

# Baseball Origins Newsletter

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The baseball origins newsletter is put out by members of SABR's Origins Committee, and the website for baseball's origins, [www.protoball.org](http://www.protoball.org). It is intended to foster research and discussion of the origins of the game of baseball, baseball's predecessor bat-ball games, and the growth of baseball prior to 1871 (when professional, league baseball was founded).

Comments, suggestions and articles should be submitted to Bruce Allardice, editor, at [bsa1861@att.net](mailto:bsa1861@att.net) or Larry McCray at [lmccray@mit.edu](mailto:lmccray@mit.edu).

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# Wicket Observations from the Nutmeg State

By: Alex Dubois

**Editor's Note:** *Described in the 1800s as a game halfway between cricket and baseball, and by modern scholars as an American adaptation of cricket, wicket is another one of those bat-ball games that pre-dated baseball, but never sunk lasting roots with the American public.*

*Wicket had early American roots. By 1841 (3 years before the Knickerbocker Club and the Elysian Fields) newspapers contain frequent mentions of wicket in its three core states (CT, MA and NY). By 1860 wicket and wicket clubs can be found in 14 of the nation's 34 states. It had jumped from its New England roots to faraway California and Hawaii, to Louisiana, to Iowa.*



*Author Alex Dubois is Curator of Collections at the Litchfield Historical Society in Connecticut. He began researching the game of wicket in 2016 as part of an exhibit on sports and recreation in Litchfield County. While in graduate school in Cooperstown, Dubois completed volunteer work at the National Baseball Hall of Fame to digitize photographs by Charles M. Conlon.*

*Hopefully Alex Dubois' fine article will stimulate further research into this once-popular game.*

Dr. D. E. Bostwick was crossing the village green in Litchfield, Connecticut, sometime in 1870. A hot liner from a nearby baseball game struck him in the eye, knocking him to the ground. While Dr. Bostwick recovered from the injury, his son Arthur wrote in 1930 that his father "might have been killed by it."<sup>(1)</sup> The accident, he believed, may have resulted in the game of baseball being banned on the Litchfield town green. By the 1870s, baseball had taken hold in America, with sports journals already touting the game as "America's pastime." Luckily for the residents of Litchfield, there was always wicket.

Wicket, or wicket ball, was one of a number of bat-and-ball games played by Americans in the era before baseball. New England was the heart of wicket country, with Western Massachusetts and especially Connecticut serving as strongholds of the game. There is

little definitive history on the origin of the game. Most writers agree that wicket began as an early form of cricket imported to New England by English settlers sometime in the late seventeenth century. (2) Some speculate that cricket “savored so much of the English aristocracy” that the settlers of New England gradually changed the game’s features, shaping a primitive version of England’s national pastime into a uniquely American sport. (3) Wicket utilized a larger and lighter ball than cricket, and was played with low-standing wickets of greater width and as many as 30 players a side. As these traits are not identified (or, at least, are not common) within documented cricket variations before the mid-eighteenth century, it is likely that whatever the form of the game that arrived in America, “wicket most likely evolved markedly once it had set down American roots.” (4)

The earliest recorded games of wicket date from the late colonial period, although later wicketers recalled the game being a favorite pastime “long prior to the Revolution.” (5) Project Protoball contains numerous entries for the game, the earliest specific mention of wicket being a game played on the Boston Common sometime around 1725. (6) On two occasions in May 1778, soldiers stationed at Valley Forge recall playing wicket. The latter game involved George Washington himself, who played wicket with his men after dining with General Henry Knox. (7) Wicket was sometimes described as “the Connecticut Game.” In that state, and particularly in Hartford and Litchfield Counties, wicket was played with “practically unabated interest” from the 1760s to at least the mid-nineteenth century. (8) Wicket also appeared in nearby New York, with games played in Brooklyn, Buffalo, and Rochester. As Connecticut natives and other New Englanders traveled elsewhere, the game followed. Connecticut settlers to the Western Reserve spread the game westward, with wicket games being reported by students at Western Reserve College in Ohio and nearby University of Michigan between 1830 and 1850. At Hiram College in Ohio, students in the 1850s played wicket in the street next to the College president’s home. James A. Garfield, a president and professor at Hiram and later President of the United States, was remembered by a student as “one of our best players.” (9)



Photograph showing the Poquonock Drum Corp at a clambake and wicket game played in J. M. Brown's pasture in Poquonock, July 4, 1890. Multiple wicket bats, a wicket ball, and the two wickets are visible. Courtesy of the Windsor Historical Society, Windsor, Connecticut.

### **The Rules of the Game**

Lacking any definitive set of rules for the sport, wicket play varied greatly. The sport was adapted for causal play according to time restrictions, space limitations, and a smaller number of players. Store clerks in Hartford in the early 1850s, for example, held shortened games in various locations across the city, with the "best games of all in many respects" being the early morning games played on Main Street and in State House Square.

*"It was customary for the first [clerk] who was first awake at 5 o'clock to dress, and make rounds of the square, knocking on the doors and shouting 'Wicket.' By 5:30 enough would be out to begin playing, and soon with 15 to 20 on a side the game was in full swing. These games would end about 6:45, in time to open the stores at 7 o'clock."* (10)

At the same time, organized wicket clubs and village teams began appearing in New England, though most (if not all) lacked formal club constitutions or officers. Matches between village teams and wicket clubs were lengthier and often more organized, with some teams even agreeing to stipulated rules before the match was to be held. Some rules were set forth in the challenge or invitation sent from one team to another, such as

the five rules listed by the Bloomfield (and vicinity) team in their invitation to the players of Hartford in 1841. (11) When asked to serve as a judge at a wicket game in Thomaston in 1865, Harry S. Bartholomew included in his reply a list of 19 rules that had been used for the famous Connecticut championship match between Bristol and New Britain in 1859. (12)

In July 1874, the Litchfield Wicket Club adopted the following rules and regulations to govern how their matches were played (a copy of which can be found in the research files of the Litchfield Historical Society):

Sec. 1 Bounds &c. The wicket bounds shall be eight feet in width, and the wickets seventy feet apart. The wickets shall be six feet in length and shall stand four and one half inches above the ground; the ball not being more than five inches in diameter. The centre-line shall be midway between the wickets: and the tick-marks six feet in front of their wicket.

Sec. 2 Bowling &c. Before delivering the ball the bowler must first step one or both feet over his wicket, the ball must strike the ground before reaching the centre-line and must be within the bounds. Any violation of these rules will be adjudged "no bowl". Underhand throwing will not be allowed. No tally will be allowed on balls stricken which are not correctly bowled.

Sec. 3 Putting out. In putting out a striker the bowler must stand astride of his wicket and must strike off the wicket from the inside with the ball, which is to be firmly held in one or both hands: When the wicket is thus struck off the batsman is to be adjudged out unless he has placed his bat upon or within the tick-mark, before the wicket is so struck off.

Sec. 4 Batting. The batsman shall not go outside the bounds to strike a ball, and no tally can be allowed on a ball so struck. If he knocks off his own wicket either with his bat or person he shall be out. He must in ticking place his bat upon or within the tick-mark. If he arrives at his tick-mark and fails to put down his bat to the Ground he may be put out by the bowler. If a batsman's wicket is knocked off by a ball struck by the opposite batsman he shall be out, unless the batsmen shall have crossed each other, in which case the one who struck the ball shall be out: the wicket becoming his after crossing.

Sec. 5 Tallying. No tally can be made on a ball adjudged "no bowl"; and the batsman can be in no way put out by such a ball. To make a tally the batsmen must have crossed each other, and they must place their bats upon or within the tick-marks before making a second tally. If the ball is struck and the striker caught out, a tally shall be allowed if the batsmen have crossed each other before the ball is so caught.

