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Outside the Lines of Gilded Age Baseball: Profits, Beer, and the Origins of the Brotherhood War

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Outside the Line of Gilded Age Baseball:
Profits, Beer, and the Origins of the Brotherhood War

Outside the Lines of Gilded Age Baseball: Profits, Beer, and the Origins of the Brotherhood War

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in History

by

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Abstract

In 1890, members of the Brotherhood of Professional Base Ball Players elected to secede from the National League and form their own organization, which they called the Players League. The players objected to several business practices of the National League, including aspects of the reserve clause in player contracts, the Brush Classification Plan to control their salaries, the buying and selling of players, and fines for various infractions. This dissertation explains how these events combined to produce the revolt by the players at the conclusion of the 1889 season. It also examines various other important aspects of 1880s baseball, including abuse of alcohol, treatments of umpires, physical training techniques, violence on the field, cheating, gambling, mascots, team finances, and racism in baseball. The dissertation illuminates various social and economic aspects of life in Gilded Age America as well. Finally, it helps explain the importance of a little-understood era in the baseball's history that lasted from 1885-1889 and contributed to confirming baseball's status as America's national sport.

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I should also thank my family for their moral support, especially as this dissertation reached its second and third year of serious work. I will not have to spend family holidays reading books and typing late into the night anymore.

Finally, I must thank my close friend and unofficial editor, Dr. David Mitchell, for his insights, suggestions, and willingness to read most of the chapters. I would gladly return the favor in the future, if only I had any advanced knowledge of physics or astronomy. Your help throughout the project was invaluable.

Dedication

I am dedicating this dissertation to my father. You taught me how to play. Then you came to every game to watch.

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Introduction

Why Write a Dissertation on 1880s Baseball?

Why write a scholarly dissertation about baseball? I found myself answering that question nearly every time someone asked me what my PhD dissertation was about, as everyone from my academic advisor to my mother was a bit skeptical at first. Furthermore, when I told them it was about baseball in the 1880s, and the decision of major league baseball players to start their own league separate of the existing ones in 1890, I had to answer a few more questioning looks. Given enough time, however, I eventually worked out some answers.

First, and most importantly, it is something that deeply interests me. It is nearly impossible to write a work of this length if not fully invested in your subject, and the previous topics I had considered, while interesting and important, just did not quite grab hold of me as this one did. However, there have to be some good academic reasons, too, as telling your doctoral committee you really like your topic is not enough by itself. Among these good academic reasons is the fact that very little scholarship exists that specifically addresses this period in baseball's history. For whatever reason, the late 1880s have escaped the attention of most baseball writers. There is some baseball literature mentioning events in these years, certainly, but few have attempted to put these years at the center of the story and describe why they are important in their own right. As it turns out, they are. What happens in the second half of the 1880s leads directly to the Players League and the Brotherhood War of 1890, and the

consequences of the Brotherhood War do much to shape the landscape of baseball in the 1890s. The problems that arise in the 1890s because of the failure of the Players League eventually contribute to the rise of the American League in 1901. And so it goes.

Originally, my plan was to write a dissertation that told the story of the Players League and the Brotherhood War with the National League in 1890. There are a handful of books on this event, some better than others, and I hoped to contribute something new to the study of what happened in 1890. As I went deeper into the research, however, I discovered that the causes of the conflict were more numerous and multifaceted than the existing literature generally indicated. As the preparatory chapters became both greater in number and more lengthy, I realized that these events, in and of themselves, were really their own story. Therefore, I ended up with a dissertation dedicated to describing the causes of the Brotherhood War, rather than the event itself. Maybe someday, I will write a sequel that follows my original plan of describing the Players League and its history. We will see. If I ever do, it will certainly be different from what I envisioned when I began this project, thanks to some of the things I have discovered in the process.

At the most basic level, the quarrel between the players and owners that erupted into baseball's version of war in 1890 was about the same things that workers and employers always argue about, that is, wages, hours, and conditions of work. That the two sides argued over salary is not a surprise at all, and these arguments are the most important engine driving the events in this dissertation. However, considerations such as hours and conditions of work mattered, too. For example, the baseball season generally began in mid-April and ended in October. Did a player have a responsibility to his club before that time, in the form of mandatory training? Could a club control the actions of its players after working hours by, say, using detectives to spy

on them and make sure they were not drinking after hours, and punishing players who did? Similarly, questions arose regarding conditions of work. If a player got hurt and could not play, was the team obligated to pay him or not? Did it make a difference if the injury occurred on or off the field? Could teams blacklist players for certain unsavory behaviors, and if so, what behaviors qualified a man for blacklisting?

In the larger sense, this dissertation is also about the attempt of the players to have some say in the answers to these questions. Part of the problem was that clubs often engaged in decisions that, even if merited to some extent, were arbitrary. Too often, the interpretation of the rules was whatever the clubs said it was, and this inevitably led to abuses that angered the players and hurt relations with management. Having the ultimate power, the clubs could usually get their way, but in the process, they often alienated players to the point that the player was unwilling to return to their team the next year and agitated for his release during the off-season. Even worse, the player might play poorly on purpose to convince management it had no choice but to let the player go. Sitting such a player on the bench until he straightened up was not always an option, because most teams had but one or two substitute players on hand at any given time, fearing the expense of carrying extra men.

These are all among the reasons that players in the National League formed the Brotherhood of Professional Base Ball Players in 1886. Realizing that when they negotiated with their teams individually they had little strength, the players banded together, hoping to achieve better results through a group with a common purpose. For the players, better results meant not just more money, but also a role in developing new rules, negotiating consequences for unacceptable behaviors such as excessive drinking, and other questions of that nature. They believed that their interests were compatible with those of the owners. Higher quality baseball

meant more patronage at the ballpark, which meant teams made more money, which meant they could afford to pay their players more, which made everyone happy. The question was, then, how to achieve higher quality baseball. The owners, as we will see, did not always look at things in the same light.

While the discussions and arguments over salary and work conditions were very important, and receive the greatest share of attention, other issues need consideration as well. For the National League especially, the owners obsessed over how to raise the image of baseball in the eyes of the public. The National League had to, considering that its tickets cost more than those of the American Association. Marketing the game towards the “respectable” classes guided many of the League’s decisions in the 1880s. That is why the crusade against drinking was so important, and why this dissertation contains an entire chapter dedicated to alcoholism in baseball. True, drinking cost games on the field, as inebriated players struggled to compete with sober ones, and if several influential members of the team began lushing at the same time, the consequences would be severe in the standings. Equally important, however, as long as baseball had an image as a ruffianly sport played by ill-educated, drunken boors, “respectable” people would stay away from the ballpark, and teams would make less money. Therefore, fighting alcohol abuse was not necessarily about helping players be healthier, or solely about winning more games. It was about making more money, although of course winning games helped make money, too.

The same was true, albeit to a somewhat lesser extent, with umpires. If baseball was to have a clean image among patrons, the games needed to run as smoothly as possible. This required competent umpires who could manage the games and keep the teams in line. Every time a riot erupted over the calls of the umpire, and police had to storm the field and swing their

clubs to restore order, “respectable” men and women turned up their noses at what they saw and were less likely to return to the ballpark the next day. As with alcohol, the game needed quality arbiters not solely to ensure the best team won on the field, but also to ensure the wealthiest fans continued patronizing the game.

It was the same with player fitness. Baseball was very much a game of motion in the 1880s, much more than it is today. When the rule makers met each winter to discuss new rules to refine the game, their intent typically centered around how to produce more action on the field. More hitting of the ball meant more action for the fielders, and more men on base meant more attempts at base stealing, all of which fans enjoyed and would pay to see. The worst possible scenario, in the eyes of baseball’s magnates, was a dull game featuring wild pitching, few swings by the batters, and few balls put in play for the fielders to deal with. Because of this emphasis, players needed mobility and athleticism, which required some kind of physical training to stay in the pink of condition, as observers put it in the Gilded Age. Teams, therefore, encouraged players to stay in shape. As with alcohol and umpires, however, the point of this encouragement was that fans would pay to see athletic players, more so than ice wagons, to use another term of the day.

Another important aspect of the game in the 1880s was, just as in the game today, the size of the market available to each team was an important determinant of success. Some baseball fans want to believe that the vast discrepancy in the cash available to each team, and the impact of that discrepancy in the standings, is a recent phenomenon. Some want to lay the blame at the door of free agency, saying that it destroyed the competitive balance in baseball. The facts, however, say that wealth and success frequently go together in baseball, and always have. Financial firepower was extremely important in the Gilded Age. Of the eighteen championships

awarded in the National League and American Association in the 1880s, sixteen of the eighteen were won by cities ranking in the top ten in population in the United States, with only Providence in 1884 and Detroit in 1887 breaking the pattern.

It is clear, then, that money plays a considerable role in this story of 1880s baseball. How to get more of it, and how to distribute it, are questions at the root of many of the events herein described. The idea that players once played for the love of the game, the thrill of competition, or the glory of a championship was an antiquated one even by this time. If I were to quote every player or team executive who said as much in the newspapers of the day, that might constitute a chapter all to itself. This conclusion that money drove most of the choices made in 1880s baseball is, I realize, decidedly not revolutionary. While it may be pedestrian, it is true nevertheless, and I see no reason to sugarcoat the fact or romanticize the story. The banality of the cause notwithstanding, the story remains very interesting because, as all good historians know, the fun is in the details. Certain people made certain decisions at certain times in response to certain circumstances, and those choices make the story unique.

Beyond these considerations, there are other good reasons for a scholarly dissertation about 1880s baseball. Among these is that many baseball observers, even seasoned ones, know little about the game in the nineteenth century. For some reason, many baseball enthusiasts act as if the game never mattered much, or was somehow different and less important, until 1901, when major league baseball took the form it retains today with two leagues, the American and the National. It is true, this era saw great experimentation with rules, the equipment was primitive, and players had not worked out all of the strategies that are commonplace today. All of the essentials were there, however. Nine men played on each side, in the same places they do now, the pitcher still delivered the ball to the batter as the centerpiece of the action, and someone

magically teleported back in time to 1888 would still clearly recognize the game as baseball. In fact, just to pick some arbitrary dates, one could make a strong argument that the game of 1890 resembled the game of 1915 much more than the game of 1915 resembled the game of 1930.

In this respect, baseball in the 1880s is to baseball history what the 1850s are to American history generally. Most baseball fans and historians look at the 1880s as a time with a few important events, but essentially see this decade as leading to something else, such as the creation of modern baseball with the American and National leagues in 1901. We might say the same about the 1850s. True, some important things happened, but it is easy to see those things only in terms of how they led to something else, namely, the Civil War. Baseball players of the 1880s, like Americans living in the 1850s, did not see things in that way, of course. They had no idea of what might happen a few years down the road, any more than we do today. It is important, therefore, to remember that they made the best choices they could based on the information they had at the time, and that they made those choices without the hindsight that we possess.

As a result of this desire to recall attention to how men played baseball in the Gilded Age, this dissertation also provides some mini-biographies of players well-known at the time but almost forgotten today. Some of the names, Cap Anson, for instance, are familiar, but how many know anything about Pete Browning? He is the man with the highest batting average not in baseball's Hall of Fame, ranking tenth all-time with a gaudy .341 mark. There are also stories in these pages about players with decidedly unremarkable baseball careers but very interesting baseball lives. Whether it be someone like Billy Taylor, unknown today and known chiefly at the time for his ability to consume alcohol, or John Gaffney, a man with no record as a major

league player but who was nonetheless very important for his innovative umpiring, this dissertation seeks to tell a bit of their stories as well.

In order for a dissertation about baseball to have much general meaning and hold the interest of those not excited by the minutiae of the game, it should also reveal something about how baseball fit in to the United States as a whole in the 1880s. The most obvious connection is to labor history. In the United States, the 1880s saw a great deal of conflict between workers and management. It witnessed the American Federation of Labor's 1886 strike that led to the Haymarket Affair, the massacre of blacks striking for a dollar per day in the sugar fields of Louisiana, and reformers such as Henry George. Workers throughout the nation joined labor unions of all shapes and sizes in hopes of bettering their working conditions, so for baseball players to form their own Brotherhood was certainly in line with the times, and the saga of what happened to the Brotherhood might be of interest to labor historians and those interested in the history of working people in the United States. Owners such as Albert Spalding and Arthur Soden might not have been on the level of John Rockefeller or J.P. Morgan, but Spalding was a multi-millionaire who practiced both vertical and horizontal integration and sat on the board of directors of several corporations, just as his more illustrious contemporaries did.

Beyond this, the last quarter of the nineteenth century was also notorious for the rise of the social philosophy known as social Darwinism. In short, social Darwinists such as Herbert Spencer and William Graham Sumner took Charles Darwin's ideas regarding the role of natural selection in evolution and applied those ideas directly to people and societies. These ideas, along with general racism, appeared in baseball in various guises during the Gilded Age. Notable examples include the treatment of mascots, detailed in one chapter, but also the cutthroat competition to eliminate rivals by any means, even if those means sometimes also injured the

victorious party. By the time this narrative begins, in 1885, major league baseball had already drawn its color line, barring African Americans from the field of play. As a result, the stories of African Americans in baseball appear here only occasionally, but I have described several examples of how the game reflected the racist attitudes of American society even without any black players at the major league level.

In addition, to make this work more accessible to the general reader, I chose to go easy on statistics and statistical analysis. Too often, baseball gains a reputation as a sport for folks who really love crunching numbers in order to make points about the greatness of players that seem hopelessly obscure to the average person. Over the past decade or so, there has been a veritable explosion of new statistics, as if baseball did not have enough of them to begin with. Personally, I enjoy statistical analysis a great deal. It provides solid evidence, and some of the statistics have the virtue of being comparable across eras of baseball history, making them valuable research tools. However, not all readers will share this taste for statistics, so while the reader will find them in places, all in all, I have employed them sparingly. I have also included an appendix on statistics in baseball that should be mandatory reading to understand fully everything presented here. Before reading the rest of the dissertation, the reader should also examine the appendix on the terminology of the 1880s, so that terms such as “coaching” and “crank” will convey the intended meaning.

Finally, a word about sources. At first glance, there seems a lack of them in writing this dissertation, but as with many first glances, this is misleading. The best source I uncovered was a sporting paper titled *The Sporting Life*. This weekly newspaper, with usually eight but sometimes twelve pages, devoted about three-quarters of its space to baseball matters. The writers of its columns were not strictly employees of the paper, but men who wrote for city

newspapers around the nation and contributed to its columns on the side each week. Therefore, while it appears to be one source, in reality, it represents twenty or twenty-five sources. Each major league city had its own correspondent, and in addition, *The Sporting Life* printed weekly pieces from men in minor league cities as well as essays from freelance writers, most notably O.P. Caylor but also men like James Hart and Charles Foley who had been in baseball for many years. To give a few examples, the paper's Detroit correspondent also wrote for the Detroit *Free Press*. Its Boston writer, William Sullivan, also worked for the Boston *Globe*, while Henry Chadwick also wrote pieces for the Brooklyn *Eagle*, edited Spalding's baseball guides, and wrote for *Outing* magazine. I found *The Sporting Life* an excellent help partly because of this great diversity of writers, but also because it allowed those writers to give their own views with little editorial oversight (the paper's editor, Francis Richter, corrected them at times but did not censor them, so far as I could tell) and gave them space to explore off-field topics, especially to fill space in the winter. These facts made *The Sporting Life* a better source than many individual newspapers, as most daily papers had good coverage during the season, but lacked the depth of reporting during the off-season and also had weaker coverage of the off-field dealings of the various teams.

Another sports newspaper, *The Sporting News*, began publication in 1886 and operated in the same format. This paper also employed men who wrote for various US newspapers to write in its columns. For instance, Tim Murnane sometimes wrote for *The Sporting News* and worked with Sullivan at the Boston *Globe*. In general, this source was a bit less useful than its weekly competitor was, as its writers did not explore the game off the field in quite the same detail, but once again, its great diversity of views equaled many sources and served as a useful counterview

to *The Sporting Life*. *The Sporting News*, based out of St. Louis, was also especially valuable in writing about baseball in the western parts of America.

Not to neglect other newspaper sources, I searched through the archives of a few other major papers in the United States in the 1880s, especially the *New York Times* and the *Chicago Daily Tribune*. Not only were they important newspapers with large circulations, but New York and Chicago were the home of some of baseball's most successful teams and three of the owners who appear so many times as movers and shakers in 1880s baseball, Al Spalding in Chicago, Charles Byrne in Brooklyn, and John Day in New York. The drawback of using daily newspapers, however, was that they tended to report on the big issues in baseball, but not the mundane ones of marginal interest to their daily readers but essential for a dissertation such as this. Despite this drawback, there is, by necessity, a certain dependence on newspapers, both daily and weekly, in a work of this type. They are the primary sources for writing about sports like baseball. Their reporters attended all the home games and sometimes traveled to road games as well, interviewed the players regularly, spoke with team owners on a weekly basis, and corresponded with each other. No one was in a better position to report on what happened each week.

A few books were useful as well. However, as mentioned earlier, most works on this era of baseball history pay little attention to the issues I chose to address, and so while these books provided background and gave form to the general line of the narrative, their overall contribution to this text is a marginal one. A close perusal of their lists of sources will reveal they used many of the same newspapers I did, in any case, but in a far less comprehensive way. I do not necessarily mean this as a criticism of their work, as they often had a different outcome in mind for their books than I did here, and some authors did their research before the internet became

available, as well. I have also referenced the biographical information compiled by the Society of American Baseball Research, known as SABR, in cases where such biographical information was available.

Throughout this dissertation, I have attempted to answer the questions beloved by all historians, those being what happened, why it happened in that particular way, and why it was important. Although this work grew into something much larger than I ever intended when I began the project, I hope it can provide baseball fans and general readers with some sense of what baseball was like in the 1880s, especially off the field. There was a great deal going on, and I hope I have managed to add something to what we know about our National Pastime.

Chapter 1

The State of Baseball in 1885

Among the greatest ironies of Gilded Age baseball is that its most disastrous season, 1890, followed on the heels of a campaign that was perhaps the most exciting of the entire nineteenth century. To the sixteen men who owned major league baseball franchises, the future of the game must have looked bright indeed as the 1889 season came to a close. It had been one of the best in the admittedly brief history of major league baseball. The National League (NL) concluded its fourteenth campaign with a monumental race between the New York Giants and Boston Beaneaters. On October 1, Boston defeated the Cleveland Spiders while the Giants stumbled against the mediocre Pittsburgh Allegheney, leaving the Beaneaters a single game ahead with four games to play. The Giants recovered, however, beating Pittsburgh the next day, then sweeping Cleveland in three games. The Beaneaters, meanwhile, lost the concluding game of the Cleveland series on October 2, dropping them into a tie with the Giants. They won the first two games of their series with Pittsburgh, meaning the race remained deadlocked until the last day of the season, October 5, but then fell 6-1, giving New York the championship. It was the second straight pennant for the Giants after several years of frustrating failures and near misses that had left their fans wondering if their costly collection of star players would ever triumph and occupy first place in the National League.

Baseball's other major league, the American Association (AA), boasted a championship race almost as dramatic. The Association's eighth season featured a thrilling campaign culminating with the Brooklyn Bridegrooms (several team members had married in the preceding two years, thus the unusual nickname) barely outdistancing the St. Louis Browns. Things seemed secure enough for the Bridegrooms as late as September 15, when they held a five game lead in the standings with just nineteen games to go on their schedule. St. Louis refused to go quietly, however, winning fifteen of its next seventeen games, including twelve in a row, so that by October 10, Brooklyn's lead was a mere two games.¹ After all, the Browns had won four consecutive Association pennants, and team captain Charlie Comiskey would not allow his team to go down without a good fight. The Bridegrooms did hold on, finishing two games up, but St. Louis's finishing flourish ensured the outcome remained uncertain until the season's final two days. In fact, the Bridegrooms were not secure in their possession of the championship until a few days after the regular season ended, for reasons discussed later.

Along with the terrific drama on the field, this nerve wracking ending meant, above all else, three things to major league baseball. First, for the quartet of cities involved in the pennant race, it meant lots of money. Thousands of fans streamed to major league ballparks to watch these teams play during the season's final month, and the season's dramatic conclusion heightened enthusiasm for the World Series that inevitably followed the championship season.

¹ In 1889, the schedules of the respective leagues did not finish simultaneously in the manner that is common in major league baseball in the twenty-first century. This is because the two leagues, while not exactly at war in the sense of each actively trying to eliminate the other, were two separate organizations, each with its own league offices and league presidents. They were competitors in the business of baseball, rather than partners as the American and National leagues are today. Thus, the leagues played schedules of different lengths, and their schedules finished about a week apart. In addition, teams did not always make up games lost to rain or darkness. In 1889, the Giants played in 126 games, going 83-43, while their World Series opponent, the Bridegrooms, played 137 times, winning 93.

In addition, it obscured the attention of most baseball observers, fans and the press alike, from the most important off-field event of the entire nineteenth century, the decision of the Brotherhood of Professional Ball Players (BPBP) to part ways with the National League and start its own league for the 1890 season. While the Brotherhood had not made its decision public yet, this possibility hovered in the background, like a nightmare waiting to spring from the shadows. In late September and early October, however, most people ignored this issue, entranced by the drama in New York, Brooklyn, St. Louis, and Boston. Finally, the American Association race highlighted an important rivalry shaping the destiny of baseball, that between St. Louis president Chris Von der Ahe and Brooklyn president Charles Byrnes.

