

Baseball in Philadelphia During the 1860s: An Analysis of Black and White

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During the early 1860s, baseball emerged as the dominant team sport in Philadelphia overtaking two of its forerunners—town ball and cricket. Teams from New York visited Philadelphia and introduced baseball (New York Game rules) to Philadelphians which the locals adopted, following the lead of the Olympic Club, the city's most prestigious. Initially, local clubs vied for hometown supremacy through interclub competitions, but the Grand Matches of 1861 and 1862 in which local clubs pooled their talent to take on teams from New York and New Jersey put the game of baseball on firm ground in the Quaker City. The dominant white teams were the Olympics, Athletics, B, and Keystones.

Black baseball emerged in Philadelphia following the Civil War. There were a half-dozen black clubs, but the most dominant and prominent was the Pythians. They played scrub games against whoever was at the playing field in Camden until intercity competition was introduced to them in

1866. They often challenged for the Negro Championship of the United States, playing teams from Baltimore, Washington, New York, Chicago, and Harrisburg. They seldom played against white teams, though they often used the Athletics' facility for championship games.

The demographic analysis of black and white baseball players reveals, for the most part, what one would expect in that great socioeconomic disparities existed between the races during the 1860s. Based on a sample of 104 white players and 48 blacks, more than two-thirds of the white players held white collar positions in comparison with 45 per cent of the black players, 30 per cent of the sample of native white Americans (N = 10,830), and 5 per cent of the sample of Philadelphia blacks (N = 5138). Less than one-fourth of the white players were artisans, whereas two-fifths of the black players held artisanal positions. For the white players, this percentage was disproportionately less than the 43 per cent in the native whites sample who worked as artisans, but for the black players, it was disproportionately greater than the 15 per cent of the Philadelphia blacks holding positions as artisans. One surprising finding occurred among low white collar workers in which the percentages of black and white players in this occupation category were virtually the same, but substantially higher than the 25 per cent of native whites in this category. White players held significantly more real and personal property than did the black players.