Sec. 6 Shams. Three shams shall be adjudged out; and a ball, properly bowled, striking any part of the body before touching or being touched by the bat shall constitute a sham.

Sec. 7 Fielders. Fielders shall not go inside the bounds until after the ball is struck, and then only for the purpose of catching or fielding the ball. In catching, the ball must be taken on the fly and held firmly in the hands or hand, and not against the body: if the ball bounds in the hands it will not be considered caught and the striker will not be out. A ball is considered as in the bowlers hands when it has been thrown to him and has reached or passed the wicket bounds, whether the bowler has actually secured the ball or not, and no tally can be made after the ball is thus in: if the batsmen have crossed, however, before the ball is in, they may complete the run after it is in, and are liable to be put out by the bowler in so doing.

Sec. 8 The umpire is to be the sole Judge of the game, but in case of inability to observe correctly, he may ask information of players or bystanders and make use of the same at his discretion.

**BALL PLAYING.**

Our readers have been already apprized that a challenge had been sent from the Ball Players of Litchfield, to those of this City, requesting them to try their skill at Wicket. The challenge was accepted, and we now give the result of the game.

Litchfield.	Tally.	Hartford.	Tally.
First in,	46	First in,	54
2d "	40	2d "	64
3d "	40	3d "	28
	126		146
		Litchfield,	126
			20

Thus it appears that the "Bantam Players" "barked up the wrong tree."

The utmost harmony existed, and every one appeared to enjoy the sport.—*Times.*

*Connecticut Courant*, Volume 70, Issue 3618, Page 3.

An examination of extant rulesets and other descriptions of the game reveal a number of commonalities. Wicket games were most often played over three innings, and usually

organized in a best-of series. When the aforementioned Bloomfield team invited Hartford to a wicket contest in 1841, they stipulated a best-of-nine series. The same agreement was in place a year earlier when Hartford played Granville (MA), although after Hartford won five straight games, the remaining four were dropped. (13) An 1849 contest between Westfield and Granville was played in a best-of-five series, with a supper to follow and all bills to be paid by the losing side. (14) A shared meal between players is something of a wicket tradition. In their invitation to the Hartford players in 1841, the “Ball Players of Bloomfield” also stated that the contest would be played for “Dinner and Trimmings.” After the championship match between Bristol and New Britain, the members of the New Britain club stayed for a “customary banquet” at the Kilbourn House, with the match’s two officials and others in attendance. (15)

There are three basic roles in wicket: bowlers, batters, and fielders. The fielding team is represented by two bowlers, one at each wicket, and up to thirty fielders, who are responsible for catching or fielding any ball that is struck by the batters. The primary goal of a bowler is to retire opposing batters by striking off the opposite wicket with the ball. The ball could be delivered by either bowler from either end, implying that bowlers could swap places at any time, although Bartholemew wisely stipulated in his rules that “when the bowler has received the ball, it shall be bowled by him before it is passed to the other bowler.” (16) Most rules indicate that the bowler must always begin his throw behind the closest wicket, and either step completely over the wicket or be astride it before releasing the ball. (17) Requirements were also set on the number of times the ball had to bounce and how far it could travel before doing so; usually the ball had to touch the ground before the center or centre-line to be judged fair, as well as stay within the bounds. Bowling in wicket was more like a roll than a throw. Some rules required bowlers to keep their arm completely straight and use an underhand cast, although the Litchfield club clearly prohibited underhand throwing. (18)

The batting team is represented by two batters, one at each wicket. The batters primarily serve as defenders of the wicket, attempting to stop any bowl from hitting their wicket and dislodging it. When either batter makes good contact with the ball, both batters attempt to complete a cross (also referred to as a tally or, less often, a run) by running from one end of the alley to the other and touching their bat either behind the tick-mark or, in some accounts, reaching the opposite wicket or even touching the wicket “stumps.” (19) Some accounts state that batters could choose whether or not to attempt a cross after hitting the ball, although an account from the University of Michigan states that “it was necessary to run between the wickets at each strike.” (20) Unlike cricket, wicket batters were usually not allowed to make crosses when the ball was bowled wide or traveled past the batter without knocking off the wicket (called a “bye” in cricket); crosses were scored only after the ball had been hit. On the rare occasion that a struck ball eludes all thirty fielders and can’t be recovered, some rules

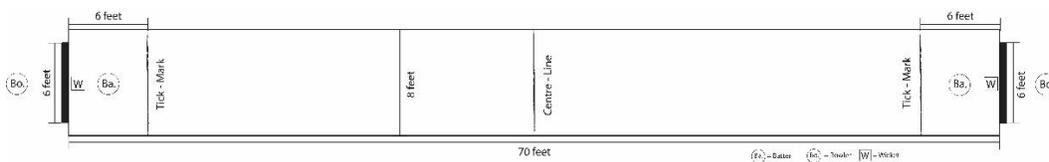
even stipulated that lost balls were to count as four crosses (interestingly, the batters were still required to physically run all four crosses, somewhat similar to baseball players running the bases after hitting a home run). (21)

The fielders had two jobs: catch the batter out or assist the bowler in putting the batter out. Most rules indicate that struck balls needed to be caught in the air to register an out, usually with an accompanying clarification like “a ball caught before striking any other object but the catcher is out.” Some rules, however, permitted fielders to catch a ball on the first bound to record an out, such as those used when Bloomfield played Hartford in 1841 (though this appears to be a less common, or perhaps earlier, rule). (22) The Litchfield Wicket Club had perhaps the most specific rule for fielding, requiring the ball to be held firmly in the catcher’s hands (and not against his body) without being bobbled. Fielders could also throw the ball to one of the bowlers in an attempt to put a batter out. In “putting out” a batter, the bowler must stand astride his wicket or behind it and use the ball to strike off the wicket from the inside. If he can do so before the batter has safely crossed (either by reaching the wicket or placing his bat beyond the tick-mark, depending on what rules are in play), the batter is out. Batters were also out if they knocked off their own wicket while attempting a hit, or if they knocked off the opposite wicket with a struck ball. (23) When a batter was out, the next man in the batting order took his place; by most accounts, three outs were considered a side out and ended that half of the inning.

Diaries, memoirs, and newspaper articles also attest to the fact that wicket was a spectator sport. When the wicketers of New Britain headed to Bristol in 1859, the following occurred:

*“Interest had also grown in Hartford to such an extent that a special train was made up in that city for the event. The train left Hartford at 7:30 A.M., with one carload of Hartford people and when it reached New Britain, four cars were quickly filled with excited people. Every car was trimmed with flags and bunting and as the train reached the local station about nine o’clock it presented a grand appearance. The visitors had a band with them and the crowd that greeted them at the station was a large one. It is estimated that when the game commenced there were fully 4,000 people in and around the grounds.”*  
(24)

## The Field



Wicket alley according to 1874 rules of the Litchfield Wicket Club.