All three of these issues, the unceasing search of baseball teams and their owners for more money, the relationship of the players to the teams that employed them, and rivalries between the teams themselves, have deep roots and important consequences. They rate among the central factors shaping baseball in the Gilded Age. In order to comprehend why this is true, we must understand how each of these threads developed during the 1880s, then wound together in 1889 to produce the rebellion of the Brotherhood of Professional Ball Players. Let us begin with some of the relevant pieces of baseball history prior to 1885.

* * * * *

Ideas about how to run the game of baseball, as a business, were still evolving, but a few fundamentals seemed clear by the mid-1880s. As a group, baseball's owners took many of the practices so popular in their business pursuits and began adapting them to the game of baseball in an effort to limit competition, control as large a market share as possible, keep labor under

control, and the like. In the first half of the 1880s, the two major leagues had fielded teams in competition with each other in some cities, such as New York, Philadelphia, and St. Louis. By 1889, this pesky competition was nearly a thing of the past, as major league baseball boasted sixteen teams operating in fifteen different cities. (New York and Brooklyn constituted separate entities until 1898, when Gotham absorbed the City of Churches.) Philadelphia was the only city in which the leagues competed directly.

At the time, these efforts to increase stability through limiting competition were quite important to team owners because team turnover was a chronic problem. Of the eight franchises that founded the National League in 1876, only two, Boston and Chicago, remained in 1889. No fewer than twenty-two clubs had occupied the other six slots in the league over that span. The Association, with its shorter history, had done a bit better, but franchise instability was certainly on the minds of baseball's magnates.² Collectively, they decided that limiting the competition for fans within cities would aid their search for greater profits and greater continuity.

A second issue for owners was their perceived need to tighten control over the labor of their players. Towards that end, major league baseball owners had two measures at their disposal by the end of 1880s that would lead directly to the Brotherhood War of 1890. The first of these, the reserve clause, had existed since 1879 and, over the past decade, baseball owners slowly realized the various ways they might use this instrument to depress player salaries and

² Had the owners been able to see into the future, they would have known this problem was nearly over. Of the eight franchises competing in 1889, five (Boston, Chicago, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, and New York) are still members of the NL, although the Boston club is now the Atlanta Braves and the New York Giants now play in San Francisco. Two other members of today's National League, the Cincinnati Reds and the Brooklyn (now Los Angeles) Dodgers were in place by 1890, so that seven of the eight teams that constituted the NL before the expansion of 1962 were members by that year. The remaining team of the eight, the St. Louis Browns (now Cardinals), arrived in 1892 following the dissolution of the American Association after the 1891 season.

limit player mobility. (More on the reserve clause in the next chapter.) New to their toolbox in 1889 was the Brush Classification Plan, credited to John T. Brush, owner of the National League's Indianapolis Hoosiers. The plan called for a salary scale based on a five-tier classification of player performance, ranging from a minimum of \$1,500 to a maximum of \$2,500. Included in the classification scheme was a clause stating that the classification system would take into account a player's "habits, earnestness, and special qualifications," all nebulous considerations, to say the least, which could limit not only the salaries, but the personal independence of the players as well.³

Baseball's barons had discussed such a plan on and off for several years. Back in 1885, for example, they had discussed a graduated plan for player salaries (discussed in chapter two) as a means to reduce salaries and "to protect their own interests by mutual agreements and concessions." Proponents, worried that only clubs in larger cities would turn a profit under existing conditions, professed a hope that a graduated salary scale would provide incentives for players to improve their play and move up the scale, though once again the "record, habits, & co" of the player would also factor into their salary rating. Technically, the clubs did agree to a simplified version of this scheme, capping salaries at \$2,000, but from the outset it proved unworkable, as there were no penalties for circumventing the rule. However, this did cause significant unease amongst players at the time, as discussed in the next chapter. Other owners called for a simple blanket on top salaries and arbitrary salary reductions of 20-40%, but these calls also went unheeded in 1885. By 1889, however, the owners felt the time was right for

³ Peter Levine, *AG Spalding and the Rise of Baseball: The Promise of American Sport* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 58; John Thorn, *Baseball in the Garden of Eden: The Secret History of the Early Game*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2011), 227-228, 232-233.

revisiting the salary reduction idea, and voted in favor of the Brush Plan.⁴ (For more on the Brush Plan and its consequences, see chapter sixteen.)

Whatever major league owners tried to do to maximize their profits and limit player independence, the one owner seemingly always at the bottom of any plan was Al Spalding of the Chicago White Stockings. One of his hometown newspapers, the *Chicago Daily Tribune*, described him as “endeavoring to create a baseball trust,” while *The Sporting News* had accused him of plans for “one great stock company” and being “a one-league monopolist” throughout the summer of 1887 in regards to a potential scheme for uniting the two major leagues into one.⁵ These plans, first unveiled in 1886, did not come to fruition right away. “President Spalding, of the Chicago Club, is still working on his one-association scheme for next season . . . the exposure of the scheme has killed whatever chance of success it had for next season, but Mr. Spalding is not easily discouraged, and he will stick to his pet theory till the last. The American clubs . . . are a unit in favor of keeping their own organization intact.”⁶ Spalding later saw his wish fulfilled, as we will see, after the demise of the Players League in 1890 and the American Association in 1891.

⁴ “From Providence” M.C.D., *The Sporting Life*, August 26, 1885, 1; “Graded Salaries” Olympic, *The Sporting Life*, August 26, 1885, 1; “Conferees to Meet Monday” NA, *The Sporting Life*, August 26, 1885, 1. The salary limit approved in the winter of 1885 and 1886 technically remained in force even when the National League adopted the Brush Plan for 1889. However, as there were no penalties attached for violating the provisions of the 1885 rule, adherence to the measure was almost non-existent, and players often earned money outside their official salary by various unofficial means. Still, it was a concern to ballplayers throughout this era because, should management ever enforce this rule consistently, it would drastically reduce salaries for some players. “The Base Ball Compact” NA, *The Sporting Life*, October 28, 1885, 1.

⁵ Levine, *AG Spalding and the Rise of Baseball*, 56-57.

⁶ “Caught on the Fly” NA, *The Sporting News*, September 13, 1886, 5.

In addition, it was Spalding, not Brush, who was probably the true author of the Brush Classification Plan to limit player salaries adopted in November of 1888.⁷ Likewise, in 1889 Spalding proposed a plan to codify the financial structure of all of baseball. In July he wrote a letter to Nick Young, president of the National League, proposing a system wherein all baseball leagues, major and minor, would enter into an arrangement featuring the two major leagues at the top and all minor leagues organized into a four-tier structure below. Depending on its classification, each minor league team would limit player salaries to \$60 per month or \$600 per year (class D) to \$200 per month or \$2,000 per year (class A). Furthermore, each league would pay the major leagues \$1,500 to \$2,000 per year, depending on classification, and in return, the major leagues would allow each minor league club to reserve its players, protecting them from having their players enticed away by other teams. The exception was that teams of a higher classification could purchase players from clubs of a lower classification level by giving notice one week in advance and paying \$1,500. Few outside of the sixteen owners of major league teams endorsed Spalding's plan, citing its tendency to enrich a small group at the expense of the rest of organized baseball. The *Chicago Herald* denounced it as a plan for a "baseball trust" and a "scheme for the monopoly of the business."⁸

As one of the prime movers behind the scenes in baseball, Spalding's background merits some description. His rise to influence mirrors that of several of his capitalist brethren in late nineteenth century America, the main difference being in the details rather than the general storyline. Like most of the men known alternately as "captains of industry" or "robber barons,"

⁷ Thorn, *Baseball in the Garden of Eden*, 232-233.

⁸ The description of Spalding's plan and the quoted material is from Levine, 57-58. The plan also garnered criticism from writers F.H. Burnell and Harry Palmer of *The Sporting Life*. "Brunell's Budget," F.H. Brunell, *The Sporting Life*, July 24, 1889, 8, and "Chicago Gleanings" Harry Palmer, *The Sporting Life*, July 24, 1889, 8.

depending on the individual's point of view, Spalding's story was hardly rags to riches, however much he liked pretending that it was. It is more accurate to describe his life with a slight modification of the oft-quoted baseball metaphor, "he was born on third base and went through life thinking he hit a home run." Spalding grew up amongst the mahogany furniture and gold-banded china of his parents' home in Byron, Illinois. For Spalding's father, James, "managing his investments and buying and training his horses seem to have occupied his working hours." Spalding's mother, Harriet, who contributed a large inheritance herself to the family finances from a previous marriage, described James as a man who "took life leisurely, and was prosperous in every way."⁹ Far from being rags to riches, the real story behind Spalding's rise in the business world is worthy of the financial elite of which he was a well-established member by 1889.

It began in true robber baron fashion, by disregarding one contract for another, more advantageous, one. By the conclusion of the 1875 season, baseball observers regarded Spalding as the premier pitcher in the game, based on his record of 54 wins and 5 losses for the Boston Red Stockings, a team so dominant it won 71 games that year against just 8 defeats, including winning all 37 of its home games. Besides Spalding, the Red Stockings lineup featured three other Hall of Fame players, "Orator" Jim O'Rourke, George Wright, and Deacon White, not to mention Cal McVey (lifetime batting average of .346) and Ross Barnes (lifetime batting average of .360). The club was a member of the National Association (NA), a predecessor of the National League that would dissolve following the 1875 campaign. The NA had both eastern and western teams, but the eastern teams dominated the standings, much to the chagrin of Chicago coal magnate William Hulbert, a man described as "rugged, self-willed, blunt and

⁹ Levine, *AG Spalding and the Rise of Baseball*, 3.

determined, but possessed of great executive ability and unflagging energy.” Believing western clubs could succeed, both on the field and in the account books, Hulbert made overtures to Spalding about returning to his native Illinois for a yearly salary of \$2,000 (longtime baseball observer Henry Chadwick claimed it was actually \$4,000), further sweetened by the positions of team captain and field manager, plus 25% of the team’s gate receipts. Despite his association with the Boston club, and the National Association’s prohibition on engaging players already under contract to other clubs, Spalding accepted.¹⁰

When Spalding reached Chicago, he was not alone. With him were three of his old Boston teammates, McVey, White, and Barnes. This was part of Hulbert’s plan, as well. In his communications with Spalding, Hulbert wrote, “bring with you to Chicago the pick of the Eastern club talent, or as much of it as you can induce to come, and I shall be in a position to offer you such inducements as I think will be more than satisfactory to yourself, and fully so to the players you bring with you.” Spalding also netted two of the top players of the Philadelphia Athletics for his new employer in the Windy City, Ezra Sutton and Adrian “Cap” Anson, although Sutton later had second thoughts and returned to the Athletics.¹¹ This was, without a doubt, one of the greatest transfers of talent in the entire nineteenth century, ranking with the

¹⁰ Levine, *AG Spalding and the Rise of Baseball*, 22-23; “From Chicago” Harry Palmer, *The Sporting Life*, February 2, 1887, 2; “America’s National Game” Harry Palmer, *Outing*, (July 1888), 353-354; “Chadwick’s Chat” Henry Chadwick, *The Sporting Life*, February 9, 1887, 2. It is also worth noting that in the early years of the game, the position of field manager was quite different from what it is in the twenty-first century. The team captain typically performed the duties of today’s manager. The manager of the 1870s was essentially a business manager, sometimes the owner of the team, who oversaw ticket receipts, corresponded with other managers to set up exhibition and regular games, kept track of the team’s finances, and the like. For more, see Chris Jaffe, *Evaluating Baseball’s Managers: A History and Analysis of Performance in the Major Leagues, 1876-2008*, (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, 2010), 65-66.

¹¹ Palmer, “America’s National Game,” 354.

exodus of Louisville's entire corps of quality players to Pittsburgh after the 1899 season, or the move of Buffalo's "Big Four" to Detroit for 1886.¹²

The deal went down in, at best, a quasi-legal fashion that was emblematic of the business world of Gilded Age America, although the exact details of what really did go down depend on which baseball writer the reader would like to credit. According to Chicagoan Harry Palmer, (who was, admittedly, Spalding's mouthpiece in the press) Hulbert was angry over losing out on a third baseman and shortstop named Davy Force. In the days of the National Association, Force was, true to his last name, a force when at bat, as well as enjoying a reputation as a nice defensive player. In the five years the National Association lasted, he put up OPS+ numbers of 96, 179, 137, 113, and 140. Hulbert wanted to bring Force to Chicago very badly, and believed he had signed "Wee Davy" (his official playing measurements were a height of five-foot-four and a weight of 130 pounds) to a contract for 1876, but was, in his eyes at least, cheated out of

¹² The difference is that in both the Louisville and Buffalo cases, the team was about to disband. In the Louisville case, the owner of the team, Barney Dreyfuss, also had bought into ownership of the Pittsburgh Pirates and served that club as its president. With Louisville set to disband, he transferred most of the best players to Pittsburgh, including Fred Clarke and Honus Wagner, easily the best player of the first decade of the 20th century. This situation, of one man owning shares in more than one franchise, was quite common in the 1890s, just as in the corporate world, single individuals sat on the board of directors of countless corporations. According to Harold Seymour's research, in fact, by the year 1900 every single owner of a National League franchise actually owned shares in more than one franchise. The consequences of this for competitive balance, or in this case the lack thereof, are not hard to imagine. In the Buffalo case, one team, the Detroit Wolverines, purchased the entire Buffalo franchise in order to obtain the quartet of Dan Brouthers, Hardy Richardson, Jack Rowe, and Deacon White. However, Buffalo continued to exist as a franchise, fielding a replacement team of marginal players. Harold Seymour, *Baseball: The Early Years*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960), 170, 303-304. Speculation regarding such a heist smoldered all through the off season, with *The Sporting Life* advocating that one franchise acquire the entire quartet, as Detroit eventually did, in order to challenge the strongest clubs in the league, the Chicago White Stockings and the New York Giants. As Chicago had just finished with 87 wins against 25 losses, and New York at 85-27, this may not have been poor advice, considering the third place club of 1885, the Philadelphia Quakers, had managed all of 56 wins and finished 30 games back of Chicago. New York's winning percentage of .758 remains the best ever compiled by a second place team. "Notes and Comments," NA, *The Sporting Life*, October 28, 1885, 3.

getting his man when the Philadelphia Athletics swooped in and also signed Force to a contract fraudulently dated before the Chicago deal. When he took his complaint to the National Association's annual meeting, Hulbert discovered that Philadelphia had packed the meeting against him, and that he would not prevail. His anger, according to Harry Wright, was volcanic. "Hulbert was a sight to look upon that day. He was simply one magnificent spectacle of rage and wrathful indignation—a thunder cloud of suppressed fury that it did me good to look upon."¹³

That solon of baseball writers, Henry Chadwick, recalled things a bit differently. In Chadwick's recollection, it was Chicago, not Philadelphia, which had tried the nefarious trick of antedating its contract with Force; it was the fact that he had failed to sign Force legally, not the rage over Philadelphia cheating him, which fueled Hulbert's anger all through the 1875 season. Bill James sides with Palmer, however. He asserts that Chicago had indeed signed Force first, but that when a Philadelphia Athletics executive, Mr. Spring, became the head of the National Association, he called another meeting at which the Judiciary Committee reversed its old decision.¹⁴ Al Spalding also claimed that Philadelphia had acted unjustly, not Chicago, although as an interested party, perhaps his words require one or more grains of salt.¹⁵ Whatever the truth, it is safe to say that Hulbert's ambition led to what happened next.

Chicago's coal baron plotted revenge over this "outrage." He started a correspondence with Spalding to try to get the star pitcher to sign a deal and come to the Windy City in 1876. The two men exchanged letters through the early months of the 1875, and in June (during the season and therefore in violation of the prohibition on negotiating with players already under

¹³ "From Chicago" Harry Palmer, *The Sporting Life*, February 2, 1887, 2.

¹⁴ Bill James, *The New Bill James Historical Baseball Abstract: The Classic, Completely Revised*, (New York: The Free Press, 2001), 33.

¹⁵ "From Chicago" Harry Palmer, *The Sporting Life*, February 16, 1887, 2.

contract), Hulbert made his move. He traveled to Boston to meet Spalding in secret, hoping to lure him back to the West. He got to the Hub City at 10 PM and traveled straight to his hotel, meeting Spalding by appointment there. They talked all through the night, until 4 AM, at which time Spalding agreed to sign a Chicago contract. The next morning, Hulbert inked Ross Barnes to a Chicago pact by 9 AM, Cal McVey by 10, and Deacon White by 11. Later that same day, Boston management discovered in the Boston morning papers that Hulbert was in its city, and immediately located the Chicagoan, wining and dining him for two consecutive days in hopes of keeping him away from their players. “For two days they never left him; invited him to dinner, to breakfast and to supper; took him to the theatre, slept with him, and froze to him tighter’n a brother.”¹⁶

It was not enough. At the end of the two days, Hulbert and Spalding were to meet at the Old Colony rail depot and catch a train for Philadelphia, in order to meet with Anson and Sutton and complete the talent heist. The magnate was not as enamored with these men as with the Boston quartet, but getting even with Philadelphia for Force by swiping two of their best players in return seemed justified to Hulbert. At first, things did not go according to plan. When Hulbert arrived to meet Spalding at the depot, Boston’s team president and secretary were still with him. Spalding hid in a baggage car until the train made it out of Boston, then returned to coach and located Hulbert, who was reportedly shaking in fear that Spalding had changed his mind. The pair reunited, then they proceeded southward and signed their men in Philadelphia, with the understanding that everyone would keep their negotiations secret.¹⁷

The secret lasted all of two weeks. As all these events transpired in the middle of the 1875 season, fan reaction in Beantown was unmerciful towards the “secessionists,” while Boston

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

management hatched all kinds of schemes to try to get Spalding and friends back into the fold. Boston's owners also took heat from their fans over not paying their star players enough to keep them from deserting. None of the schemes worked, although after Ezra Sutton decided to return to Philadelphia, Cap Anson wavered and nearly decided to join him. Chicago dominated the new National League in 1876 with a 52-14 record and, despite the significant cash outlay to draw the "Big Four" plus Anson to the shores of Lake Michigan, the team turned a profit during the nation's independence centennial year.¹⁸

As the one player who, in 1889, stood most firmly on the side of the National League in its dispute with the Brotherhood, we should also introduce Cap Anson and describe his story in some detail. Although Anson was just 23 at the time of the 1876 move to Chicago, his connection with Spalding was already well established. Back in 1870, when Spalding pitched for the Rockford Forest City club, the team played an exhibition series in Anson's hometown of Marshalltown, Iowa. Anson played so well that Rockford offered him a contract for the following season, which he accepted rather than continue his on-again, off-again efforts at attending the state college in Iowa City, today the University of Iowa. He thus embarked on a professional career in which he played regularly for 27 seasons, not retiring until 1897. His association with Spalding strengthened further in 1874 when Spalding, now with Boston, and Anson, now with Philadelphia, participated in an exhibition of baseball in the British Isles. Boston's manager, Harry Wright, was born in Sheffield, and wanted to prove the superiority of the American game over cricket to his former country (and perhaps his father Sam, as well, who was president of New York's St. George Cricket Club).¹⁹

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Levine, *AG Spalding and the Rise of Baseball*, 18-19; Anson's biography at the Society for American Baseball Research's (SABR) website, <http://sabr.org/bioproj/person/9b42f875>,

The tour of the British Isles took Spalding's Boston club and Anson's Philadelphia nine to Liverpool, Manchester, Sheffield, London, Nottingham, Dublin, Glasgow, and other stops in Great Britain. "The object of the voyage is to give Englishmen a practical illustration of the beauties claimed for the American game." The Brits proved gracious hosts, and a few commented favorably on the "scientific" nature of baseball, but they remained largely unconvinced of baseball's future in Britain, preferring the "dignity, manliness, and system" of their own native sport. The duo might have failed to wean the British from their allegiance to cricket, but Anson's friendship with Spalding proved enduring, and Anson became the field manager of the Chicago White Stockings by 1879 and eventually owned a small share of the team's stock.²⁰

Besides his longevity and excellence on the field, baseball historians today associate Anson with two other rather unseemly things during his playing and managing career. His ability to belittle and berate both opposing players and umpires was legendary. Although most baseball records give his nickname as "Cap" for captain, or sometimes "Pop" because he managed to play to such an advanced age, many in the 1880s nicknamed him "the Baby" because he whined and kicked so energetically against umpires. Because he was successful as a manager, other teams copied these practices and took them to a level Anson never reached. St. Louis Browns captain, and future Chicago White Sox owner Charles Comiskey, excelled at this practice as well, and Comiskey's teams likewise had great success on the field. The result was that by the 1880s and 1890s, the game on the field was rowdy in the extreme, featuring foul play,

accessed January 14, 2014. The England tour is described in "The Trip To England In 1874" NA, *Spalding's Official Base Ball Guide, 1889*, (Chicago and New York: A.G. Spalding & Bros, 1889), 91-93.

²⁰ "The United States" NA, *London Times*, August 4, 1874, 3; Levine, *AG Spalding and the Rise of Baseball*, 18-19.

foul language, dishonest tactics, and frequent on-field violence against both opponents and umpires. Observers of the day recognized the change, and many did not like it. On June 24, 1883, *The Sporting Life* criticized a Philadelphia news writer for disparaging umpires in print, thus serving to encourage rowdyism, and that same day the paper also drew attention to managers removing their teams from the field of play and refusing to continue the game when they felt particularly aggrieved by an umpiring decision.²¹

The second black mark on Anson's record is his role in establishing segregation in major league baseball. In 1883 he nearly refused to play the Toledo club, set to join the American Association the following year, in an exhibition because the Blue Stockings featured an African American, Moses "Fleet" Walker, as their catcher. Anson's club played that day when threatened with the loss of gate revenue if they refused, but Anson refused to play against teams with black players in the future, and thus, the color line became part of major league baseball for more than six decades, and part of minor league baseball as well for nearly that long. While Anson was not alone in his desire for segregation by any means, the influence and prestige of his name helped give segregationists in baseball the ammunition to draw the color barrier.²²

Spalding, meanwhile, continued up the corporate ladder as his playing career wound down. Having appeared in only four games in 1877, and just one in 1878, by 1883 he was club president of the White Stockings (Hulbert died in April, 1882), and his sporting goods company was thriving by supplying equipment to baseball teams across the nation. By now, Spalding had realized one of capitalism's eternal truths. Any worker, no matter how skilled at his or her craft,

²¹ "On the Fly" NA, *The Sporting Life*, June 24, 1883, 5. For Anson's career as an umpire baiter, or "kicker" in the parlance of the day, see Jaffe, *Evaluating Baseball's Managers*, 66-67, and Anson's SABR biography. For rowdyism in 1880s and 1890s baseball, see Bill James, *The New Bill James Historical Baseball Abstract*, 52-54, as well as chapter ten of this dissertation.

