was not long after their introduction into common American usage that the terms "national game" and "national pastime" began to acquire a sense of exclusive application to baseball. Because baseball had no serious early competitor for the attention and affection of the American player and spectator, it soon became viewed as the—the supreme, the only—American national game. By 1866 baseball was implicitly (and sometimes explicitly) represented as the only legitimate claimant for the appellation "national game." Since then, despite the development and popularity of