Most sources use the word “alley” when referring to the layout of a wicket field. The alley could be any smooth surface of hard ground, be it a well-maintained and skinned grass surface or a patch of rolled dirt with the grass removed. (25) Some towns even had dedicated wicket fields, such as when the Collinsville and Bristol teams played a game on the “ground occupied by the Hartford Wicket Club, on the South Green.” (26) In terms of how the game is played, the wicket alley functioned much the same as the pitch in cricket. However, very few accounts make any mention of the size or layout of the rest of the wicket field, although some do mention outfield and infield players. The length of the alley differs from source to source, but it is most commonly listed in Connecticut games as being 75 feet long and between 8 and 10 feet wide. The Litchfield Wicket Club played on an alley 70 feet long. Shorter alleys of 60 feet and even 40 feet did appear in other states. (27) Some descriptions of the game mention the center line or “centre-line,” located at the halfway point of the alley, which was used in deciding whether a ball was properly bowled. Fewer accounts make mention of tick-marks, which some clubs used to demarcate the minimum distance from the opposite wicket that a runner needed to pass in order to record a tally. The Litchfield Wicket Club set the tick-marks at 6 feet.

The length and construction of the wickets also varies between sources, but is discussed in a larger number of accounts than almost any other aspect of the game. Unlike modern cricket, in which a wicket is formed by three vertical stumps with two bails resting on top, the game of wicket utilizes a single horizontal wicket resting on two vertical uprights. The Litchfield Wicket Club used 6-foot wickets placed 4.5 inches off the ground, but made no formal mention of how they were to be constructed. Another account describes the wickets in Bristol as comprised of “two pyramids of wood on top of which is a slender stick about five feet long.” (28) When Bristol went to Brooklyn to challenge the Ansonia Company team, the wickets were described as “two pieces of white wood” about an inch square and six feet long, resting on three-inch blocks. (29) Even the shorter wicket lengths of 4 or 5 feet represented a much wider target for wicket bowlers than for their cricket counterparts.

The fielding side in wicket commonly had 30 players, a number which shows up in many primary source accounts. A bowler was stationed at each end of the alley, behind the wicket. It is likely that two fielders also played behind the wickets as catchers. Games between Hartford and Granville in 1840 and Tolland and Otis-Sandisfield in 1855 stipulated slightly smaller teams of 25 men. (30) When the married and unmarried men of East Hartford challenged one another to a game in 1858, the married men “accidentally” fielded 21 players against 20 from the unmarried team. The *Hartford Courant* published a good-humored article calling the married men “sly Benedicts” who had “pulled the wool over their unsophisticated competitors” to achieve a 6-run victory.

(31) The “boys” planned to renew the challenge in the fall, “when they will make sure of fair play and equal numbers.”

Lacking the traditional 30 players for the fielding side in New Haven, Dr. Storrs Ozias Seymour recalled playing a more casual type of wicket at Yale in the 1850s, in which players rarely chose sides. Instead, “when a man was bowled or caught out someone else took the bat, a sort of order being observed, so that all had the chance to bat.” (32) Another common variation was the age of the players. The Hartford Courant wrote about a wicket game between Poquonock (Windsor) and Wethersfield-Newington on October 14, 1907 that some players were about 60 years old while others were “just sprouting fuzz on their upper lips.”

### **Equipment**



A wicket bat and ball in the collection of the Windsor Historical Society. The bat and ball are seen in a photograph of a wicket game and clambake held on July 4, 1890 in Poquonock. Courtesy of the Windsor Historical Society, Windsor, Connecticut.

In addition to the wickets, the game required little more than two bats and a ball. Extant examples of wicket bats bear strong resemblance to those used in the Irish game of hurling, though numerous colorful descriptions of the bat can be found in primary source accounts. One describes the bat as resembling a “lawn tennis bat except that the part where the net work is on a lawn tennis bat is made of wood.” (33) They have also been described as “something like the halberds of the time of Henry VIII” or “more in the order of a lacrosse bat, although of an entirely different shape.”

Other observers went as far as to say the bat bore a “strong resemblance to a Fiji war-club” or looked “like a huge smoking pipe but flat on two sides.”(34) The bats ranged from 3 feet to 4 feet long, with a circular or oval end about 8 inches in diameter, and were made from a range of woods, including “well-seasoned” willow, bass, oak, or any

“hard, white wood.” (35) By all accounts, wicket bats were heavy. Thomas Day Seymour, a Yale professor who had played the game at Western Reserve College, described the bats as “so heavy that only the strong (and quick) batter dared to wait until the ball was opposite him and then strike. I was always satisfied to steer the ball off to one side.” (36)

Wicket balls were considerably larger than those used in either cricket or baseball, some being almost twice the size but “just as light and not so hard.” (37) The Litchfield Wicket Club stipulated that the ball was to be no larger than 4.5 inches, although there is ample evidence of larger balls being used. Balls from 5 to 5.5 inches were popular, with outliers as large as 6 inches and others almost as small as a baseball (3.75 to 4 inches in diameter). (38) One account describes a wicket ball as being “as large as a man’s head, and of peculiar manufacture. Its center was a cube of lead weighing about a pound and a half. About this were tightly wound rubber bands...and the whole sewed in a thick leather covering.” (39) Other balls were made of yarn and covered in “stout leather,” weighing closer to 9 ounces (just over half a pound). (40) Despite numerous accounts of the ball’s lightness, there is evidence that heavier versions may have seen use. Professor Seymour recalled the following:

*“The ball was so heavy that most bowlers merely rolled it with such a twist that they could impart; but some bowlers almost threw it. Mark Hanna was such a star player about 1860, and the rule had to be called on him that the ball must touch the ground three times before it struck the wicket.”* (41)

In Poquonock, an area in northern Windsor, wicket balls were usually made by the village cobbler. (42) The Wethersfield Wicket Club preferred their balls to be made by one particular man, an old wicketeer serving a life sentence at the state prison. He had “a reputation for making wicket balls that is equal to the fame of the house of Spalding in turning out baseballs.” (43)

## **Conclusion**

While a baseball accident may have prolonged wicket play in Litchfield, the game was largely in decline by the end of the Civil War. Wicket became a “throwback” game, a tradition carried on only occasionally and, for the most part, in a few locations across Connecticut. The game was played “not exactly as a revival, but rather as a matter of local pride and to keep the traditions of the game alive, as well as to give the old wicketeers a chance to stretch their muscles.” (44) For many wicketeers, the game’s decline was a great disappointment. In Bristol, for example, a town where “men and boys take to wicket playing as a duck will to water,” some regretted that the younger generation would lack “the opportunity of participating in a recreation so enjoyable.” (45) An early historian of the game, George Dudley Seymour of Bristol felt that young

Americans lacked the patience necessary for wicket. Americans required “an intense, snappy game, in which all of the excitement is compressed into an hour or two. Such a game is baseball.” (46)