²² "Toledo and Fleet Walker" John Husman, Society for American Baseball Research, *Nineteenth Century Notes*, (Spring 2010), 4-8.

was still a worker, subject to the financial whims of the employer. The best route to wealth and power lay, not with the most skilled performer on the field, but with the most skilled performer in the realm of ownership and management. Spalding even developed his own marketing arm for his sporting goods business, *Spalding's Official Base Ball Guide*, published yearly. It contained statistical records and summaries of the recently completed season, to be sure, but also advertised Spalding's goods, bore his name, picture, and autograph on the cover, and disparaged the products of competitors.

Spalding "won" the right to publish the official National League book in 1876, at the insistence of his club's owner, Hulbert. Although the contract merely stated Spalding had the right to publish the official league book (of rules of play and the league's constitution), and while the baseball guide was not an official National League publication, Spalding's obfuscation of this fact by using the word "official" on the cover went unchallenged until 1882. By then, the public mind already associated his name and products with being the official representative of major league baseball.²³

The same was true regarding the Spalding baseball and, later, Spalding's uniforms. At the NL's yearly meetings, the league consistently voted (including Spalding, who voted as secretary and then, after Hulbert's death, president of the Chicago club) to adopt Spalding's baseball as the official ball for all National League games. This allowed the guide to trumpet its ball as an official product, and allowed Spalding to utilize one of the time-honored techniques of professional advertisers: allowing normal people to take part in greatness through association. By 1884, the guide listed other leagues that used the Spalding baseball as a further testimonial (five of them in the 1886 guide, those five being the National League, New York State League,

²³ Levine, *AG Spalding and the Rise of Baseball*, 75-76.

Eastern League, New England League, and the College Association²⁴), and by 1890, it touted the advanced technology used in their manufacture. The ball's patented plastic cement, the guide claimed, "makes it more elastic. . . . soft to the hands, and at the same time . . . retains its perfect shape." Spalding's catalog for his sporting goods also received free publicity when, for example, *The Sporting Life* mentioned it in its columns in the spring of 1886.²⁵ By that year, the catalog was even offering a newly invented baseball item, sliding pants.²⁶

Like any good captain of industry, however, Spalding did not stop there. Instead, he continued to achieve both vertical and horizontal integration of his company. Horizontal integration, the practice of increasing market share through expanding production, buying out competitors, and so forth, came as more and more leagues began using his products. However, Spalding also engaged in vertical integration, controlling more than one link in a product's chain of production. Not only did Spalding sell balls, bats, and uniforms, by 1879, his company manufactured all these products for itself, with *The Sporting News* estimating a production level of 1 million bats yearly by 1887. Soon, AG Spalding & Bros. also manufactured bicycles, skates, golf equipment, tennis rackets, dumbbells, caps, uniforms for multiple sports, and hunting equipment and clothing. Indeed, AG Spalding & Bros. even designed the original basketball used by Dr. James Naismith in Springfield, Massachusetts. As did many of his fellow tycoons, in 1892 Spalding reincorporated his company in New Jersey to take advantage of that state's lenient corporate laws, with the venture capitalized at \$4 million. He may not have been Andrew Carnegie, but for a \$3,800 investment made just 16 years earlier, it was impressive growth,

²⁴ "Something Extraordinary" NA, *The Sporting Life*, March 3, 1886, 2.

²⁵ Levine, *AG Spalding and the Rise of Baseball*, 77-78; "Something Extraordinary" NA, *The Sporting Life*, March 3, 1886, 2.

²⁶ "From Chicago" Remlap, *The Sporting Life*, March 3, 1886, 5. Remlap was Harry Palmer, who signed his articles for *The Sporting Life* with his name spelled backwards for a time.

demonstrating both Spalding's business acumen and the power of using an insider position to secure business contracts.²⁷

* * * * *

These events, then, helped set the stage for the break between players and owners in 1889. As Spalding consolidated his emerging empire of sporting goods, he also led the faction of National League owners who hoped to use the reserve rule and the Brush Classification Plan to expand their control of major league baseball by tightening their grips on player salaries and players' freedom to choose where and with whom to play. This effort, however, met resistance. The players, led by John Ward and the Brotherhood of Professional Base Ball Players, the organization of players of which Ward was president, had other ideas. Even as the 1889 season wound towards its dramatic conclusion, there were events unfolding in the background that would shake baseball to its very foundations.

Ward and the BPBP spent much of the 1889 season attempting to negotiate with baseball's moguls over the issues raised by, and abuses of, the Brush Plan. The owners spent the season ignoring those attempts. Perhaps the owners underestimated the organization of the Brotherhood, or perhaps they decided it was time for a showdown with the players and provoked confrontation intentionally. Either way, they refused Ward and his Brothers a hearing, and Ward and other BPBP members began reaching out to interested financiers not yet involved with the game, but with money to fund a new baseball league. In the process, they decided to challenge not just the Brush Plan, but the reserve rule and the entire financial structure of baseball as well.

²⁷ Levine, *AG Spalding and the Rise of Baseball*, 78-81.

In order to understand why and how such a dramatic break came about, it is necessary to consider how relations between players and owners reached such a low point. The first step of this story is to understand what the reserve clause was, and why it became so important in major league baseball at this early and formative point in its history.

Chapter 2

The Reserve Clause

Major League Baseball's official historian, John Thorn, once described the evolution of the player-management relationship in baseball by writing:

Earlier attempts to monetize the game had come first through owning the field and charging admission, then by owning the clubs and leasing the services of star players who would serve as the attraction. Men like the Wrights and Spalding and Reach next thought to capitalize upon the game by selling its implements of play, creating baseball equipment manufactories that might one day monopolize a disaggregated but nationally vibrant marketplace. Finally, those in club management thought they might insulate themselves from competition by controlling the raw material—by owning the players outright as if they too were sporting goods, the exponents of play if not exactly its implements.¹

In their efforts to achieve this level of control, no tool of management was more potent than the reserve clause.

Prior to 1879, standard practice was that players signed contracts for a single playing season, which lasted about six months. At the conclusion of the contract, they were free to sign with whomever they chose for the next season. From the perspective of the team owners, this had both advantages and disadvantages, but by 1879, experience seemed to indicate that the disadvantages were more numerous. It was true that this system of one-year contracts allowed them to raid other teams freely, and allowed the possibility of building an imposing team in a single off-season by signing talented players away from competitors, as Hulbert had done with

¹ Thorn, *Baseball in the Garden of Eden*, 210.

Spalding and associates in 1876. Talented players came at a price, however, and by 1879, many owners had concluded that this system was unsustainable, or perhaps insufficiently profitable would be a better term, from a business standpoint. National League owners first tried to ameliorate this problem of free agency among players by passing a rule stating that clubs could not negotiate with the players of other clubs during the season. They intended this rule to prohibit the commonplace practice of teams negotiating agreements for the following season with opposing players whenever their respective clubs met on the field. This did not solve the basic problem posed by a free market economy, however. As long as the players could sign with the team of their choice for their fair market value, keeping player salaries in check, and the labor force under their collective boot heels, remained agonizingly out of reach for baseball's magnates.

National League owners' answer, spearheaded by Boston's parsimonious and baronial Arthur Soden, was the first version of the reserve clause in 1879.² The terms of the reserve clause were simple enough. It gave each club the right to "reserve" five players, meaning that when the player signed a contract, while they signed for that season only, the club reserved the

² See Soden's SABR biography for more details, at <http://sabr.org/bioproj/person/a1b2e0d0>, accessed May 22, 2014. Describing Soden as parsimonious is charitable. According to his biography, he booked the cheapest hotels for his players to stay in while on the road. He forced Boston's players to collect tickets before games, cut the grass of the ballpark, battle fans to retrieve foul balls, pay for their uniforms, and pay the cleaning costs of their uniforms. Soden also charged the wives of the players full price to attend games, while eliminating the press section in order to seat more paying customers. He offered his players a bonus if they could make their shoelaces last for two years rather than one. In 1887, he refused to split the gate revenue from Boston's Labor Day game with Philadelphia (it was tradition that for holiday games, which typically drew substantial crowds, the two teams split the gate) because Labor Day was made a holiday after the schedule's creation. "From The Hub" Mugwump, *The Sporting Life*, September 14, 1887, 3. Soden comes across as about as dislikable a man as there was in baseball in the 1880s, perhaps deserving of comparisons with someone such as Henry Clay Frick. Mugwump was the pen name of a Harvard graduate and assistant city editor of the *Boston Globe*, William D. Sullivan.

exclusive right to negotiate with that player the following season. (This was out of fear that the more profitable teams would outbid the others for their top players if the other teams could not protect those players in some way, as well as to depress the earning power of the best players, who could no longer negotiate with other clubs for their services.³) Essentially, it meant that every contract signed by a reserved player was a one-year deal with a team option for the following season. Because the terms were the same in the contract each year, with the option of reservation renewing each year, the reserved player was now the possession of his club permanently. All other NL clubs were bound to respect the reserve lists of their competitors, and could not play games, regular or exhibition, against teams featuring a player reserved by one club but attempting to play for another. The only way for a player to escape was to secure a release from the reserving team, but even then, upon signing his next contract, he would fall under the umbrella of the reserve clause once again. Even this escape route was not a clear path, however, as any other team in the league could claim a released player within ten days of the release, thus obtaining his services and the right to reserve him in the future.

In addition, two other little-known aspects of the original reserve rule are interesting. First, it was secret. The owners who agreed on the rule in 1879 did not publicize it, and the rule did not actually appear in the language of player contracts until 1887 (see chapter fourteen). It was also an *ex post facto* rule, meaning that the league owners implemented the rule for 1879 after already agreeing to player contracts for the 1879 season. The players had signed their 1879 contracts without the knowledge that the reserve rule existed, yet the owners applied the reserve provision to those contracts.⁴ Rather than deny the secret nature of these proceedings, the

³ Seymour, *Baseball*, 108.

⁴ Thorn, *Baseball in the Garden of Eden*, 172; Seymour, *Baseball*, 108. The prohibition of exhibition games was no small matter. Teams often played exhibitions outside of their regular

architects of the rule fully admitted to such practices. A.G. Mills, another of the reserve clause's creators, said as much in a letter to baseball's senior sportswriter of the era, Henry Chadwick. When Chadwick asked about the history of the reserve rule, Mills answered that, prior to 1883, "such reservation did exist to a limited extent, but it was accompanied by a secret agreement between the clubs, whereby each club obligated itself to abstain from negotiating or contracting with certain specified players at the time under contract with the other clubs."⁵

In order to understand the relationship between players and their teams more precisely, this is also a good time to note that the status of major league baseball players does not exactly translate into modern terms. Although both the National League and American Association claimed the title of "major leagues," other leagues, even if known officially as minor leagues, were not necessarily inferior. In the twenty-first century, most minor league teams are members of an organization headed by a major league team. The minor league team does not actually own its players, the major league team does, and the major league team controls the movement of those players throughout its organization. This was not the case in the nineteenth century. At that time, minor league teams did not affiliate with major league teams. They were their own entities, had control of their own players and finances, and their leagues operated independently of major league baseball for the most part. They might sell players to major league teams, but these sales were voluntary business transactions, not forced moves dictated by the major league teams.

schedules to bring in more revenue. During the 1879 season, for instance, teams played, on average, 78 games against other league teams even though the league schedule stretched over more than 150 calendar days. The off days from the league schedule allowed for travel and exhibition matches. These exhibitions could be quite lucrative, especially when teams from the American Association played their counterparts in the National League, as in the yearly matchups between the St. Louis Browns and St. Louis Maroons or Philadelphia Quakers and Philadelphia Athletics.

⁵ "A New Point" A.G. Mills, *The Sporting Life*, January 25, 1888, 1.

This meant that not all of the best baseball players were major league players in the 1880s. A high quality minor league featured many players who were every bit as good as most major league players were, and especially in the early 1880s, a few of these minor leagues offered their men comparable pay as well. To cite one example, a sportswriter once asked Louisville Colonels owner Zach Phelps if he meant to acquire a pitcher from the Northwestern League during the winter of 1887 and 1888. Phelps replied, “Well, no. The Northwestern League pays higher salaries than the American Association does, and it is difficult to obtain a man from that body. We are likely to look somewhere else.”⁶ This reality presented major league owners with a quandary. What happened if one of their players, upset by the confinement of the reserve clause, decided to sign with a minor league team that offered him a similar salary but without the reserve clause to hold him in place from year to year? The owners eventually arrived at the obvious answer: extend the reserve clause to include more players, and enter into agreements with minor leagues that required them to respect the reserve rule.

This took some time, as the National League had several difficulties to overcome. At first only five players per team fell under this provision, the rest retaining their traditional freedom to sign with the team of their choosing for each new season. The teams selected which five men to reserve, and while the teams did not write the reservation into the player’s contract, eventually sports newspapers began publishing who the men were, so it was no secret. In 1879, however, players in other leagues remained unaffected and, as mentioned previously, there were plenty of minor league teams that played very competitive baseball and paid reasonable salaries. Teams in these leagues were more than happy to acquire top talent and were under no obligation to respect the reserve lists of National League franchises. The American Association was a case

⁶ “Falls City Gossip” J.A., *The Sporting Life*, November 16, 1887, 5.

in point. In 1882, the Association announced its intention to compete with the National League as a major league and immediately began trying to lure National League players into its new circuit with generous contracts and no reserve clause. It also offered the spectators of its games tickets for just twenty-five cents, as opposed to the NL, which had set ticket prices at fifty cents, in an effort to build its fan base, especially in cities where it competed directly with the League.

National League owners eventually overcame these problems, however. They achieved peace with the American Association in 1883, although at the cost of acknowledging the new league's status as a fellow major league. The nation's economy appeared fully recovered from the Panic of 1873, and it appeared there might be room for more than one professional league after all, provided the leagues could minimize competition within cities through granting local monopolies. Their agreement, signed after a meeting known as the Harmony Conference, also included one of the strongest minor leagues of the day, the Northwest League. Under the Tripartite Pact, later known as the National Agreement, all three leagues agreed to abide by the reserve rule and respect each other's player contracts.

The Harmony Conference also established a blacklist for players who tried to flout the reserve clause by leaving their club in order to sign in leagues outside the National Agreement, and this combination of the National Agreement and the blacklist eliminated both of the primary routes by which players had previously escaped being reserved. Not only was the blacklist public knowledge, as sporting papers such as *The Sporting Life* published who was on the list each week, but the terms of the blacklist were, like so many aspects of baseball's disciplinary system, rather arbitrary. By 1886, the American Association's constitution, for instance, stated in Section 39 that the "Association may also in its discretion inflict upon any player such penalty as it may consider proper under the circumstances who at any time may have been guilty of

dishonorable action.”⁷ This included the potential of blacklisting them, of course. The Harmony Conference also increased the number of players falling under the umbrella of the reserve clause. Both the National League and the American Association upped the number of players each team could reserve to eleven, as the advantages that management obtained from the reserve system became more obvious. Later, the number of reserves per team rose again, to twelve in 1886 and fourteen in 1887, which in this era meant essentially the team’s entire roster.⁸

Teams did not hesitate to blacklist players, either. In 1887, the American Association adjusted its rules to allow more latitude in applying the blacklist. At its spring meeting, the Association’s moguls amended Section 33 of their constitution to read, “and in case any player under reserve shall willfully hold off and refuse to sign a regular contract with the club that has him reserved for the purpose of harassing the club, or compelling them to increase his salary . . . shall, on satisfactory evidence being furnished from the club so engaged, be placed upon the black-list . . .” On paper, at least, players trying to hold out for more remuneration now risked losing their career and livelihood.⁹ Even Chicago’s Al Spalding, staunch supporter of the reserve though he was, thought the rule draconian. “The American Association has gone altogether too far in passing a resolution to blacklist reserved players if they refuse to sign a contract. That’s going too far and will be apt to cause trouble.”¹⁰ As F.H. Brunell pointed out, however, this was an about face on Spalding’s part, as were so many of his statements. Just three years prior, he voted for the Day Amendment (along with other leading lights in the National League, such as

⁷ “Threetees’ Meditations” TTT, *The Sporting Life*, March 17, 1886, 2. TTT was Baltimore sportswriter Albert Mott.

⁸ Seymour, *Baseball*, 108-109; Thorn, *Baseball in the Garden of Eden*, 174-175. A typical team of 1887 featured a starting eight players in the field, two or three substitute players, most of whom were catchers, and three regular pitchers with a fourth or fifth man pitching occasionally. People often called these extra pitchers “change pitchers.”

⁹ “A Blow At The Dead-Heads” NA, *The Sporting News*, March 12, 1887, 1.

¹⁰ “Base-Ball” NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, March 15, 1887, 3.

Day, of course, but also Arthur Soden of Boston) against the reserve clause jumpers to the Union Association, which stated, “all men reserved by a club party to the National Agreement, not reporting to the club reserving them by April 1, should be blacklisted, and club party to the National Agreement has any power to engage or reinstate such a player after April 1, 1884.” Spalding either had learned his lesson from 1884, or was being duplicitous. Knowing Spalding’s character, either one was equally likely. As Brunell put it, “It’s quite a nice thing to go back among the returns, when the League-ites hide their cloven feet and get on a gaudy platform of innocence and justice.”¹¹

Even among the teams of the Association, it was controversial. Originally, only the New York Metropolitans opposed the resolution, largely due to the influence of manager O.P. Caylor, with Brooklyn and Cleveland wavering, but Chris Von der Ahe of St. Louis succeeded in pushing it through.¹² The sporting press was mum on whether or not Von der Ahe had the backing of general Philip Sheridan on this measure, although the old soldier did attend the meeting, remarking favorably on the game and the fitness of baseball players for service should the need arise.¹³

It seems that almost no one, outside of the six Association owners who voted for the amendment, thought the change for the better. *The Sporting Life* minced no words in its description of the new rule, lambasting it as both illegal and stupid. “As a matter of fact the amendment is altogether illegal alike in common law and under the National Agreement. Refusing to sign a contract is not an offence in any sense of the word, and therefore is not punishable, and any player blacklisted under the amendment would have ample cause for legal

¹¹ “From Cleveland” F.H. Brunell, *The Sporting Life*, March 30, 1887, 4; “The Weak Spot” F.H. Brunell, *The Sporting Life*, April 20, 1887, 5.

¹² “The Association” F.H. Brunell, *The Sporting Life*, March 16, 1887, 1.

¹³ “Chadwick’s Chat” Henry Chadwick, *The Sporting Life*, March 16, 1887, 3.

action.” The owners trying to make the rule stick operated on the supposition that putting a player on the reserve list was the legal equivalent of signing him to a contract, and these men “fail to recognize there is a vast difference between the two, and that a player not under contract, although reserved, is not amenable to discipline. . . . The player so reserved is, of course, unable to sign elsewhere, but the reserving club has no control over him, and cannot discipline him in any way until he is under contract . . .” Finally, the amendment injured the Association in the opinion of both the public and the players. “Aside from the question of legality such a law will do the Association considerable harm, alike in public estimation and in the goodwill of the players, who have been hitherto, as a body, rather partial to the liberal Association. The amendment to Section 33 is calculated to bring the Association into odium with players and public alike, and its adoption was contrary to good business policy.”¹⁴

By 1887, some baseball observers thought the practice of blacklisting might be obsolete, anyway, as “its primary object was the suppression of criminal crookedness, but it has been abused in its application to minor offenses” and they worried how it would stand up to a legal challenge, should such a challenge ever arise. (In fact, one almost did. In 1887, the Pennsylvania state legislature considered a bill to ban the practice. As it only applied in Pennsylvania, however, and the penalties for violating the act were easy to evade and not very stiff, the bill made only the slightest of ripples in baseball circles.¹⁵) Some also held the opinion that it was unnecessary for discipline, when fines could accomplish the same result without the negative side effect of the team losing the services of its blacklisted player.¹⁶ Despite such concerns, however, the practice continued.

¹⁴ “An Association Mistake” NA, *The Sporting Life*, March 16, 1887, 4.

¹⁵ “Much Ado About Nothing” NA, *The Sporting Life*, March 9, 1887, 1.

¹⁶ “From Baltimore” TTT, *The Sporting Life*, January 19, 1887, 2.

O.P. Caylor, one of the nation's best-known sportswriters and also the sole delegate to the Association's convention who voted against changing Section 33 to broaden the uses of the blacklist, was another who thought teams abused the proper use of the blacklist all too often. "There should be an application of that severe punishment only in case of extreme offences. It is hardly probable that the cause of base ball with the public will be subserved or bettered by taking up the blacklist shackle every time a player gets a little unruly. The law is already unpopular and it should be carefully guarded."¹⁷ As a manager, Caylor certainly believed that players asked for extortionate salaries from time to time, but like Spalding, believed that the Association's approach in this case was like fighting cancer with a chainsaw. Another of the game's venerable authorities, Philadelphia Quakers manager Harry Wright, sustained Caylor. "I think this blacklisting business is being carried entirely too far, and has become so common that it has almost lost its terrors to the players. To be effective it should be used only in cases where contracts had been deliberately broken, or where the player had been convicted of dishonest playing, and then I think it should be enforced fearlessly and finally."¹⁸

In Chicago, Harry Palmer agreed. He called the Association's decision "schoolboyish" and feared it had "brought down the earnest condemnation of all thinking friends of the national game." If enforced, it would "prove injurious to the interests of the game at large" and "foster the growth of elements most dangerous to the structure of our national game." Palmer stated it was no surprise that the ballplayers had formed a union (see chapter four) when faced with such heavy-handed action on the part of their employers.¹⁹ Fortunately, it only took a few weeks before the Association's managers realized this Neanderthal approach to the salary question

¹⁷ "Caylor's Screed" O.P. Caylor, *The Sporting Life*, March 16, 1887, 5.

¹⁸ "Chadwick's Chat" Henry Chadwick, *The Sporting Life*, March 30, 1887, 2.

¹⁹ "From Chicago" Harry Palmer, *The Sporting Life*, March 30, 1887, 3.

would not answer. “It will cause no trouble, for the reason that it will not be enforced. The Association managers have tumbled to the blunder they made, and even if the amendment is not repealed it will become a dead letter.”²⁰

This was for the best, as even A.G. Mills, former National League president and one of the architects of the reserve rule in the first place, thought that such tyrannical behavior by management could only do damage to the game. While pledging his continued allegiance to the reserve rule, “the mainstay of professional base ball,” he reminded readers that “the substance of the rule is that no club shall negotiate with a reserved player excepting only the club reserving him.” The problem was,

some club managers have negotiated with and made offers to players reserved by other clubs, thus committing a plain violation of the rule. What has the aggrieved club manager done about it? Has he taken his fraudulent partner by the throat and demanded that the penalty of a heavy fine or expulsion be adjudged against him? Not at all. Instead he has actually legislated to inflict upon the unoffending player the very punishment due the offending club manager . . . no possible excuse can be framed for this utterly unjust and suicidal scheme of blacklisting a player for refusing to contract with his club under the circumstances cited.²¹

Abused or not, when combined with the reserve clause, the blacklist was a potent weapon in limiting the freedom of players to realize their free market value. In using such measures, baseball owners were acting in imitation of the leaders of the business world. Contrary to the views of some, it would be a misrepresentation to call the American economy of the late nineteenth century true free market or *laissez faire* capitalism. Protective tariffs spared American industry from nearly all foreign competition. Employers could count on the courts to rule in their favor in nearly all labor disputes, and in those cases when the plight of working people became so desperate that they struck anyway, state or national troops were usually

²⁰ “It Will Not be Enforced” NA, *The Sporting Life*, March 30, 1887, 1.

²¹ “Mills’ Views” A.G. Mills, *The Sporting Life*, April 6, 1887, 1.

available to put down this labor “unrest” and help employers break unions. Government grants of vast portions of the public domain, most notably to transcontinental railroads, the brutal, inhuman, hellish prison labor system employed throughout the South, the peonage and debt slavery of the sharecropping system, the lack of laws regulating trusts, pools, and holding companies, the State Department’s willingness to interfere diplomatically and militarily in the affairs of foreign nations to protect US corporations, the list of distortions of a true free market economy goes on and on.

Although its methods were markedly more peaceful than most, baseball surely ranks among the businesses most successful in disciplining labor and avoiding the vagaries of the free market. Along with the reserve clause and the blacklist, it had fines, suspensions, temperance oaths, at times a salary limit, and the potential of release from a major league club. Some teams even enforced bed checks on their players, and from the 1886 season forward, Al Spalding in Chicago hired Pinkerton detectives to ensure his players abstained from alcohol consumption.²² Other owners did the same, on and off. By 1886, both leagues required players to supply uniforms out of their own pockets, the Cincinnati Red Stockings of the American Association appearing relatively magnanimous when the club offered its players an additional uniform for road games at club expense in 1887.²³ Teams achieved all of this through ownership’s control of player contracts, largely thanks to the reserve clause.

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²² Warren Goldstein, *Playing for Keeps: A History of Early Baseball*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), 150.

²³ “Notes and Comments” NA, *The Sporting Life*, March 17, 1886, 3; “Notes and Comments” NA, *The Sporting Life*, January 26, 1887, 3.

The legality of the reserve clause was something baseball observers debated. In 1887, the *Chicago Daily Tribune* asked a prominent Chicago lawyer to examine the clause. This man believed the clause itself unlawful, stating, “that National Agreement is simply a compact of a combination of men who are illegally trying to control the base-ball business of the country. The reserve rule is clearly *ultra vires*, and any court will so decide. Its operation is clearly illegal, and the only question is the remedy of the victim.” He added,

utterances as old as the days of Chief Justice Taney and the recent decisions of Justice Cowan in the boycott cases in New York have held that any effort to coerce the employment of an individual or individuals, or to put a territorial limitation on the services of an individual or individuals, is against the policy of the law, the spirit of the age, and the institutions which are dominant in the country in which we live. With the law laid down so clearly there appears to be no reason why ball-players should submit to the operation of the reserve rule.²⁴

At times, other players penned letters to the sporting press trying to make some of these same points. For instance, the *New York Sun* printed an account from Boston Beaneaters second baseman Jack Burdock in February of 1887 where Burdock pleaded for his release from Boston. He was dissatisfied with his situation in the Hub City because of his general unpopularity with the cranks there, and claimed he could not play his best ball as a result. Boston management had reserved him but not offered him a contract for 1887 as of early February, in essence threatening to lay him off without pay. In his letter, Burdock stated, “The Boston Club has laid me off without pay, and I am now for sale, and cannot earn a dollar by playing base ball until I am sold.

²⁴ “Base-Ball Sensations” NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, December 18, 1887, 16. The Latin term *ultra vires* means “beyond the powers” and refers to when an organization exceeds the legal powers of the law.

If the Boston people want to get rid of me let them give me my release, so that I can earn my living. If this is not slavery, what is?"²⁵

Interestingly, some observers noted from the beginning that, rather than increasing competitive balance, the reserve rule might weaken it. In June of 1883, *The Sporting Life* stated its belief that the new, eleven-man reserve rule would not stand because the weaker teams of the league were struggling to fill their rosters with enough capable players. It is also true that the owners could ignore the reserve rule, or more precisely the penalties for violating it, when doing so suited their purposes. The best example of this came in the winter of 1884-1885. In 1884, Henry Lucas, a wealthy St. Louis businessman, along with other financiers such as Baltimore mattress maker A.H. Henderson, organized a third league claiming major league status, and succeeded in luring a fair number of players, most notably Fred Dunlap, from the NL and AA into their new circuit, dubbed the Union Association (UA).²⁶ Lucas believed the reserve rule an insult to American freedom, and refused to honor the contracts of players reserved by teams in the NL and AA. The UA folded after the 1884 season, although Lucas survived the league's demise and became the new owner of a St. Louis franchise in the NL for its 1885 season. When the dust from the UA battle had settled, one question remained. What should major league baseball do with the quality players who had jumped their contracts and joined the UA?

At first, the National League was dead set against allowing these men back, and told Lucas that four key players (second baseman Fred Dunlap, outfielder George "Orator" Shafer,

²⁵ "Why Burdock Has Played Poor Ball" Jack Burdock, *The Sporting Life*, February 9, 1887, 1. Another reason that Burdock played poor ball is that he was yet another player who struggled to keep up his guard against alcohol, frequently engaging in binge drinking. For more, see his SABR biography at <http://sabr.org/bioproj/person/834f6239>, accessed June 30, 2014.

²⁶ Despite the claim of Lucas and some others that the Union Association was a true major league, and the fact that baseball histories tend to regard it as such, the actual talent level of the UA makes this classification hard to uphold. See James, *The New Bill James Historical Baseball Abstract*, 21-34, for more on the quality of players in the 1884 UA.

outfielder Dave Rowe, and pitcher Charlie Sweeney) would not be allowed back into the National League on the new nine he planned to field for 1885. Lucas complained that, as he was an accessory to these men breaking their contracts, and the National League had allowed him to join, it was unfair to impose a different penalty on the players. He compared the situation of his players to that of Tony Mullane (see chapter three), who “has broken more contracts than he has fingers and toes, and still he is not blacklisted. They are doing wrong, Sir.”²⁷ The League eventually relented, and allowed some men, notably “One Arm” Hugh Dailey, Emil Gross, Dunlap, and Orator Shafer, to return upon paying a \$500 fine, while “Pebbley” Jack Glasscock, Charlie Sweeney, Jim McCormick, and Frederick “Dupee” Shaw had to part with \$1,000 to escape the blacklist.²⁸ The difference, or so the League’s magnates claimed, was that the former quartet was merely guilty of jumping the reserve rule, while the second group of men broke their contracts.²⁹

The trouble was the National League owners had adopted the Day Resolution (after John Day, owner of the New York Gothams, who proposed it in November 1883) in March of 1884, stating that no blacklisted players could rejoin the NL. The American Association adopted the same measure in December of 1883. The NL owners passed the Day Resolution partly to discourage established players from jumping to the upstart league, and partly to prevent themselves from trying to lure any jumpers back with offers of better salaries than the UA teams were offering, thus rewarding the players for their opportunism. A.G. Mills stated he “was never more earnest in his life than when he said that these players should never play with any club connected with the National Agreement.” Once the UA was out of the picture and the danger

²⁷ “Arranging the League Games” NA, *New York Times*, March 8, 1885, 2.

²⁸ “Lucas Triumphant” O.B.S., *The Sporting Life*, April 22, 1885, 3.

²⁹ “Base-Ball” NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, April 19, 1885, 11.

averted, however, club owners eventually relented and allowed some of the renegade players back under the financial terms outlined above.³⁰ At least publicly, they did so only grudgingly. One unidentified magnate stated, “These men should be shown no mercy. Why, I would not be the least bit surprised to hear of Craver and Nichols playing in some League club before the season closes.” (The National League booted Bill Craver and Al Nichols from the game for life after they were involved in a gambling scheme in 1877.)³¹ Observers took note, the New York *Sun* offering,

the League, comprising the most powerful clubs in the country, made a set of rules which, if any player broke, he was to be forbidden to play on any of the associated nines. A St. Louis nine, under the control of Mr. Lucas, was this year admitted to the league, and Mr. Lucas has also under engagement to him seven good players who, by breaking their contracts, have made themselves ineligible for a League club. The curious part of it is that there is a very strong sentiment within the League itself in favor of relaxing its own rules and letting the contract breakers play. Because these have all come together they make a first-rate nine, and consequently they would add interest to the struggle for the championship.³²

In true robber baron style, the League would not allow mere rules (even if they were the League’s own rules) to get in the way of maximizing profit. “For look at it as you will the fact sticks out baldly that in this case principle has been surrendered to financial considerations,” wrote *The Sporting Life*, and “there are some things in this world better than filthy lucre, and the

³⁰ Seymour, *Baseball*, 152-154. Interestingly, the so-called Union War also spawned the first farm teams in baseball history, as the established leagues created “reserve teams” and played a regular schedule of games with an admission price of 25 cents, half of what the National League charged. The purpose of these reserve teams was to both keep talented players and paying customers away from the Union Association, as well as keeping underperforming players on major league clubs in fear for their jobs. They did not become a permanent fixture once the Union War was over, however, even though “Boss President” Chris Von der Ahe of the American Association’s St. Louis franchise suggested this possibility. *Ibid.*, 151-152. The New York Giants also tried the idea for 1887, hoping to develop some of the city’s young talent for their benefit. No Title, NA, *The Sporting News*, April 2, 1887, 4.

³¹ “Baseball News” NA, *New York Times*, April 20, 1885, 8.

³² “A Singular State of Affairs” NA, *The Sporting Life*, April 22, 1885, 5.

bending of the League to Mammon cannot fail to leave an unpleasant impression in the public mind.”³³ These events also left a sour taste in the mouth of A.G. Mills, and following the 1885 campaign, he resigned his honorary membership in the National League.³⁴ Mills had done all in his power to prevent the reinstatement of these men, and on two occasions prior to April of 1885, he had participated in a unanimous vote among National League owners stating that the League would not reinstate them. Mills also pointed out that the “fines” applied to the men were not even paid by the players themselves, but rather that their new teams covered their “fines” for them once they signed National League contracts.³⁵

Others disagreed, however, the Chicago *Daily Tribune* believing that, “the action of the league . . . will be commended and approved of by impartial lovers of the game throughout the country. St. Louis will now be able to enter the championship season with a strong team . . .”³⁶ National League owners parroted this same line in their official explanation of why they finally chose reinstatement. They wanted to strengthen St. Louis so that the Maroons could make a stronger showing for 1885, which meant more money for all. Owner John Day of New York said the League was “forced” to reinstate the players for this very reason. “I was not in sympathy with these men, and I proved that by suggesting a heavy fine. The Directors viewed the affair in a business light, and found that by having a strong team in St. Louis it would benefit every nine in the association. St. Louis is one of the best baseball cities in the country, and it was a matter of dollars and cents for us to have a strong League team there.”³⁷

³³ “The League’s Flop” NA, *The Sporting Life*, April 22, 1885, 6.

³⁴ “Discordant Clubs” NA, *The Sporting Life*, November 25, 1885, 1. For a full discussion of the events surrounding the Day Resolution and the threat of the Union Association in 1884, please see “Base Ball History” A.G. Mills, *The Sporting Life*, June 13, 1888, 2.

³⁵ “Base Ball History” A.G. Mills, *The Sporting Life*, June 13, 1888, 2.

³⁶ “Base-Ball” NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, April 19, 1885, 11.

³⁷ “Baseball News” NA, *New York Times*, April 20, 1885, 8.

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Following the successful skirmish with the Union Association in 1884, the magnates of the game continued to revise and refine the reserve clause in order to bolster their control of the players and fatten their wallets. In the off season of 1885, the League and the Association met to modify the reserve clause to “better control the players,” and “to control and retain the players now under contract therewith, in order to shut off the ruinous competition which has been the main cause of the excessively large salaries . . .” Their plan called for modifying the release rule, in this case by allowing other clubs to bid for any player released from their present team, rather than allowing that player to sign with the team of his choosing, or even a team in another league who might offer better pay.³⁸ A Board of Arbitration, consisting of NL representatives Nick Young, John Day, and Arthur Soden of Boston, and Association owners Charles Byrne of Brooklyn, Zack Phelps of Louisville, and Chris Von der Ahe of St. Louis, would adjudicate any questions arising regarding the legality of operations.

Another adjustment included in this gentleman’s agreement, as mentioned above, was that each league now reserved its players, rather than the individual teams. The leagues intended this measure to ensure that NL and AA teams would avoid the temptation to bid for each other’s players, thus driving salaries higher as the two leagues competed for top talent. It also meant that, should a team disband operations, their players would remain reserved, rather than being free to sign where they wished, as would happen with Kansas City and St. Louis before the 1887

³⁸ “The Baseball Compact”, NA, *The Sporting Life*, October 28, 1885, 1. For more details on the technicalities of the release rule as finally adopted, see page 1 of *The Sporting Life* for either November 25, 1885 (National League) or December 2, 1885 (American Association).

season. Furthermore, they agreed to honor the contracts of the various minor leagues, but only after a period from October 20 through December 8 in which League and Association teams could sign such players freely.³⁹ One writer described this last provision by writing “after we have robbed you of all your desirable men, you can come into the fold and nobody shall harm you.”⁴⁰ Another, describing the Eastern League, opined, “as soon as there is no material left in the League worth having, the giant monopolies will extend the right hand of fellowship to the young organization and give it the protection of the National Agreement.”⁴¹ H.B. Bennett, former president of the Union Association and now director of the minor league Washington Nationals club, echoed these views, stating, “It’s a clean steal. . . . They are going to shake the tree, gather all of the best fruit, shoot us if we attempt to get near and give us all that is left rotting on the ground after they have gone through. Such generosity would make a crocodile weep.”⁴²

Bennett was right to fear the outcome of such a rule. In the 1885 off-season alone, major league teams deprived him of a stable of quality players. During the 1885 season, Bennett had contemplated making a move for major league status in 1886, hoping the Association might find his club attractive. By the end of November, however, things appeared bleak. The Baltimore Orioles swooped in and pilfered pitcher Abner Powell, catcher Chris Fulmer, and infielder/outfielder Buster Hoover. The Louisville Colonels signed away infielder Bill White

³⁹ “The Arbitration Committee” NA, *The Sporting Life*, October 28, 1885, 1; “The Reserves” NA, *The Sporting Life*, October 28, 1885, 1.

⁴⁰ “Diamond Drift,” NA, *The Sporting Life*, October 28, 1885, 4.

⁴¹ “Hub Gleanings” Mugwump, *The Sporting Life*, November 18, 1885, 3.

⁴² “Bennett Unloads” NA, *The Sporting Life*, November 4, 1885, 2. While it is certainly possible that Bennett held a grudge against the established leagues, considering his experience with the UA, this sentiment appears a general one amongst minor league officials.

from his roster as well.⁴³ While none of this quartet exactly dominated in 1886, the best being Fulmer's work in Baltimore, they surely would have been an improvement over what the Nationals fielded that season. This was all the more tragic because, ironically, Bennett's Nationals *did* gain major league status for 1886, although with the National League rather than the American Association. Putting a brave face on his plight, he claimed that the franchise was profitable, and that it saw an average attendance of 1,600 fans for the prior two seasons as well.⁴⁴ It worked, and Washington joined the National League to take Buffalo's place, but with so few capable players left, the Nationals stumbled to a miserable 28-92 record, including twelve consecutive losses at one point. Their lineup, with the singular exception of terrific outfielder Paul Hines, was dismal. Aside from Hines, no regular player managed to hit the league average, with third baseman Buck Gladmon compiling a dreadful .138/.201/.230 batting split.

The Nationals were so weak a team that some observers offered an extreme explanation for their incompetence: opium smoking. "No man can 'hit the pipe' and play ball, too; he must give up one or the other. There are at least two members of the Washington Club who are regular patrons of a Georgetown opium 'joint.' . . . If manager Scanlon wishes their names for his own information we are prepared to furnish him with the proof."⁴⁵ Furthermore, "one of them is a great favorite with Washington audiences, and if the fact were generally known that he is a slave to this vile habit we have no doubt that he would be driven in disgrace from the club.

⁴³ "From the Capitol" NA, *The Sporting Life*, November 11, 1885, 1.

⁴⁴ "From the Capitol" RHW, *The Sporting Life*, November 18, 1885, 1. RHW were the initials of correspondent R.H. Wood, also known as WUD. He wrote for *The Sporting Life* until 1887 when, surprisingly given the information detailed in chapter eight, he gave up writing and attempted to become an umpire. This did not go as planned, however, and by July of 1888, he was a minor league manager instead. "Toledo Fires Frank Mountain" NA, *The Sporting News*, July 21, 1888, 1.

⁴⁵ "Notes and Comments" NA, *The Sporting Life*, August 4, 1886, 5.

If those two men continue to indulge in this thing we shall deem it a duty to admirers of base-ball to print their names.”⁴⁶

Other minor league teams fared no better than the soon-to-be major league Nationals. Haverhill of the Eastern New England League (ENEL) lost promising pitcher Ledell “Cannonball” Titcomb to Philadelphia, while Al Spalding swooped in and netted John “Jocko” Flynn (for a salary rumored at \$3,000, no less) from the ENEL Lawrence club to be the third pitcher for his White Stockings.⁴⁷ What made all this hard to stomach for these minor league clubs, besides the obvious fact that they were losing their quality players, was the double standard of major league baseball’s owners. One justification often given by major league teams for the reserve rule was that if a team invested in a young player, nurtured him and trained him so that he eventually developed into a quality performer, the reserve rule would protect that team from losing the now-established player as soon as someone willing to open their wallet and offer the player more money came calling. Yet, this was exactly what major league teams were doing to minor league ones. Minor league teams also signed, developed, and brought along young talent, yet as soon as a major league team willing to offer \$3,000 for a Jocko Flynn came along, they were helpless to match offers from clubs with greater financial firepower such as the Chicago White Stockings. As the Southern League correspondent for *The Sporting Life* wrote, “if a club takes the trouble and goes to the expense of developing a young player, there is no reason why they should not receive some benefit for the same, either by being permitted to retain his services or be paid for his release.” This led him to conclude, “the minor leagues should have the reserve rule, at least within themselves. . . . When a manager hits upon such a combination he is fortunate indeed, and should be permitted to hold his combination together . . . it was this that

⁴⁶ “Diamond Dust” NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, August 4, 1886, 3.

⁴⁷ “Hub Gleanings” Mugwump, *The Sporting Life*, November 18, 1885, 3.

brought the reserve rule into existence, and if it was necessary to the League and Association it is just as necessary to the minor leagues.”⁴⁸

While a few writers offered support and justification for these measures allowing major league teams to raid minor league rosters for talent, not all their sports reporting brethren were so charitable. For instance, the *Fall River News* of Massachusetts lamented that the agreement offered no protection to ball clubs outside of the National Agreement, leaving minor league outfits vulnerable to the vultures of the League and Association swooping in to snatch their top players at inopportune moments for the hometown team. It further derided the major league teams with their “poverty stricken but bursting treasury,” and opined that no jury in America would uphold the legality of the reserve clause.⁴⁹ *The Sporting Life* even editorialized that the teams themselves were to blame for their self-proclaimed financial straits, shining its spotlight on the League’s policy of charging 50 cents for admission, thereby reducing attendance. “This fifty-cent tariff is the millstone that has been dragging the League down slowly but surely, and the League leaders have not been slow to recognize the fact. But pride has rebelled against a reduction. The ability to exact and command a higher rate has always been considered a mark of superiority over all other organizations,” but, “these arguments, once potent, will no longer bear discussion.” The Association, on the other hand, with its 25-cent tickets,

has from its inception held to the lower tariff, which indeed has been the main element of success, and has in a great degree contributed to the widespread and remarkable revival of interest in the National game. The lower rate has popularized the game in that it has brought it within the reach of thousands who were unable to meet the demands of the League, and thus gave the game the go-by altogether. . . . If, all things being equal, the one body can exist and flourish by offering a first-class entertainment at twenty-five cents why should another body exact and receive double that amount for an entertainment not a whit better?