## Notes

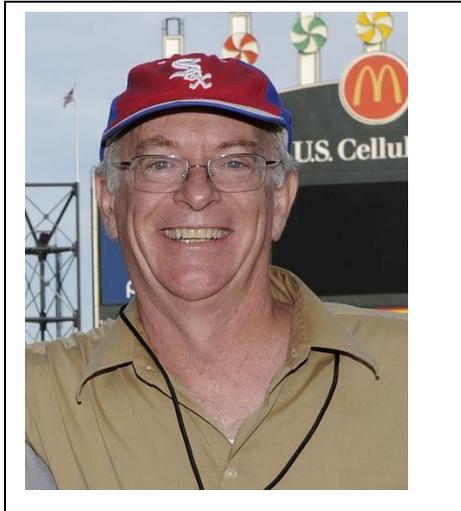
- (1) Letter from Arthur E. Bostwick to Col. Samuel H. Fisher, Litchfield, Connecticut, dated September 30, 1930.
- (2) Ray Hardman, “Before There Was Baseball, There Was Wicket.” WNPR, October 31, 2013. <http://wnpr.org/post/there-was-baseball-there-was-wicket#stream/0>.
- (3) Frederick Calvin Norton, “That Strange Yankee Game, Wicket” in Eddy N. Smith, George Benton Smith, and Allena J. Dates, *Bristol, Connecticut, In the Olden Time “New Cambridge,” Which Includes Forestville* (Hartford: City Printing Company, 1907). Originally published in the Hartford Courant, 1904.
- (4) Larry McCray, “State Championship Wicket Game in Connecticut: a Hearty Hurrah for a Doomed Pastime.” Accessed via Our Game, a blog run by John Thorn, the official historian for Major League Baseball. <http://ourgame.mlblogs.com/2012/08/17/championship-wicket-game-in-connecticut/>. Originally published in a special issue of the journal *Base Ball*.
- (5) George Dudley Seymour, “The Old-Time Game of Wicket and Some Old-Time Wicket Players” in *Papers and Addresses of the Society of Colonial Wars in the State of Connecticut, Proceedings of the Society*, Vol. II (New Haven: The T. M. & T. Press, 1909) pp. 269-303. Online at: <https://ourgame.mlblogs.com/the-old-time-game-of-wicket-c3c40f2e0b8e>.
- (6) Protoball, Wicket Chronology, Item No. 1725C.1. “Wicket Played on Boston Common.” <http://protoball.org/1725c.1>.
- (7) Protoball, Wicket Chronology, Item No. 1778.4. “Ewing Reports Playing ‘At Base’ and Wicket at Valley Forge – with the Father of his County.” <http://protoball.org/1778.4>.
- (8) Seymour, “The Old-Time Game of Wicket.”
- (9) Protoball, Wicket Chronology, Item No. 1857C.34. “Wicket Played at Easter OH College; Future President Excels.” <http://protoball.org/1857c.34>.
- (10) Protoball, Wicket Chronology, Item No. 1852C.11. “Hartford Lads Play Early Morning Wicket on Main Street.” <http://protoball.org/1852c.11>.
- (11) Protoball, Wicket Chronology, Item No. 1841.10. “Bloomfield CT Wicket Challenge: ‘One Shamble Shall Be Out.’” <http://protoball.org/1841.10>.
- (12) Norton, “That Strange Yankee Game, Wicket.”
- (13) Protoball, Wicket Chronology, Item Nos. 1840S.28 and 1841.10. <http://protoball.org/Chronology:Wicket>.
- (14) Protoball, Wicket Chronology, Item No. 1849.14. “Westfield Upsets Granville in Wicket.” <http://protoball.org/1849.14>.
- (15) Norton, “That Strange Yankee Game, Wicket.”
- (16) “Rules of the Game of Wicket” by Harry S. Bartholomew, in Norton, “That Strange Yankee Game, Wicket.”
- (17) The Litchfield Wicket Club rules stipulate that the bowler must have at least one foot over the wicket before releasing the ball, while Bartholomew and other sources say that the bowler must pass fully over the wicket.
- (18) Protoball, Wicket Chronology, Item No. 1850S.16. “Wicket Play in Rochester NY.” <http://protoball.org/1850s.16>.
- (19) 1850S.16 makes a mention of batter’s having to “touch the stumps” when crossing. The Litchfield Wicket Club and Bartholomew, among other sources, state that batters had to touch their bats on or

behind the tick marks and make no mention of them having to touch the wicket uprights or “stumps” themselves.

- (20) Protoball, Wicket Chronology, Item No. 1850C.35. “U. of Michigan Alum Recalls Baseball, Wicket, Old-Cat Games.” <http://protoball.org/1850c.35/>
- (21) Protoball, Wicket Chronology, Item No. 1858.30. Also “Rules of the Game of Wicket” by Harry S. Bartholomew, in Norton, “That Strange Yankee Game, Wicket.”
- (22) *Hartford Courant*, June 23, 1841. Protoball, Wicket Chronology, Item No. 1841.10. “Bloomfield CT Wicket Challenge: ‘One Shamble Shall Be Out.’” <https://protoball.org/1841.10>.
- (23) Norton, “That Strange Yankee Game, Wicket” and Litchfield Wicket Club, 1874 Rules.
- (24) Norton, “That Strange Yankee Game, Wicket.”
- (25) Protoball, Wicket Chronology, Item No.1855C.3. “Demo Game of Wicket, Seen as a CT Game, Later Played in Brooklyn.” <http://protoball.org/1855c.3>.
- (26) *Hartford Courant*, September 3, 1859, page 2.
- (27) Protoball, Wicket Chronology, Item Nos. 1850C.35 and 1850S.16.
- (28) Norton, “That Strange Yankee Game, Wicket.”
- (29) Protoball, Wicket Chronology, Item No. 1855C.3. “Demo Game of Wicket, Seen as a CT Game, Later Played in Brooklyn.” <http://protoball.org/1855c.3>.
- (30) Protoball, Wicket Chronology, Item Nos. 1840S.28 and 1855.26.
- (31) *Hartford Courant*, August 6, 1858, page 2.
- (32) Recollection of Rev. Dr. Storrs O. Seymour, in Seymour, “The Old-Time Game of Wicket.”
- (33) Norton, “That Strange Yankee Game, Wicket.”
- (34) *Hartford Courant*, October 14, 1907; *The News-Weekly*, September 30, 1949; and Protoball, Wicket Chronology, Item No. 1855C.3.
- (35) Protoball, Wicket Chronology, Item Nos. 1830S.5, 1846.7, and 1855C.3.
- (36) Protoball, Wicket Chronology, Item No. 1830S.5. “Wicket Played in the Western Reserve [OH].” <http://protoball.org/1830s.5>.
- (37) Protoball, Wicket Chronology, Item No. 1855C.3. “Demo Game of Wicket, Seen as a CT Game, Later Played in Brooklyn.” <http://protoball.org/1855c.3>.
- (38) *The News-Weekly*, September 30, 1949, and Protoball, Wicket Chronology, Item Nos. 1830S.5, 1846.7, and 1857.19.
- (39) Protoball, Wicket Chronology, Item No. 1850S.16. “Wicket Play in Rochester NY.” <http://protoball.org/1850s.16>.
- (40) Protoball, Wicket Chronology, Item No. 1846.7. “Amherst Juniors Drop Wicket Game, 77 to 53: says Young Billjamesian.” <http://protoball.org/1846.7>.
- (41) Seymour, “The Old-Time Game of Wicket.”
- (42) *Hartford Courant*, October 14, 1907.
- (43) Gary Goldberg-O’Maxfield. “Wethersfield’s Glorious Baseball History.” February 5, 2012. [http://wethersfieldhistory.org/articles-from-the-community/wethersfields\\_glorious\\_baseball\\_history/](http://wethersfieldhistory.org/articles-from-the-community/wethersfields_glorious_baseball_history/).
- (44) Seymour, “The Old-Time Game of Wicket.”
- (45) Norton, “That Strange Yankee Game, Wicket.”
- (46) Seymour, “The Old-Time Game of Wicket.”

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## Protoball Interview with Bruce Allardice



**Larry McCray Note:** Bruce Allardice is easily one of the most prolific and imaginative origins diggers that we know of. He recently entered his 10,000th data entry on Protoball.org; he has contributed over 2/3rds of the 11,000 clubs listed on the site, and over 250 different chronology entries; his work inspired the sites' "Proto Stats" feature, based substantially on Protoball data [[https://protoball.org/Proto\\_Stats](https://protoball.org/Proto_Stats)], and then, last year he founded and edits this newsletter.