⁴⁸ “Minor League Claims” Creole, *The Sporting Life*, October 5, 1887, 1.

⁴⁹ “Don’t Believe It” NA, *The Sporting Life*, October 28, 1885, 2.

The League's answer to this, as described in chapter one, was monopoly. Instead of allowing multiple teams in the same market and being at the mercy of competition, so that market conditions determined the ideal ticket price, it chose to limit each city in major league baseball to one team, continue charging fifty cents for admission, and compensate for reduced attendance by slashing player salaries.⁵⁰ Only the Philadelphia Quakers had the League's permission to charge twenty-five cents, because Philadelphia was the one city where the League and Association both fielded teams.⁵¹

* * * * *

Although the reserve clause did not actually appear in player contracts until 1887, the language found in player contracts already leaned heavily towards ownership's side, to say the least. Through the 1887 season, all contracts in the American Association, for instance, contained the following provisions:

1. The player will play base ball and render all services connected therewith that may be required of him by the club from date of same to a certain day.
2. The player agrees to give his exclusive services to the club during said period, and not to play with any other club without consent of his club; that he will not conspire or attempt to lose any game, nor willingly contribute or aid in the same; that he will not be interested in any pool or wager on any game, but will at all times during said period render his best service to the club.

⁵⁰ "Bend or Break" NA, *The Sporting Life*, November 4, 1885, 5.

⁵¹ "Home Rule" NA, *The Sporting Life*, November 25, 1885, 2.

3. That during all of said period he will well and truly perform all duties that may be assigned by the club or its officers; that he will well and truly serve the club in such capacities or positions for play that may be assigned him from time to time, as often and in such manner as may seem fit to the club; and will yield cheerful and prompt obedience to all directions of the club, and hold himself subject to its orders at all times during said period.

4. The player shall strictly obey and comply with all regulations that are, or may be, adopted by the club for the government of its employees, and also obey and be subject to the constitution and rules of the American Association.

5. The player will absolutely refrain from drunkenness and all and any excess or dissipation whatever, from gambling in any form, and from all conduct or behavior dishonorable, disreputable, or contrary to the spirit of the rules and regulations which have been, or may be, instituted and made by the club; and that he will use his best endeavor to protect and keep his health, strength and skill as a base ball player during the term of his employment by the club.

6. The player assumes all risks of accident or injury in play or otherwise and of illness from whatever cause, and of the effects of all accidents, injuries or illness occurring to him during said period.

7. The player must keep himself informed of all rules and regulations of the club and the Association.

8. It is mutually agreed by the club and player, that should the player at any time or times, or in any manner fail to comply with the covenants and agreements above, or any of them, or with any of the rules and regulations of the American Association, or with the rules and regulations of the club, which now are or may hereafter from time to time be made or instituted, or should the player at any time or times be careless, indifferent, or conduct himself in such a manner as to injure or prejudice the interests of the club, or should the player become ill or otherwise unfit, from any cause whatever in the judgment of the club, to fulfill in a satisfactory manner the duties which may be required of him, and thereupon, the club shall have the right to discipline, suspend or discharge the player, as to it shall seem fit; and the club shall be the sole judge as to the sufficiency of the reason for such said discipline, suspension or discharge.

9. The player agrees to provide himself with uniform and keep it in repair. After all the above the club agrees:

10. That in consideration of the full and complete performance of the above agreements it will pay the player the sum of _____ dollars, at the rate of _____ dollars per month, so long as the contract remains in force. Upon condition that deductions shall be made for all suspensions, fines, etc., and that the player shall only be paid until the time of his discharge for any cause.⁵²

⁵² “Players’ Contracts” Veteran, *The Sporting Life*, November 3, 1886, 5. “Veteran” was the pen name of Jimmy Williams, who managed the St. Louis Browns in 1884 and the Cleveland Blues in 1887 and 1888. His team did well in his short stint with the Browns, winning 51 against 33 defeats, but his second try was not so favorable. Cleveland went 59-136 in his time at their helm, though as a new team in the American Association in 1887, the Blues were not overflowing with talent.

A few things stand out upon analysis of the contract terms, beside the obvious one that of the ten clauses, nine required certain actions of the players, and only one required action of the clubs, and then only in the case that the player fulfilled all nine other clauses first. Both clause two and clause five, for example, attempt to prohibit gambling by the players. We can assume that such language would not appear in the contract if gambling were not a potential problem. Clearly, team owners saw gambling on games by players as a major concern in the present, the recent past, or both. Clauses three and four, while they seem obvious enough (the player should perform the duties required and obey the team rules) are vague enough to allow enough leeway for the club to find fault with any number of things a player might or might not do. What constitutes cheerful and prompt obedience, for example? In addition, by requiring the player to comply with regulations the club might adopt in the future, however onerous, these parts of the contract allowed for an array of potential disputes.

The rest of the fifth clause might bring a hearty laugh, considering the number of players who observed this rule only in the breach. (See chapter six.) It made good sense for the clubs to attempt this, of course, as intoxicated players cost all teams games over the course of the season, but the fact that each club enforced the rule differently, and often arbitrarily, in many cases did more harm than good. Clause six is rather harsh by the standards of the early twenty-first century, but this was standard during the 1880s. In many, possibly most, lines of employment, the law stated that workers assumed the risks of their job when accepting employment. The reasoning was that workers knew the risks of injury when they took a position, and if injury occurred while on the job, it was their responsibility.

In fact, some teams enforced this rule harshly, others less so. For instance, the Philadelphia Athletics docked the pay of stalwart pitcher Bobby Mathews during the 1886

season when he suffered from a sore arm. The Athletics laid him off without pay while he recuperated. He started just two games after July 21, and his club denied him \$541 due to inactivity.⁵³ After the season ended, Mathews tried to retaliate by refusing to sign a contract for 1887 until the club paid him back the money it withheld in 1886. While the team held out against his demands, he began coaching a college team to bring in some cash while waiting for his employer to see the light.⁵⁴ Management refused to budge, with team official Billy Sharsig making the case that not only did Mathews provide no value while hurt, but that after returning he appeared just three times while receiving \$600 compensation for those three appearances.⁵⁵

This was a truly unfortunate situation, as Mathews, who participated in the original National League season back in 1876, had given the Athletics quality service for several years, winning exactly 30 games three years straight, 1883-1885, while averaging more than 400 innings pitched over the three seasons prior to his 1886 arm troubles. Clearly, he was not one to shirk legitimate duty. Mathews was also probably an even better pitcher than observers of the 1880s gave him credit for. Recalling that the three things pitchers can control are walks allowed, strikeouts, and home runs allowed, Mathews excelled in two of these three categories. Twice he led his league in fewest walks allowed per nine innings, and he led his league in most strikeouts per nine innings in four different seasons. Between 1882 and 1885, he posted his league's best ratio of strikeouts to walks in three of the four seasons. He finally signed a contract for 1887 in late March, although sadly, the sporting press did not specify whether he got his money back or

⁵³ For more on Bobby Mathews, see his SABR biography at <http://sabr.org/bioproj/person/e7ad641f>, accessed July 4, 2014; "Local News" NA, *The Sporting Life*, February 9, 1887, 5. This man is surely the least known pitcher in baseball history with 297 or more wins.

⁵⁴ "The Quaker City" NA, *The Sporting News*, February 19, 1887, 1; "The Philadelphia Players" NA, *The Sporting News*, March 5, 1887, 1.

⁵⁵ "Philadelphia News" NA, *The Sporting Life*, March 16, 1887, 5.

not, saying only that Mathews reached an “amicable adjustment” with the club. Later reports indicated, however, that he got the money due him.⁵⁶ Sharsig did not hold a grudge, apparently, stating that Mathews’ velocity was as good as ever, as was his arm, and that he could probably pitch three times per week if needed.⁵⁷

As it turned out, however, 1887 was the final campaign for Mathews. His arm was not actually in very good condition, and he toiled only seven games for the club before leaving major league baseball as a player at the end of the season. He did appear on the diamond in 1888, but as a coach for the younger pitchers the Athletics employed that year. He claimed that with the new rules (the number of strikes required to strike out a batter changed from four to three that winter) he would be as effective as of old, but was unable to persuade the Athletics to let him appear in the pitcher’s box one more year.⁵⁸

The 1887 situation in New York concerning first baseman Dave Orr was like that of Mathews, but even less clear-cut. The team fined the burly first baseman in September when he sat out some games. Orr claimed illness and a lame arm, but as team executive O.P. Caylor explained, “he was not too ill, however, to get into a row at home and whip an officer, whereupon I telegraphed for him to report at Cleveland, which he failed to do on account of a lame arm. I found that the lame arm was due to a fall down stairs during the fight mentioned.” Caylor concluded, “as he was not injured in the discharge of his duty there was no reason why he should be paid for his loss of time and I justly mulcted him. Thereupon he became abusive and

⁵⁶ “Spalding and His Surplus Players” NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, November 3, 1887, 6.

⁵⁷ “Philadelphia News” NA, *The Sporting Life*, March 30, 1887, 5.

⁵⁸ “The Quaker City Players” Redart, *The Sporting News*, February 25, 1888, 1. In the 1880s, unlike today, the pitcher pitched from a box marked out on the field, rather than from a pitcher’s mound.

his suspension followed.”⁵⁹ Both Orr, and the New York Court of Special Sessions, had a different view of things. He claimed he had been injured at his boarding house at 241 East 112th Street on August 16 while defending his landlady against drunken assault on the part of the lawyer serving her with divorce papers. In Orr’s effort to remove the offender from the premises, both men fell down the stairs and Orr sustained injuries to his arm, thumb, and ankle. After the landlady, Mrs. Heinzl, corroborated his story, the courts immediately discharged Orr, thus clearing his name. The fine still stood, however.⁶⁰ Despite this fact, Orr may still have gotten the best of things in the end. Early in 1888, New York sportswriter George Stackhouse spotted the hefty first baseman near City Hall Park, with none other than recent divorcee Emily Heinzl on his arm.⁶¹

Perhaps the reason that Caylor suspected Orr of falsifying his status was that such behavior was in keeping with Orr’s reputation. For example, in 1888 he again told his team (now the Brooklyn Bridegrooms) that he could not take the field because of an injured foot. When Brooklyn dispatched its team physician, Dr. McLean, to evaluate Orr’s condition, McLean found Orr away from home, and his new landlady told the doctor she thought he had gone to Coney Island for the day. This behavior was trebly frustrating to Bridegrooms management, as Orr was a terrific player, and the team’s captain, and the team’s opponent that day was the team the second place Bridegrooms were trying to catch in the standings, the St. Louis Browns. The result was that, once again, Orr’s team attempted to make the big first baseman respect its authority. “Dave Orr, the captain of the team, is no longer acting in that capacity. In fact he is

⁵⁹ “The New York Clubs” NA, *The Sporting Life*, September 14, 1887, 1.

⁶⁰ “David Orr As A Bouncer” NA, *Chicago Daily Inter Ocean*, October 28, 1887, 2.

⁶¹ “New York Mention” George Stackhouse, *The Sporting Life*, January 11, 1888, 4.

not even playing on the nine, neither is he drawing any salary. He has been suspended without pay until he concludes to play ball and discontinue monkey-shines.”⁶²

The 1888 case featuring Detroit Wolverine right fielder Sam Thompson was not cloudy in the least. The big outfielder hurt himself early in the season and played in only fifty-six games for the year. In late July, tired of seeing their great player sitting out games, Detroit decided to lay him off without pay until he was ready to perform once more. Thompson threatened to sue them to recover his pay.⁶³ He later tried to go back into the outfield, but his arm injury was so severe that he could barely throw the ball to an infielder, thus providing indisputable evidence that his ailment was quite real.

Not all teams chose a hard line on this issue, however, and sometimes, those clubs showing more understanding towards their players realized all the benefits that came from treating their men magnanimously. Consider the case of Henry Boyle. Pitching for the St. Louis Maroons of the National League in 1886, he had a wonderful, but shortened, season, as “Handsome Henry” led the NL in ERA. Because of an arm injury, however, he pitched in just 25 games (and because of weak offensive support, won 9 games against 15 defeats despite his low ERA) that year, working 210 innings. When it came time to discuss salary for 1887, the St. Louis club offered him a moderate raise, but a salary not quite commensurate with leading the league in earned run average. Boyle signed anyway, out of gratitude for the fact that the team had continued paying him as usual while hurt.⁶⁴

Whatever his other faults may have been, St. Louis Browns owner Chris Von der Ahe also took this liberal approach to his injured players. In 1887, when top pitcher Dave Foutz and

⁶² “A Turn-Up At Brooklyn” George Stackhouse, *The Sporting Life*, August 8, 1888, 1.

⁶³ “Detroit Dotlets” MAT, *The Sporting Life*, August 1, 1888, 5. MAT was Charles Matheson, sporting editor of the *Detroit Free Press*.

⁶⁴ “From St. Louis” Joe Prtichard, *The Sporting Life*, March 30, 1887, 2.

frontline catcher Doc Bushong suffered injuries, Von der Ahe continued paying them on schedule. The fact that this earned him praise from the sporting press indicates that not all, perhaps even not most, owners did the same.⁶⁵ The Baltimore Orioles also realized the advantages of this strategy in 1888. On August 14, 1887, one of their catchers, Chris Fulmer, injured his finger to the extent he could not catch another game that season. The Orioles continued delivering regular paychecks to their incapacitated backstop. When it came time to sign a contract for the next season, Fulmer said, “I have been treated fairly, and even generously, and I appreciate it. Last season I was the last to sign; this year I am going to be the first. So give me a pen and shoot out that contract.” The Orioles did so, and signed their man on the spot.⁶⁶

Even umpires might face this dilemma at times. Being an umpire was extremely dangerous, given the primitive state of protective equipment in the 1880s, and sometimes injuries occurred on the job due to foul tips and stray pitches. One umpire, named Cuthbert (probably Ned Cuthbert, a former outfielder of the 1870s and 1880s), even went so far as to sue the American Association in 1887 for back pay, claiming he sustained an injury on the job that was so bad he could not stand up. He wired Association president Wheeler Wikoff, asking for a substitute until he could recuperate and resume his duties. Wikoff proceeded to fine Cuthbert for not reporting for his next umpiring assignment, then fire him when Cuthbert protested the fine. The bewildered man stated, “when I return to St. Louis next week I propose to see whether a contract is a contract. I was injured in the discharge of my duty, gave notice in time for the appointment of a substitute, and was released without explanation and without cause in addition to being illegally fined.”⁶⁷ (Sportswriter F.H. Brunell, however, responded to Cuthbert’s claim

⁶⁵ “From St. Louis” Joe Prtichard, *The Sporting Life*, September 7, 1887, 4.

⁶⁶ “Baltimore Budget” TTT, *The Sporting Life*, April 11, 1888, 2.

⁶⁷ “A Little More Trouble” NA, *The Sporting Life*, September 21, 1887, 1.

by writing, “the Association ought to set up his incompetency as a defense. That’s surely a cause for his removal.”)⁶⁸

In addition to the issue of paying players while hurt in the line of duty, another part of the American Association contract that is interesting is clause seven. This clause, that players must keep informed on changes in rules and regulations, seems obvious and straightforward enough, but recall that many Americans of the late nineteenth century were illiterate. (This is one reason that the political parties of the day developed symbols to stand for their party, so that illiterate voters would know which candidates to cast their ballots for.) This was also, of course, nearly a century before baseball players had player agents to deal with legal matters for them. As a result, for many players, this clause was much more difficult than it appears on the surface.

Finally, clause eight is probably the most questionable of all. After wading through the excessive verbiage, it states, essentially, that clubs can discharge players whenever they want to and for whatever reasons they wish, and that the players have no appeal, whatever the circumstances of the case might be. This clause, above all the others, disturbed many players. No matter how many faithful years of service they had supplied their team, how strong their performance, how valuable their skills might be, or how large an offer of salary they might receive from another ball club, their team had complete control over their future. Because of the reserve clause, they could not leave their club under any circumstances, while the club could let them go at any time and for any reason.

Following the 1887 season, American Association owners Charles Byrnes of Brooklyn and Zack Phelps of Louisville, both lawyers, put their heads together to work out a new contract

⁶⁸ “From Cleveland” F.H. Brunell, *The Sporting Life*, September 28, 1887, 5. Regrettably, the sporting press sometimes identified people by last name only, and so in some cases, I have been unable to discover the first names of some of the more obscure people mentioned in the press.

that they hoped would make it more “legal and binding.” (The language of this new contract is in Appendix D.) The improvements, from the owners’ point of view, amounted to the fact that all the individual acts the earlier contract attempted to legislate against, gambling, drinking, and so forth, now fell within the purview of one clause, with the terms remaining so vague that the powers thereby granted to the team could encompass almost any action on the part of the player. The extra legal verbiage and terminology also must have intimidated the average player, whose level of literacy might not be up to par with understanding all the legalisms replacing the simpler and more direct language of the earlier contract.

* * * * *

Its legality and terms aside, the issue of the need for a reserve clause and its justifications is an important one. Its supporters cited several reasons for its necessity, outside of the obvious financial ones. Probably the most common of these reasons was that the reserve clause would bring player salaries more in line with what a typical worker made. The players, so the argument went, were workers, but because they only worked two hours per day for about seven months of the year, there was no reason they should pull down an extravagant salary. A related argument was that because players only “worked” at baseball six or seven months of the year, and were free to take “regular” jobs in the off season, their clubs were not obligated to pay them a salary that would support the player for an entire year, only the portion of it they spent playing ball. National League president Nick Young also offered, echoing the views of the liberal reformers of the 1870s, that it was pointless to pay high wages to the players, because the players simply

squandered those wages on gambling and drink. Paying lower wages, so that players had little disposable income with which to dissipate themselves, was thus the morally correct thing to do.⁶⁹

The reserve clause's role in maintaining competitive balance between the teams was another frequently offered justification. Without the clause, defenders argued, the richer teams would be able to corral the most expensive talent, and eventually fan interest in the poorer teams would decline to such a level that those teams would have to cease play because they would be broke, leaving the wealthiest teams with no one to play. Therefore, the reserve clause was necessary because it worked to the benefit of both players and owners by creating franchise stability and maintaining a stable collection of teams.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Seymour, *Baseball*, 106. One great flaw in these arguments, besides the fact that a player deserves whatever the market will pay him for his talents, is that people playing professional sports have but a limited time to capitalize on and make money from their talent. The careers of sports figures rarely last beyond the mid-30s of the performer, and so an athlete must make the money needed to support themselves in a shorter window of time than a typical worker can expect to.

⁷⁰ The fact that, by 1891, the structure of the National League would remain unchanged until the 1960s, described in the previous chapter, might seem solid proof of this argument. However, it is also true that, mathematically speaking, baseball has been more competitive since the advent of free agency in the 1970s than it was during the reserve clause era. Bill James calculates the level of competition in his index of competitive balance (a higher percentage means more balanced competition), given decade by decade:

1870s: 21%
1880s: 24%
1890s: 27%
1900s: 30%
1910s: 36%
1920s: 34%
1930s: 31%
1940s: 34%
1950s: 34%
1960s: 40%
1970s: 45%
1980s: 56%
1990s: 57%

All percentages taken from James, *The New Bill James Historical Baseball Abstract*, 13, 39, 57, 75, 97, 124, 148, 200, 224, 252, 279, 298, 311. It is also important to note that the greater

Originally, it appears that not all players were against the concept of the reserve rule. After all, it did guarantee a job for the following season. In 1882, NL president Hulbert stated, “on the contrary, they are all anxious to be reserved, and their only fear is that they won’t be.”⁷¹ One of Hulbert’s successors as National League president, A.G. Mills, even tried to portray the rule as a measure to protect the players, stating, “the course of professional base-ball playing in this country is strewn with the wrecks of clubs which have undertaken to carry a salary list they were utterly unequal to, resulting, of course, in the high priced players being stranded in mid-season, with considerable amounts due them by such clubs, which they have never yet received.”⁷²

Whether or not these sentiments are actually true, and their veracity must be somewhat suspect given the sources, by the middle 1880s, the players realized clearly enough that the reserve clause was a potent weapon in ownership’s arsenal. The owners imitated those in the business world who proclaimed, as true believers in the free labor ideology, that the interests of labor and capital were identical.⁷³ Some sports publications and writers agreed, such as Francis Richter, the editor of *The Sporting Life*, who announced, “The intention of *The Sporting Life* is to always treat with equal fairness, and to offer good advice to, both classes, club-owners and

stability of the game following 1890 reflects other measures taken by the leagues to promote continuity. For instance, in January 1886 the National League implemented a policy requiring all new clubs to deposit \$5,000 with the league president as surety for “the contractual relations between the several members of the League.” The teams also provided each other with mutual bonds for the same purpose, also to the sum of \$5,000. “Eight Clubs” NA, *The Sporting Life*, January 20, 1886, 1. “The League” NA, *The Sporting Life*, March 10, 1886, 1, describes this policy in detail.