Bruce, at Sox Park

**[1] One the tiny origins crowd's luckiest days was when you dropped into an Origins Committee session 15 or so years ago. What led you to do that?**

I've been fascinated by baseball history as long as I can remember. As a young boy I collected and memorized baseball cards. To encourage this interest my grandfather would quiz me about baseball: "How many homers did 'Big Klu' hit in 1957?" "If 'Little Louie' has 45 hits in 173 at bats, figure out in your head his batting average." He'd chide me if I couldn't immediately answer. But I didn't get into serious baseball historiography until the 2000s. You see my stronger historical interest was the Civil War, and writing about that war was my first priority. By the year 2010 I'd written books on all the Civil War subjects that interested me (I still write articles on the war, BTW), but still had no intentions to get heavily into baseball history.

I'd joined SABR and attended the 2001 (Milwaukee) and 2004 (Cincinnati) Conventions, but my Damascus Moment came (if memory serves) at the 2012 Atlanta SABR Convention where I attended a committee meeting (either 19<sup>th</sup> Century BB or Origins). The discussion was about the spread of baseball to the south immediately after the Civil War and the moderator asked if there was a Civil War historian in the audience that could answer some specific questions about why baseball came to Knoxville in 1867. I raised my hand and answered the questions. That got me to realize that with my specialized knowledge of the Civil War, and experience in researching the Civil War era, I could make a real contribution to the study of baseball in the 1850s and 60s. I thus volunteered my services to the Origins Committee.

My interest in history has never been to write the 380<sup>th</sup> book on the Battle of Gettysburg, or the 380<sup>th</sup> book on Ty Cobb, but rather to assemble data and draw conclusions from that data, focusing on subjects that were either mis-treated or not treated at all in existing historiography. My first baseball article was on a subject that I knew had always

been mis-interpreted: early baseball in the southern states. The article broke new ground by proving that baseball was not something brought to the south by postwar Union occupying troops (the hitherto accepted explanation) but rather had grown up in the south prewar.

I just wish there was a golf equivalent of SABR, a SAGR. I'd be active in that too! But between my teaching job and SABR, I'm probably spread too thin already.

**[2] You joined SABR's Origins Committee at the time of its initial project, the Spread of Base Ball data collection. You have been, by far, the most prolific contributor to that (ongoing) data set, and have rooted out the earliest games in many towns, regions, states, and foreign nations. How have the amassed data affected your views about where the modern game diffused over time? Can we sort out why baseball caught this wave, and other pastimes didn't?**

First off, the serious study of the spread of baseball demanded something more than the anecdotal evidence that earlier histories relied on. Perhaps foolishly, I set about amassing that data. Fortunately, this search coincided with the rise in digitalization of old newspapers. Databases such as GenealogyBank and Newspapers.com have proven a godsend to all historians.

The amassed data has shown that the game spread to the west and south more rapidly than was ever believed. This provided nuance, to say the least, to the prevailing New York City-centric view of baseball—the notion that baseball spread outward, more or less evenly, from its NYC roots. To give but one example from the new data, baseball reached Chicago—700 miles from New York City—about the same time the New York game hopped over the East River to neighboring Brooklyn.

The “Wild West” is another area where the data shows that, on average, when a frontier town was formed, a baseball club was formed within two years after. One old meme has it that the first building in a frontier town was a saloon, the second a church. That has to be changed to add a third event—a ball club.

I had not originally intended to trace baseball in foreign countries, but some time back MLB's historian, John Thorn, told me that MLB would like to know the “first” baseball not just in every area of the U.S., but in every country of the world. What was uncovered was that the rest of the world has had surprisingly early baseball events. For example, faraway Alaska, Scotland and China had baseball prior to many parts of the continental United States. Right now Protoball has sourced baseball in practically every country (all but about 12 of 200) on earth. Am still looking for baseball in the remaining dozen!

Author Tom Gilbert has connected the rise of baseball in the 1860s to the rise of what some would label “muscular Christianity.” Baseball just happened to come on the scene in an era when exercise became more valued. It was in addition a pleasure-giving, outdoor sport. The era also saw the rise of a more distinctly “American” culture, and in that cultural milieu, an “American” game like baseball found favor over sports such as cricket, with its British (foreign) image. In the late 1840s and early 1850s cricket clubs were widespread and seemed destined to rival baseball as an American pastime. By 1860 cricket, a “foreign” game, played at a slower and thus less exercise-giving pace, fell out of favor with the masses.

**[3] Your constant web searches give you a better feel for the effects of digitalization than most of us have. Are you sensing recent trends that we haven't experienced? Are searches getting easier than before? Or less productive? Are we nearing the crest of what electronics can do for early baseball research, or is the productiveness of digital searches beginning to thin out?**

There are several trends going on here. The first is that old newspapers continue to be digitalized and made searchable via Optical Character Read (OCR—for those unfamiliar with OCR, the computer scans a printed page and prints out what it reads as the words on that page. Those words are cached and can be searched on the computer). Chronicling America (the Library of Congress digitalization program) is now up to 19 million pages, at least 4 million more than when I started. While a large proportion of these new pages are from later newspapers, older papers keep getting digitalized. Beyond what the major online newspaper databases (Chronicling America, Newspapers.com, Genealogybank.com and Newspaper Archive) contain, a host of local libraries are doing their own digitalization of newspapers, often with OCR. The genealogy site “Ancestor Hunt” does a great job keeping track of new online newspaper databases.

Another trend is that it seems the OCRs are getting more accurate. One of the frustrations with earlier OCRs is that they misread the key words you search for in old newspapers, such as “base ball.” I’ve had to alternately search for “baii ball,” “base baii,” “bass ball” and countless other variations. The type/font quality on some newspapers (especially the older ones) is distressingly indistinct, leading to even wilder OCR misreads. It may be just my impression, but more recent OC reads seem more accurate.

There are a number of newspapers that have been scanned and put online, but not OCR’d. Searching these involves downloading each scan to look for baseball mentions. Usually I just at look issues for holidays such as July 4<sup>th</sup>, or the day of the county fair

(often in September) which, especially in rural areas, were often celebrated with a baseball game.

Searching for baseball data in old newspapers is like gold mining—one has to extract a ton of rock to obtain an ounce of gold. And as with gold mining, the richer ore veins are becoming fewer and fewer. Still, there's plenty of nuggets out there for the avid researcher.

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## **“This noble exercise thus abused”: *Chicago Tribune* Accuses the Washington Nationals of Swindling**

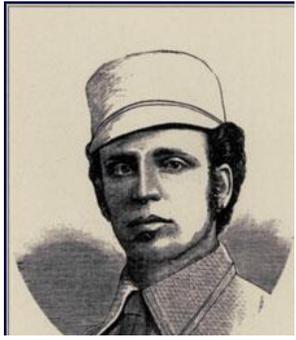
**By Steve Sisto**

The 2022 collective bargaining negotiations between Major League Baseball and the Players' Association sparked conversations and controversies over how much money players and owners make. Turn the clock back a little more than 150 years, to the 1860s, and the thought of players getting paid anything to play baseball was unheard of, let alone millions of dollars a year.

In 1867, (openly) professional baseball players didn't exist. At that time, ballplayers were supposed to play for the fun of the game and nothing more. But a visit to the Midwest (then just the “West”) by the National Club of Washington, D.C., had the *Chicago Tribune* accusing them of being paid by way of hustling and gambling.