⁷¹ Quoted in Seymour, *Baseball*, 108.

⁷² Quoted in Goldstein, *Playing for Keeps*, 149.

⁷³ For a full description of this ideology, see, for example, Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party Before the Civil War*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), and for the many ways in which this ideology had become outdated by the 1870s and 1880s, also see Eric Foner, *A Short History of Reconstruction*, (New York: Harper & Rowe, 1990).

players, capital and labor.” This was because “Just as in any other branch of business where wages are paid, either class is helpless without the other, and these foolish articles which tend to embitter ball players against their employers, rank with the dangerous and inflammatory editorials to workingmen in socialistic and labor-reform journals.”⁷⁴

In most cases, however, the players were not buying it. They, in opposition to the owners, could produce many reasonable arguments to bolster their case. First, the idea of a white man being unable to work for whom he pleased, and being unable to leave that employment when he pleased, seemed distinctly un-American.⁷⁵ Even owners and their supporters admitted as much in their more candid moments, although quickly following with justifications for why the reserve rule was necessary all the same. As to ensuring competitive balance, the fact that the New York Yankees won 20 world championships and made nine other appearances in the World Series during the reserve clause era would indicate that it did not hinder the wealthier franchises too greatly. The New York Giants added five more championships, and sixteen total playoff appearances, from the inception of the World Series, in 1903, until 1975 when the courts finally struck down the reserve rule. This was because, as some astute critics pointed out, the artificially low salaries produced by the reserve clause allowed owners to be either miserly, or incompetent, or both, and still profit whether their product on the field was any good or not. By shielding these owners from the workings of the free market, critics believed the reserve clause allowed for inefficiency, ineptitude, and poor player development and evaluation models to continue, unimpeded by the negative economic

⁷⁴ “Ball Players’ Salaries” NA, *The Sporting Life*, November 11, 1885, 4.

⁷⁵ This statement must, unfortunately, include the adjective “white,” as blacks suffering peonage as sharecroppers, or in the prison labor system of the Jim Crow South, certainly could not work for whom they pleased, nor could Native Americans confined on reservations, or Chinese in western states, the list goes on and on.

consequences that should have accrued from putting an inferior team on the field year after year.⁷⁶

One of the most cogent and coherent set of arguments against the reserve clause appeared in an essay from *Lippincott's*, a prestigious literary magazine, in August 1887, authored by New York Giants shortstop John Montgomery Ward. In the essay, Ward posed the question, “Is the Base-Ball Player a Chattel?” Ward discussed three reasons for implementing the reserve rule. The first was stability. Without some stability from year to year, investors would be reluctant to finance baseball teams, as it was very difficult to gauge the value, and the potential return on an investment, in teams that gained or lost valuable players on a yearly basis. As a result, teams frequently joined leagues but lasted only a handful of seasons as their finances rose and fell. If, however, a club could hold over most of its players from one year to the next, or at least the best ones that the team absolutely depended on, investors could put money into teams with greater confidence, improving franchise stability.

Greater stability aligned with Ward’s second reason for the reserve rule, limiting salaries. With all clubs competing for the best talent each year, players demanded, and often received, healthy salaries. If these players were not available, there would be fewer bidding wars for top talent, depressing the total amount of money spent on salaries.

The third goal of baseball’s magnates, in Ward’s view, was monopoly. If the National League could reserve all of the top talent to itself, and gain a reputation for superiority in the eyes of spectators and the sporting press, the League could dictate terms to both players and competing leagues alike. No monopolist of industry could have put it better.

⁷⁶ For a broader discussion on the merits and demerits of the reserve clause, see Seymour, *Baseball*, 110-115. I have mention what seem the most salient parts of the discussion here.

Ward had some sympathy with the need for stability. Clearly, some continuity was in the best interests of the sport as it grew and matured. The connection between spectators and players was just as important then as it is today, and he recognized that if each club fielded a brand new nine each season, these bonds would not develop, and attendance might suffer. However, in the rest of his essay he described how management manipulated the reserve rule to reduce players to a state of near-slavery. As more leagues in organized baseball entered into the National Agreement, the players' choices narrowed to playing in a fringe league for miniscule pay or taking what their major league team offered in exchange for a career of service with one team. This led Ward to state that however bad a player's situation might be, or how he might try to escape the reserving team, he was always

at the disposition of his former club. Like a fugitive-slave law, the reserve rule denies him a harbor or a livelihood, and carries him back, bound and shackled, to the club from which he attempted to escape. We have, then, the curious result of a contract which on its face is for seven months being binding for life, and when the player's name is once attached thereto his professional liberty is gone forever.

Clubs, on the other hand, could release players at their option by giving the player ten days of notice, with no further liabilities under the contract. "That is to say, the club may hold the player so long as it pleases, and may release him at any time, with or without cause, by a simple ten days' notice; while the player is bound for life, and, no matter what his interests or wishes may be, cannot terminate the contract even by ten years' notice."⁷⁷

Following this, Ward provided readers with several examples of how clubs had abused the reserve rule, rendering it a detriment to the game. Besides describing the *ex post facto* nature of the rule, Ward referenced the case of Curry Foley. This man had a modest career as a pitcher

⁷⁷ "Is the Ball-Player a Chattel?" John Montgomery Ward, *Lippincott's*, (August, 1887). Copy of the article obtained from Michigan State University, <http://history.msu.edu/hst324/files/2013/05/ward.pdf>, accessed May 23, 2014.

and outfielder for the Buffalo Bisons and Boston Red Stockings between 1879 and 1883. He is also the first recorded major league player to hit for the cycle.⁷⁸ Sadly, in 1883 he developed rheumatism, which eventually left him both physically incapacitated and broke. His team at the time, Buffalo, refused to release him, however, claiming he was faking in order to get his release. To rub salt in the wound, Buffalo's management did not pay him for the days he missed trying to fight his illness. Due to the reserve clause, he could not escape from his contract with the Bisons. These circumstances of having to remain with a Buffalo team that would not pay him drained Foley's finances to the point where he had to reside in an asylum. Things were so bad that other ballplayers organized a relief benefit for Foley in the winter of 1885-1886 out of sympathy for his plight.

Another serious abuse of the rule occurred when clubs used it to deny pay rightfully earned by their players. Ward wrote that, earlier, clubs could release players at any time by providing notice twenty days in advance. Taking advantage of this, several teams served their men with twenty days notice on September 10, and then on October 1 released all reserved members of the team, when the contracts lasted to November 1, thus depriving their men of their final month of pay. However, because all the released players were reserved with the releasing team, they had no choice but to go back and sign with the same team for the following season.

The reserve rule also inflated the sum a team could obtain for selling a player. Ward noted that when Chicago sold the legendary Mike "King" Kelly to the Boston Beaneaters for \$10,000 prior to the 1887 season, the reserve clause made that price tenable from Boston's perspective. The Beaneaters were not just buying Kelly's services for 1887, but for the rest of

⁷⁸ A "cycle" is when a player hits a single, double, triple, and home run all in one game. It has happened almost 300 times in major league baseball history as of 2014, making it about as rare as a pitcher throwing a no-hit game.

his career, potentially. The fact that Chicago sold Kelly without his input, and that Kelly did not see a single penny from the sale, reminded Ward of the slave trade of old. Later, when some defenders of the reserve rule pointed out that players often did very well financially after their sale to a new team (Kelly made in the neighborhood of \$5,000 per year playing in Boston), Ward answered, “the assertion that the player is always benefited by an increase of salary, though not necessarily true, would only prove the injustice of his former reservation by showing that the selling club had paid him a less salary than he was really worth. The reserve rule was made that a club might retain its players, not that it might sell them.”⁷⁹

Finally, there was the St. Louis Maroons-Kansas City Cowboys debacle. Following the 1886 season, the National League expelled these two teams from its ranks. While one might assume this freed their players from the reserve clause, as their former teams no longer existed to reserve them, such was not the case. Prior to the 1886 season, the National League modified the reserve rule so that all players were reserved by the league, rather than by their individual teams. This meant that all of the Kansas City and St. Louis players were still under contract to the National League, despite having no team to play for, and therefore they could not seek to sign on with another team (either in the NL or some other league) that might want them. Instead, the players had to wait while the league office shopped them to other NL teams. In April, the League finally released those players for whom it found no takers, but now they were at a significant disadvantage in finding teams for 1887 because the rosters of most teams were full already.⁸⁰ This came after the 1886 incident in which National League president Nick Young complained about a Southern League team, Nashville, doing exactly the same thing. “The club

⁷⁹ “Chadwick’s Chat” Henry Chadwick, *The Sporting Life*, December 26, 1888, 4.

⁸⁰ “Is the Ball-Player a Chattel?” Ward, copy of the article obtained from Michigan State University, <http://history.msu.edu/hst324/files/2013/05/ward.pdf>, accessed May 23, 2014.

of that place has disbanded entirely . . . yet they retain control of a lot of their best players and are trying to sell them to the highest bidders. Now this is entirely wrong in letter and spirit, and President Young said that his mail was loaded down with protestations against such proceedings . . .”⁸¹ After observing these shenanigans, John Ward commented, “it is all well enough to keep the reserve list in force. This is a good thing and I believe in it, but I fear that this way of saying to a man, you shall go here or you shan’t go there, is too much. . . . the next thing is to deliver the goods if some of these men should refuse absolutely to go to Indianapolis.”⁸²

Some in the sporting press saw these abuses of the reserve rule as well. One, referring to the Maroons-Cowboys situation and sounding rather like Ward in tone (and also implying that the rule was dubious in its legality in the process), complained about holding players from signing with a team of their choice, because by the time the National League office finished shopping them, there were too few openings available. “This is one of the abuses of the reserve rule that should be legislated upon for the benefit of players. . . . and if it is not remedied some day some intelligent player will go to law about it, and then away goes the iron rule which is an excellent one in its proper use, but tyrannical in its abuse.”⁸³

The National League perfected another variant of this practice by 1889. Just before that season began, the Cleveland Spiders released one of their men, infielder Gus Alberts, so that he could sign to play in Milwaukee, a minor league city at the time. Alberts decided, however, he preferred not to play in the Cream City, and as Cleveland had released him, he was looking forward to signing wherever he chose. At the last moment, however, the Washington Nationals swooped in and claimed him under the rule giving other teams from the same league ten days to

⁸¹ “Important, if True” NA, *The Sporting Life*, August 25, 1886, 3.

⁸² “General Sporting” NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, March 12, 1887, 11.

⁸³ “From Baltimore” TTT, *The Sporting Life*, January 26, 1887, 2.

sign a released player. The Nationals did not even want Alberts for themselves. They simply acted to prevent him gaining his freedom once they discovered his intent not to go to Milwaukee. The Nationals released Alberts in turn, allowing Cleveland to reclaim their recently departed player and return him to the team's reserve list. Alberts did not stay with Cleveland long enough to begin the 1889 season, as he eventually agreed to play in Milwaukee as per the original plan, but the fact that his league could manipulate him in this way was another sign that baseball's magnates had stretched the reserve rule far beyond its original intent.⁸⁴

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It was, perhaps, poetic justice that the reserve rule began backfiring on the major league clubs within a couple of seasons. By the winter of 1887-1888, the prices that teams paid for new blood were spiraling upward, and there seemed no way to stop the trend, other than giving the right of reservation to the minor leagues. What had happened was predictable enough, as it was exactly what had caused major league teams to create the reserve rule for themselves in the first place. Minor league players began auctioning their services to the highest bidder. This, in turn, caused established players already in the major leagues to ask for greater salaries. They knew that they were worth more than an untried newcomer, and, understandably, expected that their salaries would reflect that fact.

Because of these escalating costs, early in the winter of 1887-1888 baseball's powers that be reconsidered the issue of whether or not major league baseball should extend the reserve rule to minor league baseball. This is interesting because, in all other regards save cost, doing so

⁸⁴ "A New Wrinkle" NA, *The Sporting Life*, February 27, 1889, 1; "Milwaukee Mention" NA, *The Sporting Life*, March 6, 1889, 1.

seemed against the best interests of major league teams. Major league baseball teams were used to swooping in, like a hawk on the wing, to sign players from the various minor league teams after the conclusion of their championship seasons. Giving minor leagues the right of reservation of their players might cut down on this practice and slow the accretion of talented newcomers into the major leagues.

The logic behind the idea of extending the reserve rule seems based on a few factors. First, some clubs were considering developing a reserve team to feed talent to the major league club, and protecting this investment with the reserve rule would aid in that endeavor. Chicago, St. Louis, and New York had already moved in this direction, signing hordes of new players to contracts over the winter, while Boston and Detroit were considering it. This move towards a reserve team was another response to the fact that, in the winter of 1887-1888, the new talent teams pursued for the 1888 season wanted exorbitant remuneration for their signatures over and above what they had sought in past. They “wanted the earth” in the parlance of the day. Teams began to balk at the thought of paying hefty prices for unproven players, but also needed new players to fill holes in their rosters, so putting together reserve teams of their own offered a way out of this dilemma.

Ultimately, this idea of creating reserve teams did not really take hold, as there was little talk of it by the winter of 1888-1889, and the idea did not take firm root at this time. Part of the explanation is that, by the winter of 1888, the National League announced the Brush Salary Classification Plan to control the salaries of all newcomers in the League (see chapter sixteen) and the NL teams decided to set aside these other methods for the time being. The other critical reason was that teams found creating and maintaining a reserve team too costly. This led one paper to write an obituary for the idea of a reserve team, stating, “the reserve team craze seems to

have gone the way of the other base ball fads. Very few major league clubs will sign many more men than they expect to have regular use for, and in the minor leagues, where even more rigid economy is necessary, few extra men will be carried. Retrenchment is the order of the day.”⁸⁵

More sinisterly, extending the right of reservation to minor league teams would also give ball clubs, major league and minor league, greater control over the players in general, and this appeared the primary attraction of the idea. If minor league players were reserved, they could no longer offer their services to the highest bidder. Their clubs could, but as individuals, they could not. Top talent might still cost major league clubs a significant outlay, as teams could auction off their best men to the highest bidder, but the money realized from the sale would go to the team, not the player. (Predictably, given the financial rules of baseball and their constant flirtations with financial insolvency, some minor league teams could not resist temptation and began falsifying the statistics of some of their men to the press, thereby artificially inflating the sale price they received.) Major league teams liked this idea because, after purchasing the minor league player, they might offer a lesser salary to the new man now on their reserve list, and this would help them keep down their leading recurring cost, player salaries. This was especially relevant for 1888, as the new contract League owners agreed to with the Brotherhood of Professional Base Ball Players in the fall of 1887 stipulated that reserved men could not have their salaries reduced unilaterally by their teams (see chapter fourteen). Additionally, if major league clubs paid the money to the minor league teams rather than the players, this would keep the minor leagues more solvent, thus strengthening the pipeline that funneled players to the majors.

⁸⁵ No title, NA, *The Sporting Life*, January 23, 1889, 2.

Why would minor league teams sell under these circumstances? Because, playing in smaller markets than major league cities, most minor league teams found themselves in constant need of cash. In any given year during the second half of the 1880s, only a few minor league teams made any significant profit, and many times teams struggled to make it through the season financially. If offered enough money, the temptation to sell was hard to resist.

Of course, this move to extend the reserve clause in 1888 would not be strictly legal. Many minor league players had already signed deals for 1888, and so extending the reserve clause to them after the fact was indeed Machiavellian, another *ex post facto* extension of the rule. As the *Chicago Daily Tribune* wrote, “to tie up with a reserve rule players who have signed contracts for 1888 with the minor leagues, never dreaming they would be subject to reservation, will be a confidence game alongside of which three-card monte or bunko will become respectable.”⁸⁶ Brooklyn’s Charles Byrne, a member of baseball’s Arbitration Committee, tried to allay this fear by stating, “There is a mistake about that. My opinion is that men who signed contracts before that amendment to the National Agreement was adopted cannot be reserved under it. . . . Anything else would be gross injustice.”⁸⁷ Others disagreed. Philadelphia president John Rogers, who was also on the Arbitration Committee, told his minor league petitioners they could reserve all their players, regardless of when the player signed the contract. This led the *Daily Tribune* to state, “it is not likely that Mr. Byrnes’s views will prevail.”⁸⁸ In any case, baseball observers left the matter to hang until the final decision on minor league reservations took place. In the meantime, the *Daily Tribune* went on to describe the motives at play.

But that is precisely what is expected from the Board of Arbitration at its meeting today. The managers of the minor league clubs are making all sorts of specious arguments in

⁸⁶ “Sports And Sportsmen” NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, December 7, 1887, 6.

⁸⁷ “Caruthers Goes To Brooklyn” NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, December 14, 1887, 1.

⁸⁸ “Base-Ball Sensations” NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, December 18, 1887, 16.

favor of “full protection” for themselves, still they are one and all frank enough to say that they want a chance to realize on the valuable young players who may develop under their management. They appear to imagine that in the interest of the game they should have a right to realize on such players. If they honestly sought the protection of the National Agreement in order to hold their clubs together and with the intention of paying valuable men as good salaries as they could get elsewhere their position might be entitled to some support. They are, however, simply in the show business with a view to furnishing a certain quality of entertainment for a certain price, and they are actuated by a desire to make money. . . . That they can have no legal or moral right to prevent the player from getting the full value of his services is so manifest that few of them have the audacity to make any pretensions of rights, yet all agree that if the practice be tolerated in the leading organizations it ought to be in the minor ones.⁸⁹

Rogers’ view prevailed, of course. Matters on this score came to a head when a pitcher for the Syracuse Stars of the International League, Con Murphy, sued the team when it tried to reserve him for 1889, as Murphy was among those who had signed before the International League received the right of reservation. Murphy claimed his contract was with Syracuse management for 1888 only, and therefore the reserve rule could not apply to him.⁹⁰ The team later papered over its differences with Murphy, however, and the case did not go to trial, as Syracuse probably feared what a court might decide should a judge consider the reserve rule on its legal merits.

Protection for the minor leagues would come at a price, however. According to the scheme advocated by Al Spalding, as stated in a letter to Brooklyn president Charles Byrnes, “for the protection now given and this additional right of reserve I think it would be fair and equitable and agreeable to the minor league clubs to assess each association a certain sum of money each year, making one price where protection for the season only is given, and a higher price where protection and the right of reserve is given.”⁹¹ The minor league team owners would

⁸⁹ “Sports And Sportsmen” NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, December 7, 1887, 6.

⁹⁰ “Washington Whispers” Bob Lerner, *The Sporting Life*, January 23, 1889, 4.

⁹¹ “Chicago News” Harry Palmer, *The Sporting Life*, November 30, 1887, 3.

face no penalty if they did not agree to the protection scheme proposed by Spalding, but they did have to agree to pay \$250 per team to the secretary of the Board of Arbitration (for distribution amongst the major league teams) in order to enjoy a right of reserving players that the major leagues would recognize.⁹² After some debate about the advisability of asking for the right of reservation with no protection money, the minor league delegates to the meeting, E.E. Menges, C.M. Sherman, and Sam Morton of the Western Association, C.D. White of the International Association, Maurice Kauffmann and T.J. Brennan of the Southern League, W.H. McDermith of the Ohio League, E. Cheney of the New England League, and James Kennedy of the Central League decided to accept the terms offered. It seemed they preferred this system to anything involving a draft, as outlined in the Millenium Plan (see chapter fourteen). They disliked the idea of a draft because with the right of reservation, set at fourteen men per team, a team in good financial shape did not have to part with its top players who wished to leave and play in the major leagues. They could hold them, either to get a higher price the next year or to increase their chances at a championship, as they saw fit.⁹³

Some writers saw this scheme for what it was. Baltimore's Albert Mott wrote in his weekly column for *The Sporting Life*,

What is the protection? Protection from the protector—a sort of pay me so much and I won't rob you—give me fifty dollars and you can keep your watch worth a hundred. Charming knight errantry, isn't it? But then, it is a necessary evil—oh yes, necessary to the stronger, but not to the weaker unless he is to be squeezed out of his property or its equivalent. This thing cannot be gotten around by any right thinking person. You cannot plead justification because the minor bodies practice the slavery of reservation thereby, for two wrongs never yet made one right. . . . The base ball man looks at it through another pair of goggles. He says, first I must have discipline, and reservation is necessary for that. I must have protection in my property from the grasp of my brother manager, and reservation is necessary for that. I must control wages within reason, and reservation

⁹² "The Annual Meeting" NA, *The Sporting News*, December 10, 1887, 1.

⁹³ "Minors Win" NA, *The Sporting Life*, December 14, 1887, 1.

is necessary for that. I must have a regular influx of young blood playing material from the weaker organizations, and I will have it, or be paid an equivalent for not taking it.⁹⁴

Another interesting aspect of extending this right of reservation to the minor leagues was that it did not encompass and protect its minor league signatories as thoroughly as the major leagues' reservation system did. For instance, when the Detroit Wolverines decided to cease play after the 1888 season, the team did not resign its place in the National League until March of 1889, and continued in the League, with full powers of reserve over its players, until that time, even though the club announced its decision to quit by October of 1888. This enabled it to sell its men for whatever price they might bring. Likewise, when the National League decided to boot out Kansas City after the 1886 season, the League retained the right of reservation over the team's former players, and dispensed them to any who were interested. With the minor leagues, on the other hand, these same rules did not apply. When the Chicago team of the Western Association took a much less drastic step for 1889, and simply decided to move from Chicago and merge with Minneapolis, it did not retain the right of reservation over its players that it wanted to transfer from Chicago, although the Minneapolis men remained under reserve because they had not moved or changed status.⁹⁵ Likewise, when the Central League made a decision to expel its Easton franchise following 1888, exactly as the National League had done with Kansas City in 1886, the Central League tried to reserve the Easton players. The major leagues disallowed this move.⁹⁶

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⁹⁴ "Baltimore Bulletin" TTT, *The Sporting Life*, February 22, 1888, 4.

⁹⁵ No title, NA, *The Sporting Life*, January 16, 1889, 2.

⁹⁶ No title, NA, *The Sporting Life*, January 30, 1889, 2.

Given the myriad abuses that took place under the reserve rule, it is surprising that the players did not mount some kind of challenge to the rule. The Brotherhood of Professional Ball Players did not challenge the rule, at least not until it decided to challenge the entire structure of major league baseball in 1890. Perhaps they refrained because they knew that the owners would not give up the reserve rule under any circumstances short of revolution, or perhaps the organization truly believed the rule would remain useful if the Brotherhood could only force the League's moguls to stop abusing it. Several incidents arose between 1885 and 1889 that seemed to offer prime opportunities to test the rule in the courts, yet no player ever took such a drastic step. We can only speculate as to why no one ever did, but from the general tone of what players said in public, one of the reasons was that they truly believed that ownership would listen to reasoned arguments about the rule's abuses and that the owners were willing to make changes in a spirit of fairness because they wanted to do what was best for the game. It took many years, until the middle of 1889, for the players to realize beyond doubt that this was not true.

Of all the abuses mentioned, the sales system bothered the players the most. Partly because the players created value through their performance on the field but saw none of that value when teams sold them somewhere else. That is why players occasionally refused to sign contracts with their new team unless they received a portion of the money from their own sale. This was not the only abuse in the system of selling players, however. Many times, teams would reserve their full complement of men from the season before. This total was fourteen men by 1887, as fourteen was roughly the number of players any team carried on its roster at any given time. Preparatory to the next season, however, teams often signed a handful of new players, looking for talented young blood to help them challenge for more wins. This meant clubs often

entered April with between sixteen and twenty players, all the while only intending to keep fourteen of them. The unlucky men who did not make the final fourteen ended up in a precarious situation. By the time they found out their teams would not keep them, they could only scramble to find a new team to play for, and by then those pickings were very slim because it was so late in the preseason.

Back in 1885, however, the worst of these evils, from the perspective of the players, were still ahead. The sales system was not yet in full bloom, and the reserve rule did not yet ensnare all players. By the end of that year, they had a more pressing and immediate problem. During the winter of 1885, major league baseball owners initiated the next phase of their plan to control the players. This was the 1886 salary limit.

Chapter 3

The 1886 Salary Limit

At the conclusion of the 1885 season, with the reserve rule firmly in place to limit the movement of most major league baseball players, baseball's owners looked around for other ways to strengthen their hand in relations with their players. As both major leagues held their winter meetings to take stock of the state of the game, they came to a few decisions in this regard. As always, the need for more profit was foremost on their collective minds. As a result, one major change preparatory to the 1886 season was a significant lengthening of the championship season. In 1885, the championship schedule for both circuits had been 112 games, with each team playing sixteen games against each of their seven opponents. For 1886, the National League decided to add two more games against each opponent, which increased its campaign to 126 games, while the American Association went all the way to a 140-game slate featuring twenty games against each opposing team.

Not all observers regarded this increase as a good thing, because it required playing championship games in April and October, when the weather could be very questionable in northern cities. It was an open question as to whether fans would show up in numbers great enough to generate any profits even with teams playing several more games. In addition, this longer schedule required more "work" on the part of the players. Most of them seemed not to mind this, however. Complaints regarding a longer schedule were rare, probably because the

players were used to playing so many exhibition games before and after the season, so the change really did not increase by much the number of days when they expected to play. From their standpoint, the most ominous decision taken by the owners in the winter of 1885-1886 concerned their salaries. The owners agreed to cap player salaries at \$2,000 for the coming season, and clubs could reduce the salary of any player above the cap in the negotiations for 1886 contracts. With the Union Association War of 1884 over, and the threat of a bidding war with another league over players eliminated for the time being, baseball's magnates hoped to reduce their costs by diminishing player salaries. The new salary cap was a bold effort to do just that. This, when combined with a longer schedule of games, meant that players now received less pay for more work. While there were no stated consequences for failing to observe the new cap on salaries, and teams found various ways around this "official" limit in their efforts to secure talent, none of these future means of skirting the rule was obvious as the leaves fell from the trees in autumn and the winter of 1885-1886 got underway.

Even though there was speculation right from the start about whether or not the new cap would hold up in practice, as a group the owners did all they could to pretend that it would. The Pittsburgh Alleghenys announced their strict adherence to the new salary rule. Denny McKnight, president of the Association, believed all parties would live up to the new rules. Owner Charles Byrne of Brooklyn proclaimed, "This thing of giving these fellows every cent that we make during the summer is played out. We have toadied to them long enough. Now they will have to come to our terms." When asked how to deal with players reluctant to sign for reduced salaries, he answered, "Then, sir, they can go and break stone for a living, for they will never play ball again. . . . They will have to come to our terms or starve." Finally, responding to the notion that players with sterling reputations brought credit to the game and deserved

compensation accordingly, Byrne, recalling the recent brouhaha with the Union Association but also dodging the question by reframing it, replied, “He who asks justice must show he has done justice. Do you think we can respect such fellows as Dunlap, McCormick, Glasscock, Shaw, Mullane, Gleason, Bradley and the rest of them? Have you any idea the amount of money, labor and trouble these fellows have cost the League and Association?”¹

(Byrne later denied these comments, claiming that their source was an illegitimate eavesdropper, and earned an apology from *The Sporting Life*.² That same paper was much more charitable the following winter, when it announced that all of Brooklyn’s players signing by January received salary increases “unsolicited,” and wrote, “this fact speaks volumes for Mr. Byrne’s management. He knows how to treat ball players well and yet retain their confidence and respect. No man is more thought of by players, and yet none is less imposed upon.”³ *The Sporting News*, however, reported later that the players did not receive actual raises, but a \$50 New Year’s gift instead.⁴ Based on Byrnes’ other actions, it is likely that while the quoted statements probably are close to his personal views, he was much too careful in his public statements to say things quite so bluntly.)

Similarly granite-like in his public support of the rule was Chris Von der Ahe, owner of the St. Louis Browns. He stated that his players “will all sign for \$2,000 and less, too. I see it stated in an Eastern newspaper that this rule can be easily evaded, and that it is charged that every manager in the country will violate it. Well, here is one that won’t, and I know that no one else will.” He continued, “no player is worth any more than that sum, and if there is anyone in

¹ “From Pittsburgh” NA, *The Sporting Life*, November 4, 1885, 4; “M’Knight on the Agreement” Allegheny, *The Sporting Life*, November 4, 1885, 4; “A Talk With Mr. Byrne” NA, *The Sporting Life*, November 4, 1885, 4.

² “Mr. Byrne Makes a Denial” C. H. Byrne, *The Sporting Life*, November 11, 1885, 1.

³ “Notes and Comments” NA, *The Sporting Life*, January 26, 1887, 3.

⁴ “Caught on the Fly” NA, *The Sporting News*, February 12, 1887, 5.

my club who thinks he is he will find out his mistake when he suggests any plan for me to give him a greater sum.”⁵ This apparently united front was disconcerting enough to the players that it spawned vague rumors about the possibility of their forming a union.

Some critics doubted from the beginning that baseball’s owners, all protestations to the contrary, would succeed in following their own salary plan. Ted Sullivan, a former manager in the Union Association who managed a minor league club in Milwaukee in 1886, believed “no legislation of that kind can be made to work. If a club thinks it to its interest to pay a player more than \$2,000, there is no way, so far as I can see, to prevent it being done. . . . There are a thousand ways such a rule can be broken. All the big players will receive more than the limit.”⁶ It was not long before rumors claiming exactly this started circulating. When the Pittsburgh management failed to sign a pair of players, Jim Manning and Arthur Irwin, it accused the teams successfully signing the players, the Detroit Wolverines and Philadelphia Quakers, respectively, of offering above the maximum to secure each man’s services.⁷

A few commentators opposed the rule on free market principles. One editorial writer for *The Sporting Life* offered several points to this effect. The author pointed out that a contract was a business deal, and teams would not offer a high salary unless they deemed the player a worthy investment of the funds. Furthermore, paying salaries in excess of \$2,000 had not prevented some clubs from profiting during the prior season. He even echoed the free labor advocates (and, whether he knew it or not, classical economists such as Adam Smith) of pre-Civil War days in his belief that a maximum salary would deprive players of motivation and incentive to improve. If a player earned the maximum salary, as long as he played well enough to avoid his

⁵ “From the Mound City” Olympus, *The Sporting Life*, November 4, 1885, 4.

⁶ “Sullivan’s Views” NA, *The Sporting Life*, November 11, 1885, 1.

⁷ “From the Smoky City” NA, *The Sporting Life*, November 18, 1885, 1.

team replacing him with another player, why should he strive for improvement? There was no financial incentive for the player to better himself, and this hurt the performance of the team, and might lead to discord in the ranks, as well.⁸

George Wright echoed these thoughts in an interview in November 1885. He was one of the true pioneers of the game, widely respected, a man who “has forgotten more about base ball and base ball players than some of the present managers of mushroom growth ever knew.” Thus, his words carried some weight. Wright believed the limit a mistake because it gave players no incentive to perform at their potential. “You can’t get first-class work out of any player if he is not satisfied with what he is earning, and if you don’t have a winning nine you don’t make much money.” He advocated (presaging what would happen a few years later in the Brotherhood War) that top players who were worth more than \$2,000 should receive a portion of the ticket receipts after ticket sales passed a certain point. This scheme, Wright believed, provided the proper incentive to a high level of play, because the greater the number of fans in attendance, the more compensation the player received.⁹

The story of “Honest” John Morrill speaks to this issue of risking player dissatisfaction by unilaterally cutting their pay. A quality first baseman for the League’s Boston Beaneaters, he was also the field manager and captain of the club. Entering his eleventh season in 1886, all of them with the Beaneaters, he decided to hold out for something above \$2,500 because of his skills, various responsibilities, and long service to the ball club. Some of the Boston press certainly sympathized. “John feels very sore. He thinks it is worth more than \$2,500 to play

⁸ “The Other Side” Layman, *The Sporting Life*, November 18, 1885, 2. Layman was the pen name of lawyer James Blackhurst, who later served the Brotherhood of Professional Base Ball Players in a legal capacity.

⁹ “What Geo. Wright Thinks of the Salary Question” NA, *The Sporting Life*, November 18, 1885, 3.

first base, captain and manage the team, and there are a great many who are of the same opinion. The management certainly has made a mistake, for John will never again be able to take the interest in the club which he has formerly shown. Such is his reward for years of faithful service.” When the Boston sportswriter asked George Wright for his views on the matter, the veteran observer agreed, stating

Well, now, that’s a pretty way to treat John Morrill. I see they want to cut down his salary. If there is a man who has worked hard and conscientiously for the Boston Club it is John Morrill, and he is worth every cent he got last year. . . . There are few ball players who can captain and manage a team, but John Morrill is one of the few, and when one of the players can act as manager, it is cheaper in the end . . . if they don’t want to pay him what he is worth here why don’t they release him and give him a chance to make as much as he can. . . . I don’t know why base ball should be different from any other kind of business, but it seems to be. The harder a man works the less he seems to be appreciated.¹⁰

Soon actual, rather than rumored, violations of the rule started surfacing. Despite his dramatic protestations to the contrary, even Von der Ahe evaded some of his own rules before the year was out. True, he made known a uniform salary plan for his St. Louis club. Outfielders (Tip O’Neill, Curt Welch, & Hugh Nicol) received contracts for \$1,800, infielders (Charlie Comiskey, Yank Robinson, Bill Gleason, and Arlie “The Freshest Man on Earth” Latham) earned \$1,900, and pitchers and catchers pulled down the full \$2,000. First baseman Comiskey lost \$1,000 in pay under these circumstances and catcher Doc Bushong \$800. However, Comiskey was also the field manager for the team, and thus recouped \$500 for the extra burden

¹⁰ “From the Hub” Mugwump, *The Sporting Life*, March 3, 1886, 5. Recall that at this time, the team captain was the equivalent of a team manager in modern baseball, making game decisions regarding strategy, setting the team’s lineup, and so forth. The team’s manager was more of a business position than anything else, and so serving in this role entailed a significant amount of extra work for a player, and could reward the team financially if done well.

of these duties. Bushong earned an extra \$10 for every game in excess of two he caught each week.¹¹

Bushong provides an example of why the public held players at certain positions in high regard, and why player salaries did not always seem to match their statistical output. Despite his pitiful hitting skills (lifetime OPS+ of just 56), Bushong earned wide admiration because of his defensive abilities and durability. Bushong also gained renown for his skill in handling pitchers and his ability to catch nearly every pitch, no matter how wild. He also helped pioneer the practice of catchers crouching to receive a pitch, as they do today, rather than stooping over and catching the ball from a standing position, and was among the early catchers to give the pitcher signs signifying what type of pitch to throw, as well. One might think that these technical achievements helped earn him his nickname of “Doc,” but Bushong was an actual doctor, practicing dentistry on occasion during his career and consistently after hanging up his spikes. This avocation is a bit surprising, considering the amount of wear and tear, to their hands especially, baseball catchers endured, (it was not until the second half of the 1880s that catchers began using gloves to help protect their hands while catching pitches, doing so bare-handed up until this era) but Bushong’s abilities as a receiver drew praise from all.

¹¹ “Von der Ahe’s Plan” NA, *The Sporting Life*, December 2, 1885, 1. Speaking of Arlie Latham, in addition to being the freshest man on earth, he was also one of the fastest in the game. While it may not enter into our discussion directly, at one point he took part in a footrace against another of the game’s greyhounds, Billy Sunday. To the chagrin of Latham’s teammates, who apparently bet heavily on their man, Sunday won the race by a decent margin. Charges that Latham had tanked the race intentionally circulated immediately afterwards. Sunday, of course, eventually became a household name across America for his preaching in the 20th century. He began his public career, however, in baseball, fashioning a mediocre career OPS+ of 86 and WAR of 3.0 in his eight seasons. Interestingly, during Sunday’s playing days, there was a rumor that he intentionally sharpened the spikes on his shoes to lacerate anyone who got in his way on the bases, but if true, presumably he atoned for this sin in later years. “Notes and Comments” NA, *The Sporting Life*, April 20, 1887, 11.

The amount of physical punishment a catcher endured over the course of a season is also why they could often command a salary that seemed out of line with their production level as batters. Teams, and spectators, too, recognized how difficult it was for catchers to stay healthy and rewarded them, compared to their fellows at least, as a result. Following his contributions to the St. Louis Browns in their World Championship year of 1886, Bushong's admirers in the Mound City's Merchants' Exchange presented him with "a dozen each of tea and table spoons, knives and forks, salt spoons and an elegant rattle box for 'the baby,' all of solid silver, and put up in a beautiful morocco case. They were all appropriately engraved."¹²

Von der Ahe, sometimes nicknamed "Der Boss President" because of his fiery temperament and because he was also a recent immigrant who spoke with a heavy accent, was not alone in finding ways to supplement the official salary of major league baseball's better players. Harry Stovey, for example, received an extra \$100 "gift" that was "purely voluntary" on the part of his team, the Athletics, and "unexpected" by the outstanding and defensively versatile player.¹³ Thus it was not surprising when an anonymous player, seeing through the potential loopholes, stated, "it is not unlikely that a manager who wants to secure a player not under contract will go to him and say: 'I can only give you \$2,000 salary, but there is a gentleman in the city where we play, and who likes you enough, to make you a present of \$1,000 if you play with us.'"¹⁴

At times, extravagant rumors made their way into print, as in the case of John Francis "Phenomenal" Smith. In November, the *New York Times* reported that the Beaneaters of Boston had interest in the young left-hander, and that they offered the phenomenal sum of \$4,000 to

¹² "From St. Louis" Pritchard, *The Sporting Life*, November 3, 1886, 2; Bushong's SABR biography, available at <http://sabr.org/bioproj/person/5d4b5fe8>, accessed June 6, 2014.

¹³ "Notes and Comments" NA, *The Sporting Life*, December 9, 1885, 3.

¹⁴ "The National Game" NA, *New York Sun*, October 20, 1885, 3.

place Smith in the pitcher's box the following year.¹⁵ Smith did not end up with Boston in 1886, but rather with Detroit, although he pitched a mere 25 innings for the Wolverines when they decided to bolster their sagging pitching staff in an energetic but ultimately unsuccessful late-season effort to gain the National League pennant. When Smith signed with the Baltimore Orioles for 1887, some writers blamed his lack of dominance on the fact that Detroit's catchers did not know how to work with him, but predicted better things now that he was pitching to better catchers. This notion, that certain pitchers worked well with some catchers who were familiar with them, but would not perform as effectively with unfamiliar catchers behind the bat, held a lot of credence to observers in the 1880s.¹⁶ The idea does not make much sense in Smith's case, however, as Detroit catcher Charlie Bennett generally rated among the best backstops in baseball. In any case, the only thing that turned out to be phenomenal about Smith's career was how often he changed clubs, working for seven different teams in eight seasons, including three separate tours of duty with the Philadelphia Athletics and two each with the Philadelphia Phillies and Pittsburgh Alleghenys.

¹⁵ "Baseball Notes" NA, *New York Times*, November 2, 1885, 8. Incidentally, the press commonly referred to promising young players as phenomenons or phenomenal, and in Smith's case, it happened so often that observers just called him Phenomenal, rather than John.

¹⁶ "Pitcher Smith's Engagement by Baltimore" TTT, *The Sporting Life*, November 10, 1886, 1. The idea that some catchers are better at handling pitchers than others is one of those ideas that is rather difficult to measure. It is quite possible that a pitcher will feel comfortable working with certain catchers more so than others, but it is questionable how much difference this really makes in performance. For a time, in the late 1980s and early 1990s especially, observers attempted to quantify this effect through a statistic known as CERA, which stood for Catcher's Earned Run Average. This measured what the team's earned run average was with its different catchers behind the plate, with the idea being that some catchers would demonstrate their superior handling of pitchers by having a lower CERA than their more pedestrian counterparts. As it turned out, however, this statistic did not really catch on, pardon the pun, because there was little consistency from one year to the next. Players with a CERA below their team's average one season frequently had a higher than team average CERA the next, or vice versa, and so most baseball observers concluded that it was not a very useful statistic, because it was hard to demonstrate that any catchers consistently scored better than their teammates from one season to the next.

* * * * *

Players had a mixed response to the semi-official salary limit, and the 1885-1886 off-season featured many player-management disputes attributable to the worsening contract situation. Most of the contention, unsurprisingly, surrounded the premier players, formerly well compensated, who faced major cuts in salary under the new plan. For Al Spalding, trouble lurked in his own backyard, in the person of one of Chicago's star pitchers, Jim McCormick. Coming off of a season of 20 wins and 4 losses for Chicago (he also pitched a few games for the Providence club that year), the hefty Scotsman had long been a mainstay of major league pitching staffs, with five seasons in excess of 500 innings pitched to his credit. After meeting with Spalding in November 1885, McCormick declined to sign a contract for the following season, claiming a desire to look after business interests in New Jersey.¹⁷ Given that McCormick had jumped to the Union Association for the 1884 season for a salary increase, remunerative considerations probably played a part in his decision, but if true, McCormick's public comments hid the fact well. "I have a prosperous little business at home in Paterson, New Jersey, and it is profitable enough to enable me to live nicely without the wear and tear of a ballplayer's life. For this reason I do not want to sign with any club . . ." ¹⁸

The Chicago *Daily Tribune* also caught up with two of McCormick's popular teammates, pitcher John Clarkson and shortstop Tom Burns, to get their take on the salary situation.

¹⁷ "From Chicago" Replap, *The Sporting Life*, November 4, 1885, 1; "Chicago to Lose McCormick" NA, *New York Times*, October 28, 1885, 5. Interestingly, McCormick did make good on his threat to retire to private business, but he did so after the 1887 season, rather than after 1885.

¹⁸ "Chicago Club Re-signing" NA, *St. Paul Daily Globe*, October 29, 1885, 1; "Bits of Base Ball News" NA, *New York Sun*, November 8, 1885, 7.

Clarkson, a star pitcher who had just won 53 games in 1885, pronounced himself satisfied. Burns, coming off a decent but unspectacular season, was more evasive. “I know what my services are worth, and I shall get just as much for them with the limit rule as I could get without it.” When asked if that meant his talents were worth \$2,000 per season, he responded, “I did not say so” before departing to discuss the issue with Chicago’s team secretary, thus adding to speculation that some players were getting unofficial forms of remuneration to supplement their official pay.¹⁹

Joining McCormick in refusing to sign a new contract was the noted hurler of the Cincinnati Red Stockings, Tony Mullane. Various known as “The Count of Macaroni” when referring to his dandified wardrobe (“when on dress parade Tony delights in loud ties, a frock coat and a high silk hat”²⁰), or “The Apollo of the Box,” when his pitching skills were under discussion, Mullane had a history of chafing at baseball’s efforts at salary restrictions, once stating, “I am not playing for reputation, but for money.”²¹ During the Union Association War of 1884, he had refused to accept the salary offer of the club that held him in reserve, the St. Louis Browns of the American Association. He agreed to change leagues but not cities when the St. Louis club of the UA offered a raise from \$1,900 to \$2,500. Due to some behind-the-scenes machinations, he eventually landed with the Toledo Blue Stockings of the American Association for the same salary. That was not the end of his salary-seeking escapades, however. When, despite Mullane’s quality pitching, the Toledo club departed from the ranks of major league

¹⁹ “Chicago Club Re-Signing” NA, *St. Paul Daily Globe*, October 29, 1885, 1. In addition to ball playing, Burns also served as a polo referee in the winter of 1885-1886 to increase his pay a bit. In retrospect, the White Stockings probably wished that they had just paid Burns more money so he would not need this off-season employment, considering that in February the fans at one polo match mobbed their shortstop for his lack of impartiality. “Notes and Comments” NA, *The Sporting Life*, February 10, 1886, 5.