The trip was advertised in several newspapers; the National Club, “one of the strongest in the country,” was scheduled to play 10 games in five states over two and a half weeks.<sup>1 2</sup> The might of the Nationals could not be overstated, as they won their first seven games by the following scores: 85-10 over the Capitals, 92-10 over Cincinnati, 88-12 over Buckeye, 83-21 over Louisville, 106-21 over Western, 113-26 over Union, and 53-26 over Empire.<sup>3</sup> That's a run differential of +494; for comparison, the 2021 World Series champion Atlanta Braves had a run differential of +146. Their next game was against Forest City, a “rural club” from Rockford, Illinois.<sup>4</sup> The game was held in front of 10,000 spectators at the former Dexter Park in Chicago. To the likely surprise of them all, Forest City defeated the National Club by a score of 29-23.<sup>5</sup> As the *Daily Ohio Statesman* put it, “the invincibles are at last beaten.”<sup>6</sup>

George Wright,  
Washington's Shortstop



The next game on the National Club's schedule was against the Excelsior Club of Chicago, and this is where the controversy started. The Excelsiors had beaten Forest City just a couple days prior, and since Forest City defeated the Nationals, the baseball fans of Chicago figured that the Excelsiors should have no problem taking care of the Nationals as well. As a result, many people in Chicago made "decided and extensive bets" in favor of the Excelsiors.<sup>7</sup> The game was played on July 27, "and the Chicagoans met with the most crushing failure," losing 49-4.<sup>89</sup>

The next day, the *Chicago Tribune* published an article titled "Base Ball As A Confidence Game," in which the paper accused the National Club of losing to Forest City on purpose in order to entice the people of Chicago to bet on the Excelsiors, and then making money by betting on themselves to win:

The reasons for their defeat are now very plain. The difference between the men composing the two clubs is apparent to the most uninstructed looker-on. The Nationals are carefully trained, and have been very well held in hand by their manager. They have been educated up to a high standard of skill and endurance. They have during their trip refrained from receptions, dinner parties and everything that might in the slightest degree impair their efficiency. They are professional athletes, while the Excelsiors are but amateurs. The catcher... receives a regular salary of \$1,500 per annum besides what he can make by betting. Thus the victory of the Rockford Club is easily accounted for, and the exultation of those young gentlemen is seen to have been entirely without foundation. It was a regular confidence game, familiar to every attendant upon races. It was an operation intended to induce the sporting men of Chicago to venture their money. They did so and the Nationals have pocketed it. It is estimated that \$20,000 changed hands, that that amount of money has been withdrawn from circulation here, and will go East... It is painful, however, to see this noble exercise thus abused and prostituted, a healthful game perverted into a gambling operation.<sup>10</sup>

The *New York Evening Post* reported that "a large number of heavy betters" traveled with the National Club with the intent of making money by gambling on games, and that one member of the group made \$100,000.<sup>11</sup> The paper went on to proclaim that the practice of gambling will result in the downfall of baseball: "This match may be regarded as the culmination of the base ball mania, which has been so rapidly on the increase during the past year. The gambling accompaniments of this fine, athletic sport will, we fear, cause it to sink into disrepute."<sup>12</sup>

The following day, July 29, was a busy one. First, the president of the National Club responded to the *Tribune's* allegations: "It is false that we travel around the country for gambling purposes; it is false that the game with the Rockford Club was thrown; it is false that our nine is a picked nine; and lastly, it is false that noted gamblers accompany our club, or that such a class is in any way countenanced by the National Club."<sup>13</sup> In addition, the members of the Excelsior Club held a meeting to discuss the Nationals' game against Forest City and there were no suspicions to be had: "The universal sentiment being that the game was fairly conducted, and that no attempt was made by the National nine to throw the game."<sup>14</sup> This was also the day of the National Club's final game of its Midwest trip, in which they defeated the Atlantic Club of Chicago, 78-12, and departed for Washington D.C. that evening to little fanfare.<sup>15</sup> Finally, the *Tribune* backtracked on its claims, issuing the following retraction:

We are satisfied that this was an entire mistake, and that the members of the Club are neither "professional" players nor gamblers... The game played with the Forest City Club of Rockford was fairly won by the latter, and the result is to be attributed undoubtedly to the fatigue of the Nationals, resulting from long travel and constant playing... That there was a large amount of gambling on the ground is true. Those who bet their money on the Nationals it appears were parties who came hither of their own volition from St. Louis, and others who live in Chicago. At all events, we are assured and we believe that they were not members of the National Club nor any friends of theirs.<sup>16</sup>

This was not the end of the affair, however. Despite the *mea culpa*, the paper seemingly doubled down on its original allegations, reprinting an article from the *Cincinnati Commercial* just two days later that again accuses the National Club of swindling the people of Chicago: "The defeat was sweeping and decisive. Such a state of affairs had no right to exist; and Chicago moaneth that certainty is so uncertain. It is said the Nationals do not allow their hotel bills to be paid for them, but we think they waived the rule in Chicago. They appear to have set things up with fine ingenuity and they knew where to do it. The Chicago papers stated that the Nationals were inconsolable over their defeat by a provincial club. We think a grief that pays such handsome dividends will not refuse to yield to the assuagements of time."<sup>17</sup>

Of the three teams at the center of the controversy, the Excelsior Club was the first to fold, shutting down operations just a year later in 1868. The Forest City Club played in the National Association's inaugural year of 1871 as the Rockford Forest Citys, finishing in last place with a 4-21 record, and dissolved after the season. The Washington Nationals joined the NA in 1872, ultimately folding after the 1875 season, but their name continued with separate teams in the American Association, Union Association, and Major League Baseball. The *Chicago Tribune*, which was behind the allegations leveled

against the Nationals, continues today as one of the highest-circulating newspapers in the country.

This was perhaps the first instance of a baseball team being accused of intentionally throwing games and gambling on themselves, but it was certainly not the last. Of course, the most famous of these was the Black Sox Scandal of 1919, which coincidentally also centered around a team from Chicago. You can read more about the 1919 Black Sox Scandal through SABR's [Research Committee](#) on the topic.

You can also read more on the history of gambling in baseball on [Protoball](#).

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> "Base Ball and the Turf," *Chicago Tribune*, July 15, 1867.
- <sup>2</sup> "Base Ball," *Daily Ohio Statesman* (Columbus, Ohio), June 27, 1867.
- <sup>3</sup> *Perrysburg Journal* (Perrysburg, Ohio), July 26, 1867.
- <sup>4</sup> "Gambling on base ball," *Wheeling Daily Intelligencer* (Wheeling, W.V.), August 5, 1867.
- <sup>5</sup> "Base Ball at Chicago," *Daily Ohio Statesman* (Columbus, Ohio), July 27, 1867.
- <sup>6</sup> "Base Ball at Chicago," *Daily Ohio Statesman* (Columbus, Ohio), July 27, 1867.
- <sup>7</sup> "The Tournament -- Letter from a Lost One," *Chicago Tribune*, July 29, 1867.
- <sup>8</sup> "Base Ball as a Confidence Game," *Chicago Tribune*, July 28, 1867.
- <sup>9</sup> *The Belvidere Standard* (Belvidere, Illinois), July 30, 1867.
- <sup>10</sup> "Base Ball as a Confidence Game," *Chicago Tribune*, July 28, 1867.
- <sup>11</sup> "The trip of the Nationals," *Evening Star* (Washington, D.C.), August 5, 1867.
- <sup>12</sup> "The trip of the Nationals," *Evening Star* (Washington, D.C.), August 5, 1867.
- <sup>13</sup> "By Telegraph," *Rock Island Argus* (Rock Island, Illinois), July 29, 1867.
- <sup>14</sup> "Meeting of the Excelsior Club," *Chicago Tribune*, July 30, 1867.
- <sup>15</sup> "Base Ball -- Close of the Tournament," *Chicago Tribune*, July 30, 1867.
- <sup>16</sup> "The National Base Ball Club," *Chicago Tribune*, July 29, 1867.
- <sup>17</sup> "The Base Ball Game," *Chicago Tribune*, July 31, 1867.

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## Money Ball-like Stats for 1866 Club

The Oct. 23, 1867 *Daily Morning Chronicle*, a Washington DC newspaper, published very detailed statistics of the 1866 season of the Washington Nationals.

During the season the Nationals won ten games and lost five, outscoring their opposition 593 to 325. What's especially interesting is that the newspaper furnished detailed fielding and ball-strike statistics, numbers you usually don't find in early newspapers. Presumably a member of the club kept these statistics and gave them to the paper.

The ball-strike numbers indicate that while umpires were calling them, balls and strikes were nowhere near as relevant to the 1866 game as they are today. In the 15 games the Nationals received only 109 called balls, the opposition 114, or about 7 called balls per team per game. As we know, in today's game we often see 7 balls per inning. Only

11-12 strikes were called on a team each game. In total about 1 strike and 1 ball was called per team per inning. Either the batters were swatting practically every pitch made, or the pitchers were uncannily accurate, or the umpires simply let a number of unbatted pitches go by without calling them either balls or strikes.

Base on balls and strike outs, two of the key components of modern baseball, basically didn't exist in 1866. The Nationals received only five walks in their 15 games—one every three games. Strikeouts were almost as rare, with the Nationals striking out seven times (once every 2 games) and their opposition twenty-two (1.5 per game).

It was an era of offense. The Nationals averaged 4.88 runs per inning, cleaning the bases so well that they left only 72 men on base (roughly 4.6 per game). They hit 37 home runs, about 2.5 per game. They failed to score in only 9 innings of the 135 they played.

Passed balls played a huge role in these games, equaling the “muffs” made by all other players. By category, the Nationals' fielding miscues were:

Catcher Passed balls—95

“Muffs”—96

Wild Throws—81

Which is about 6 of each miscue (18 total) per game. The numbers show that the opposing teams were even less skilled in their fielding.

As to fielding plays made, the Nationals caught about 2/3rds of the fly balls hit into fair territory (134 vs. 68 missed). They were death on “foul bounds,” catching 84 of 89.

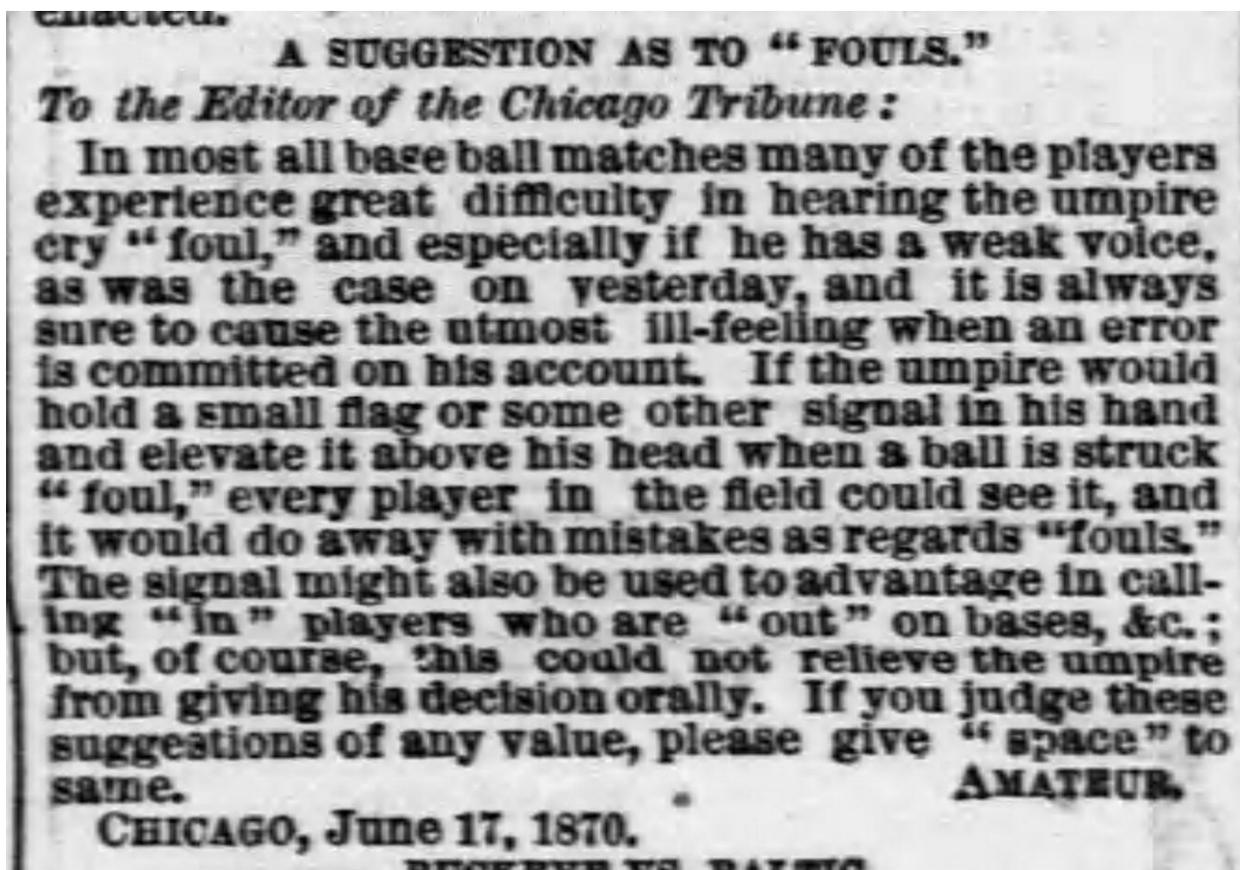
Kudos to **Bob Tholkes** for bringing this account to the editor's attention.

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## Potpourri

### Flag Baseball?

A Chicago Tribune correspondent offered an interesting suggestion to help umpires. From the *Chicago Tribune*, June 18, 1870:



Baseball Umps imitating Football referees? I've seen worse ideas!

### The Tax Man Cometh

Another item in the "nothing new in baseball" meme: in 1869, the IRS decided that baseball clubs charging admission should be taxed on the same basis as any other business.

"The Assessors of Internal Revenue are after the base ball fraternity, having notified them that they must take out a license, which is ten dollars a year; also pay two and a half per cent on the gross receipts. The treasurer must make his return once a month. In this it should be clearly understood that the Government does not tax sport—does not impose any burden on recreation—but only on the show business. Ball clubs get up matches as exhibitions, and charge a fee for the sight, and thus a ball company stands on the same level as any other company that entertains the public, so far as the tax-gatherer can see." *New York Dispatch*, Aug. 22, 1869

What's curious is that the law was passed in 1864, but not applied to baseball until five years later. Presumably the revenueurs weren't aware that baseball clubs were charging admission—though clubs had done so for years prior.

## Baseball and Politics.

Nothing is new in life. In December 1869 the various baseball clubs of the city of Boston nominated a slate of independent candidates for alderman and for mayor, their object to get from the city land for a suitable playground. The so-called "base ball ticket" (or "red ball" ticket, as the pre-printed ballots used a red ball as the slate's symbol) ran against eight other slates of candidates.

VINCENT, JAMES E. HALL.

**THE BASE BALL TICKET.**—At a meeting of gentlemen interested in out-door sports, in the Lowell Base Ball Club rooms, Saturday evening, Mr. John A. Lowell presiding, Aldermen were nominated as follows:

A. S. Pratt, Nehemiah Gibson, Moses Fairbanks, F. W. Jacobs, G. T. W. Braman, C. A. Connor, George G. Carpenter, John L. Stevenson, Charles E. Jenkins, Henry L. Pierce, S. R. Spinney, Charles Richardson.

A committee appointed for the purpose reported the following statement, which was adopted:

"To correct a misunderstanding which appears to exist as to the object of this movement, it becomes necessary to state that the design is to foster not the game of base ball and its interests alone, but out-door sports in general, as an important means of promoting the physical training of our youth, and consequently the public health. The Common has been taken and nothing left in its place, and the main object is to elect men who will grant our youth some spot for recreation. Beyond this it has no object or aim, political or otherwise."

WARD SIX.—A meeting of the Baldwin Democrats

*Boston Traveler*, Dec. 13, 1869

Their endorsed candidate for Mayor, Republican/Citizens Party candidate Nathaniel Shurtleff, won.

## Ukraine Baseball

Since The Ukraine is in the news a lot recently, readers may be interested to know that the first baseball ("indoor baseball" (softball) in this case) was played in Odessa, The Ukraine, in 1922, by sailors of the USS McFarland.

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## Latest Protoball Additions

**Total numbers**—As of March 8, 2022, the Protoball Pre-Pro (pre-1871) Database contained 10,899 clubs and 3,839 games, with a further 3,500 new games in the searchable Tholkes RIM file but not yet entered into the Pre-Pro database. They cover every state of the U.S. and over 160 foreign countries. The Glossary of Games records over 300 bat-ball related games. Over 1900 "Chronology" entries and over 9,000 19<sup>th</sup>

Century newspaper clippings, plus analytical articles, offer the baseball researcher a plethora of data.

**New countries**—Recently baseball entries for Eswatini (Swaziland), Monaco, Central African Republic, Turkmenistan and Gabon have been added. The entry for the tiny Principality of Monaco is noteworthy in that our own Princess Grace (Grace Kelly) played in the game and (from the photo below) seems to have had a ball (pun intended).



Kelly at the bat

**New early Baseball in Savannah**—Recently **Bruce Allardice**, always searching for early baseball in the South, found a reference to baseball being played in Savannah, Georgia in 1859—adding to those southern cities that had baseball prior to the Civil War.

**African History Month Find**—While some sources for African American baseball have written that the famous Philadelphia Pythians played their first match game against an African-American team from Albany, NY, a month earlier the Pythians played a game against another AA club, the Toussaint L'Ouverture of Philadelphia.

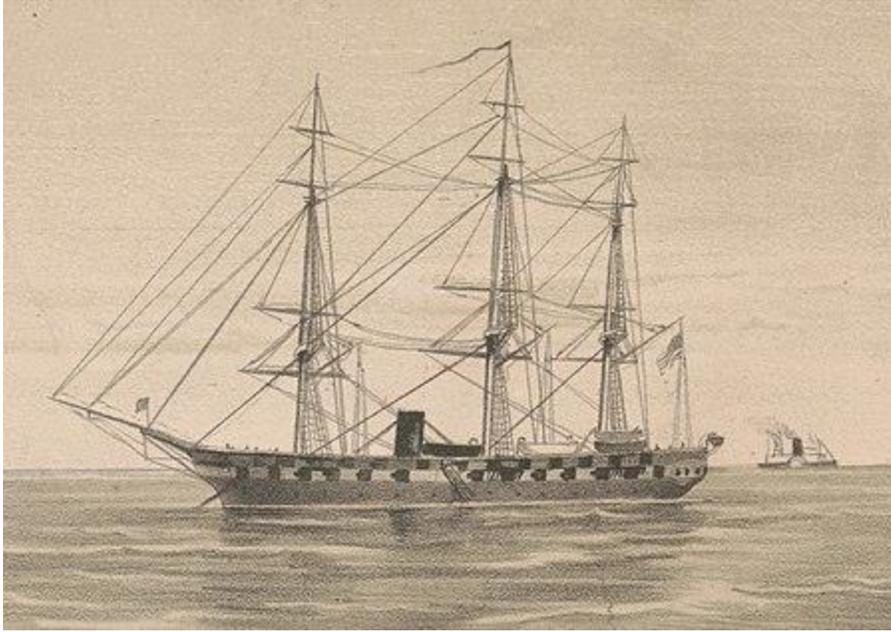
**Philly Rules?**—Maybe not in modern baseball, but perhaps in the late 1860s. The last issue of this newsletter made the case that Brooklyn quickly overtook New York City as the hub of baseball, based on the number of games and clubs played 1856-1865 in the two cities. Many Philadelphia clubs have since been added to Protoball, bringing the total for that city to over 400, The next newsletter will feature an article showing that by 1865-66 Philadelphia overtook Brooklyn, both in number of clubs and in quality of play.

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## Find of the Month

### First Baseball in Portugal

Protoball had previously had the first baseball in Portugal in 1919, played by a group of visiting US Navy sailors while their ship was docked in port, citing Josh Chetwynd, *Baseball in Europe*. Crack researcher **Bob Tholkes** recently uncovered a much earlier find, an Oct. 4, 1867 game in Lisbon between officers of the US Navy steam frigate *Minnesota*. Many of the officers had attended the US Naval Academy and had played for the various cadet baseball teams. The US Consul and “many citizens” attended the 7-inning game.



USS Minnesota, from Wikipedia

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## Research Requests

**Media Firsts Project Announced**--The Origins Committee is starting a new initiative called the Media Firsts Project, dedicated to compiling a list of firsts related to baseball and the media. Some of the questions that this project will seek to answer include:

When was the first media credential issued for a baseball game?

When was the first press box established at a baseball venue?

Who was the first baseball player quoted in a newspaper?

What was the first instance of a newspaper publishing betting odds for a baseball game?

And much more!

Anyone interested in contributing to the Media Firsts Project can reach out to Steve Sisto at [stevesisto@gmail.com](mailto:stevesisto@gmail.com).

**Protoball** has found and listed baseball in all but nine of the world's 200 countries. But we're still looking for baseball in the tiny countries of Andorra and Liechtenstein (Europe); Dominica (Caribbean); Maldives, Seychelles, Timor-Leste (Asia); Sao Tome,

The Comoros, Equatorial Guinea (Africa). Plus UK dependencies Monserrat and the Isle of Man.

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## BULLETIN BOARD

**Bruce Allardice**'s article in the December issue of *Baseball Research Journal*, a first-ever statistical analysis of baseball 1866-70 titled "Runs, Runs, and More Runs," is one of four nominees for SABR's baseball history article of the year.

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The 19<sup>th</sup> Century BB Committee reminds us:

"All Speakers Series presentations are available through the SABR website. Here is a link to the page:

<https://sabr.org/19th-century-baseball-speaker-series/>.

This page lets you view the Zoom presentation and, in a separate file, review the slides presented.

The presentation is posted several days after the live presentation."

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The ever-prolific **Richard Hershberger**, author of "Ball Four," is currently writing a second book, for University of Missouri Press, on the rise of baseball up to 1871.

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Early registration is now open for the [SABR Virtual Analytics Conference](#), which will be held over three days in online sessions from March 18-20, 2022. We'll bring together the top minds in the baseball analytics community to discuss, debate, and share insightful ways to analyze and examine the great game of baseball. [Register today to join us!](#)

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The 2022 [Frederick Ivor-Campbell 19th Century Base Ball Conference](#) will be held at the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, New York. The Conference is scheduled for April 29-30, 2022. Among the presenters will be this newsletter's John Thorn, Tom Gilbert and Richard Hershberger.



Wicket at Dartmouth, 1793