²⁰ “Caught on the Fly” NA, *The Sporting News*, August 9, 1886, 5.

²¹ “The National Game” NA, *New York Sun*, October 20, 1885, 3.

baseball at the end of the 1884 season, the Blue Stockings tried to sell Mullane's services (along with two other players, second baseman Sam Barkley and outfielder Curt Welch) back to his old club, the St. Louis Browns, who agreed to pay him \$3,500. Not satisfied with such meager compensation, at the last moment Mullane faked illness to abscond from the hotel where the St. Louis negotiations were taking place and secretly met with representatives of the Red Stockings. Cincinnati officials, alerted to the fact that St. Louis had promised Toledo officials some cash in recompense for releasing their players so the Browns could sign them, decided to cut out the middle man and strike a deal with Mullane directly, now that he had been released. They offered \$5,000 (\$2,000 in advance) and secured The Count's signature.

These shenanigans did not sit well with St. Louis owner Chris Von der Ahe, who thought he had covered all angles in his Toledo negotiations in requiring the released players, Mullane included, to sign a notarized statement promising to sign with the Browns. Von der Ahe attempted to blacklist Mullane and took his case to the American Association's Board of Directors. The Board, however, ruled that Cincinnati would retain the rights to Mullane, but that Mullane would be suspended for the 1885 season and would have to return half of his advance to the Red Stockings for "conduct tending to bring discredit on the base-ball profession, causing discontent and insubordination among all professional players, and setting an example of sharp practice almost equivalent to dishonesty."²² In his anger, Von der Ahe refused to pay Toledo the remainder of the money for the trio of athletes, but had to yield after Toledo sued in US circuit court.²³

This was the situation, then, under which Mullane refused the contract offer of Cincinnati for 1886, declaring he would "wait for something to turn up." The team, on the other hand,

²² Seymour, *Baseball*, 168-169.

²³ "Von Der Ahe Sued" NA, *St. Paul Daily Globe*, January 18, 1885, 3.

declared its intent to stick to the new salary rules.²⁴ Perhaps Mullane hoped for an opportunity such as that realized by good friend and fellow pitcher Guy Hecker. The two men pitched no-hitters just one week apart for the Louisville Eclipse of the American Association in 1882, the first no-hitters in the Association's history, at that. Before the 1883 season, Mullane moved to St. Louis, and Hecker inherited the mantle of top pitcher for the Eclipse, who renamed themselves the Colonels for 1885. He established his reputation as a premier pitcher following a 52-win season in 1884, but Hecker complained about his salary at times in 1885 and hoped to do better financially in 1886. Wanting to keep its star pitcher happy, but fearful of paying him extra cash and setting a bad example by violating the new salary rule before the ink on it was dry, Louisville management instead supplied Hecker with \$700 worth of stock in the new "Hecker Supply Company," conveniently founded just before the new salary limit went into effect. Hecker spent the off-season touring the South (where he suffered an arm injury while throwing stones at a dog²⁵) to hawk his new company's "billiards, pool, cigars, tobacco, stationery, and sporting goods."²⁶ It seems he scored some successes on his Southern tour, even, as *The Sporting Life* later reported, "Hecker is a hustler. He has also secured the making of Chattanooga's uniforms" and "Guy Hecker is still hustling through the Southern country, getting in big licks for business. He has also secured the contract for Atlanta's uniforms," and, eventually, six of the eight teams in the Southern League.²⁷

²⁴ "From Cincinnati" WWB., *The Sporting Life*, November 4, 1885, 1; "Bits of Base Ball News" NA, *New York Sun*, November 8, 1885, 7.

²⁵ "Caylor's Screech" O.P. Caylor, *The Sporting Life*, March 10, 1886, 1.

²⁶ "Affairs in the Falls City" JIM., *The Sporting Life*, November 11, 1885, 1.

²⁷ No title, NA, *The Sporting Life*, February 24, 1886, 4; "Notes and Comments" NA, *The Sporting Life*, February 24, 1886, 4; "From the Falls City" NA, *The Sporting Life*, March 3, 1886, 1.

To be fair, Hecker really did have an actual interest in his new business. One writer mentioned, “‘Heck’ ought to develop into a first-class drummer. He has plenty of presence of mind, and his tongue flows like a brooklet.”²⁸ His company, located on Jefferson Street in Louisville, also offered patrons “a large bulletin board, on which all the late base ball news is posted. It is the club head-quarters; is a popular resort already.”²⁹ Presumably, it also sold copies of *Hecker’s Guide to the Art of Pitching*. “It is fully illustrated and explains as clearly as A, B, C how to give the ‘ins,’ ‘outs,’ ‘ups,’ and ‘down shoot.’”³⁰ A year later, the Hecker Supply Company reported a “thriving” business, and its billiards hall was the winter hangout of choice for ballplayers native to or living in the Falls City, such as Tom Ramsey, Al Mays, Lev Shreve, Gus Weyhing, and John Kerins. It also got the supply contract for bats for four of the American Association’s teams: St. Louis, Baltimore, Cleveland, and of course Louisville.³¹ The quality of the company’s merchandise and Hecker’s magnetic personality were great drawing cards. “There is not a man, woman or child in Louisville and its contingent territory that does not know Guy Hecker. He is worshipped as few heroes are. His name is a household word, and his manly, noble carriage, affable manners and always even temperament, have added greatly to the well deserved popularity which his great skill as a knight of the pitching sphere has brought him.”³²

²⁸ “Notes and Comments” NA, *The Sporting Life*, January 6, 1886, 3.

²⁹ Quotes and material from “Affairs in the Falls City” JIM., *The Sporting Life*, November 11, 1885, 1; Hecker’s SABR biography, <http://sabr.org/bioproj/person/4b471b76>, accessed February 15, 2014.

³⁰ “Notes and Comments” NA, *The Sporting Life*, November 25, 1885, 3. Hecker’s book did elicit some controversy, however, and from none other than the venerable baseball writer Henry Chadwick, at that. Chadwick alleged that Hecker pirated material from Chadwick’s own book on the art of pitching, and threatened legal action against the Louisville hurler. “Notes and Comments” NA, *The Sporting Life*, March 3, 1886, 3.

³¹ “From the Falls City” XXX, *The Sporting Life*, January 19, 1887, 3; “The Louisville Team” RWL, *The Sporting News*, February 5, 1887, 1.

³² “Base Ball” NA, *The Sporting News*, February 5, 1887, 5.

Things were going so well that Hecker decided to expand his entrepreneurial pursuits. Turning day-to-day management of the sporting goods store over to teammate and fellow investor John Kerins, he opened a saloon at 406 Fifth Street in Louisville. “Hecker will endeavor to make the place a rendezvous for all the base ball players. He will add billiards, pool, and other such accoutrements as properly belong to a first-class establishment of this kind.”³³ The grog shop opened in late January of 1887, with the baseball players of Louisville invited to a “royal feast” with “plenty to wash it down with.” The new establishment was “a marvel of beauty. He sells nothing but the choicest liquors and cigars. A scoreboard will be put up next week, to report all games by innings.”³⁴ After opening his saloon, Hecker sold his share of the Hecker Supply Company to Louis Helburn, perhaps tired of the hustling required of his first business for the more convivial atmosphere of the second.³⁵

More news concerning quarrels over salary drifted in from Providence. Charles “Old Hoss” Radbourn was chomping at his bit after the team informed him of his new \$2,000 salary for 1886, a fifty percent reduction from 1885. Radbourn was another of baseball’s great pitching stars, having won a titanic 193 games in his five-year career thanks to an array of unorthodox but effective ways to deliver the baseball to home plate. He declared he would not play anywhere at that price and refused to sign with the Grays for 1886. This continued a feud with management left over from the end of the 1885 season, when Providence’s Director Ned Allen suspended Radbourn, along with starting third baseman Jerry Denny (who once allegedly assaulted a young

³³ “Hecker’s New Venture” XXX, *The Sporting Life*, January 26, 1887, 1.

³⁴ “The Louisville Team” RWL, *The Sporting News*, February 5, 1887, 1.

³⁵ “Late News” NA, *The Sporting Life*, August 17, 1887, 1.

woman in a train sleeping car while intoxicated³⁶), on September 11 for “indifferent work.” Radbourn did not pitch again that year.³⁷

As it turned out, the Providence club folded before the 1886 season, sparing Radbourn such financially insulting treatment. Boston Beaneaters owner Arthur Soden bought the entire Providence franchise over the winter, allowing him to take the players he wanted, Radbourn included, and sell the other players to whomever wanted their services before disbanding the team. Soden bought the entire Providence team, rather than just the players he wanted, so he could control the fate of all the players and get recompense for those for whom Boston had no use. Radbourn pitched for the Beaneaters for a reported sum of \$4,800.³⁸ After the 1886 season, team owner Arthur Soden revealed Radbourn’s actual salary to his city’s correspondent for *The Sporting Life*. The writer, known by the pen name Mugwump, simply called the figure “tremendous” but refused to print the exact amount, having told Soden he would not reveal the actual number. Although not conclusive, this supports those guessing that Radbourn did indeed receive a salary significantly north of \$2,000. Before the 1887 season began, the same sporting paper gave another estimate, \$4,500, for Radbourn’s recompense.³⁹

Like Radbourn in Providence, in St. Louis Fred Dunlap decided to throw down the gauntlet. Rather than play for the League’s Maroons at \$2,000 in 1886, he “tendered his resignation” to team owner Lucas and declared he would rather retire altogether than play for

³⁶ “Denny’s Awful Error” NA, *The Sporting News*, August 2, 1886, 1.

³⁷ “From Providence” MCD., *The Sporting Life*, November 11, 1885, 1. It was typical at this time for teams and newspapers to describe the quality of play from players with a reference to the quality of their “work.”

³⁸ “Soden’s Big Scoop” Mugwump, *The Sporting Life*, December 9, 1885, 1; “Another Baseball Deal” NA, *Milwaukee Sentinel*, December 2, 1885, 3; Radbourn’s SABR biography, <http://sabr.org/bioproj/person/83bf739e>, accessed February 15, 2014.

³⁹ “From the Hub” Mugwump, *The Sporting Life*, November 17, 1886, 4; “Notes and Comments” NA, *The Sporting Life*, March 16, 1887, 3.

such a miserly sum. To back up his threat, the “Sure Shot” began negotiations to purchase a saloon in his native Philadelphia.⁴⁰ Entering the saloon or restaurant business was a common pastime for Gilded Age ballplayers in the off-season. In Baltimore, pitcher Hardie Henderson, along with battery mate Bill Traffley, did the same. “Should the battery succeed in mixing cobblers and cock-tails as well as they can assort the shoots and curves the shekels will no doubt be plentiful by the time the robins nest again.”⁴¹ Likewise in Chicago, where Charlie Comiskey, captain and first baseman of the St. Louis Browns but a Chicago native, opened a saloon on Twelfth Street in 1885. “The place is very commodious and is furnished with all the modern improvements, including four brand new pool and one billiard table.”⁴²

Far surpassing these individual quarrels, however, was the decision by the players of the League’s New York Giants elected to hold out *en masse*.

They have held meetings and have thoroughly discussed the action of the joint conference committee in reference to the grading of salaries, or rather the \$2,000 limit clause. A thorough understanding was arrived at, and the club, in a body, have agreed to stand by one another in regard to this question of such vital importance. The upshot of the whole thing is that the players will not hear of a reduction in their salaries from last season, and, in fact, some few of them even want an increase on the salary they have previously received.

“Move Up” Joe Gerhardt, the club’s second baseman, remarked he might accept a minor reduction from his current salary of \$3,500, but “Orator” Jim O’Rourke, still one of the game’s top players after fourteen major league seasons, “very emphatically stated that he is worth every cent of the money he received last season and that he will not sign for one cent less than he

⁴⁰ “From St. Louis” Olympus, *The Sporting Life*, November 11, 1885, 1.

⁴¹ “Notes and Comments” NA, *The Sporting Life*, January 6, 1886, 3.

⁴² “Notes and Comments” NA, *The Sporting Life*, January 20, 1886, 3. Comiskey is also, of course, the same man who, as owner of the Chicago White Sox in 1919, played a major role in the Black Sox scandal involving eight members of his team throwing the World Series to the Cincinnati Reds.

received last season.”⁴³ The *New York Times* quoted an unnamed Giants player (although from the vocabulary employed, either team captain John Ward or O’Rourke appear the likely candidates) speaking about conditions:

The time has arrived when the players must take some action in the matter. Since the organization of the League and American Association, the legislation has been solely in the interests of the clubs. The players have been ignored at every meeting, and restrictions one after another have been placed upon them until now they can stand it no longer. The first piece of injustice was the adopting of the reserve rule. A club can engage a player, reduce his salary to \$1,000, and compel him to play for that sum, although he may have a standing offer five times that amount elsewhere. . . . At first, only five men could be reserved. We made an effort to have this broken. To show presumably their contempt for the players they changed the number from five to eleven. At Saturday’s meeting they went still further and made it 12. Players have been treated unfairly long enough, and I assure you the stockholders of clubs will find before long that they have placed the last straw upon the camel’s back. We make the money, and it is only just that we ought to get a fair share of the profits.⁴⁴

The New York players also tried to sell the public on the fact that the strict \$2,000 limit should not apply in New York City because the cost of living there was so much higher than elsewhere.⁴⁵ Team owner John Day remained unperturbed, however, at the united front offered by his players, saying, “Wait until the palms of their hands begin to itch, then they will come.”⁴⁶

* * * * *

What became of these players claiming pecuniary discontent? Dunlap came to terms early, and apparently did well for himself. His club, St. Louis, shopped him around, and while some teams, the Philadelphia Athletics especially, expressed interest, (nearly agreeing to meet

⁴³ “New York on the Anxious Seat” OBS., *The Sporting Life*, December 9, 1885, 1.

⁴⁴ “Return of the Giants” NA, *New York Times*, October 19, 1885, 8.

⁴⁵ “Notes and Comments” NA, *The Sporting Life*, December 9, 1885, 3.

⁴⁶ “Echoes of the Meeting” NA, *The Sporting Life*, December 16, 1885, 2.

the St. Louis asking price of \$3,000⁴⁷) they would not offer the Maroons sufficient compensation to acquire the Sure Shot. He ended up back with the Maroons, (signing on December 29⁴⁸), with a deal that, while its official terms were unknown, apparently met his expectations and elicited a promise to “play real ball.” Dunlap said, “I never felt so well in my life. For the past six weeks [pitcher “Handsome” Henry] Boyle and I have taken a six or ten-mile walk in the morning, and put in several hours a day in the racquet court. We are both fit to get out and play ball tomorrow.”⁴⁹ *The Sporting Life*’s St. Louis correspondent described the situation by writing, “Dunlap is very reticent regarding the matter. When the \$2,000 salary limit is mentioned he smiles a significant smile. His salary last season was away over \$3,000 and he says the sum he will receive next season will be quite satisfactory. So people can draw their own conclusions.”⁵⁰ People did indeed draw their own conclusions. “In view of the fact that Dunlap took an oath, on his contract with Cleveland, to never again soil his dimpled hands with the mud which grows on the St. Louis diamond; that he would rather subsist on bread and water (fire-water) the rest of his days, there must have been some very substantial consideration to induce him to overcome his dislike of the Mound City.”⁵¹

The coda to Fred Dunlap’s story gives more credence to the speculation about ways teams avoided the salary limit. In August of 1886, St. Louis sold Dunlap to Detroit for \$4,700, the highest sum ever received for selling a player to that point. Dunlap’s new contract with Detroit remunerated him to the tune of \$4,500 per year for two years. Detroit claimed they still observed the salary limit, however, stating that the extra pay above \$2,000 consisted of a

⁴⁷ “Price of a Second Baseman” NA, *New York Times*, December 24, 1885, 1.

⁴⁸ “The St. Louis League Team” NA, *New York Times*, December 30, 1885, 1.

⁴⁹ “Dunlap and Boyle” NA, *The Sporting News*, March 17, 1886, 2.

⁵⁰ “Dunlap Signs” NA, *The Sporting Life*, January 6, 1886, 1.

⁵¹ “Detroit Tips” MAT, *The Sporting Life*, January 6, 1886, 3.

personal services contract with Dunlap, and that they were only paying him the salary limit for his baseball activities. Thus, by signing Dunlap to two separate contracts, the Wolverines could observe the salary limit but still acquire the player that they wanted and pay him a salary that kept him happy.⁵²

Jim McCormick also decided to re-up with his club from 1885, the White Stockings. Team owner Al Spalding announced the signing in February 1886 with minimal comment, only claiming that McCormick had “signed willingly,” so it appears that little acrimony existed over McCormick’s short-lived decision to leave the game.⁵³ As to the question of salary, as usual, there was no official declaration, but rumors circulated immediately that Spalding dangled \$2,500 in front of the workhorse pitcher in order to secure McCormick’s services.⁵⁴

Occasionally, owners admitted that competition between teams forced them to fatten their offers to unsigned players. Baltimore owner Billy Barnie, the “Bald Eagle of Baltimore,” tore into Pittsburgh’s management over his difficulties in signing second baseman Sam Barkley. Barnie paid St. Louis president Von der Ahe \$1,000 to release Barkley, but then the Alleghenys swooped in, meeting Barkley in person at his Wheeling, West Virginia home, giving him a railroad ticket to Pittsburgh, and offering the maximum \$2,000 salary. Only a personal visit from Barnie changed the infielder’s mind, but to secure Barkley’s signature, Barnie had to offer the team captaincy, boosting Barkley’s pay to an estimated \$2,300. This left a sour taste in the Baltimorean’s mouth, as he had helped Pittsburgh in the past. “D--- such friendship. Hereafter

⁵² “More Sensations” NA, *The Sporting Life*, August 11, 1886, 1; “A Prince of Ball Players” NA, *The Sporting News*, August 16, 1886, 1.

⁵³ “From the City of Straits” MAT, *The Sporting Life*, February 3, 1886, 3; “Base-Ball” NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, January 24, 1886, 12.

⁵⁴ “Notes and Comments” NA, *The Sporting Life*, February 3, 1886, 5.

I'm going to look out for Bernie and the Baltimore Club, and depend upon no one but myself. I'm tired of professions of friendship without the performance.”⁵⁵

This was not the end of the story, however. A week later, Barkley's saga took a new, Mullane-like twist. He was on his way to Pittsburgh after all. Despite a signed agreement to go to Baltimore, duly witnessed by a pair of signatories, Barkley decided to jump ship and head to the Smoky City, claiming he regretted the signed agreement. Pittsburgh further claimed the agreement was null, as technically, Barkley was a member of St. Louis club when he signed the paperwork, and the Browns still owned his rights. Once the Browns made the release official, Barkley then signed on with the Alleghenys. Bernie vowed to fight this new turn of events in every way possible, in both the Association and US courts, but these gambits did not succeed, and Barkley played ball in Pittsburgh in 1886.⁵⁶ Such contractual infidelity earned Barkley a reputation with the press as a man of low character, and his on-field actions did nothing to reverse this unsavory verdict. “Cunning and unreliable Barkley did but poor work with the stick at New Orleans. He failed to distinguish himself in any way except ruffianism, vide his bat-throwing at Mullane publicly during a game. This act brands him as a tough.”⁵⁷ There was certainly bad blood between Barkley and Mullane, Barkley later stating (according to Baltimore owner Bernie, at least) that he wished he had killed Mullane when he threw the bat at the Count

⁵⁵ “Bernie Gets His Man” NA, *The Sporting Life*, January 6, 1886, 3.

⁵⁶ “A Mean Act” TTT, *The Sporting Life*, January 13, 1886, 1; “The Sale of Barkley” NA, *New York Times*, January 18, 1886, 1. For the full text of the American Association's decision, see “The Association” O.P. Caylor, *The Sporting Life*, March 2, 1886, 2.

⁵⁷ “Notes and Comments” NA, *The Sporting Life*, January 13, 1886, 3.

of Macaroni in New Orleans.⁵⁸ Barkley was out for blood because, when the pair were teammates at Toledo in 1884, Mullane stole Barkely's female companion.⁵⁹

Nor was this Barkley's first go round on the team-jumping carousel. A mere twelve months prior, after his release by the same Toledo club involved in the Mullane imbroglio, Barkley signed an apparent agreement to play for Louisville. He did not end up manning second base in the Falls City, however, but played for the Browns of St. Louis instead. While he did have a few defenders in the press, and many public figures in his hometown vouchsafed his good character, fans in Baltimore and Cincinnati (remembering the similarities to their own Mullane fiasco) were rarely so charitable.⁶⁰ *The Sporting Life* offered its readers a full hearing of all sides of the case, but in the end, also concluded that the second baseman was guilty of treachery and that Baltimore stood in the right morally, even if the Orioles did not get their man.

It would not be Barkley's last try at manipulating events for his own benefit, either. During the 1887 season, still with Pittsburgh, he suffered from an injured arm. The arm healed up over the winter, but Barkley pretended otherwise in his conversations with Pittsburgh's management, so before the 1888 season opened, they sold him to the American Association's new franchise in Kansas City. Barkley then signed with the Cowboys for a reported \$2,800. After the deal was complete, he said, "well, I worked the sore arm and strained groin on the Pittsburg management pretty well. My arm is all right and I can throw as well as I ever did. I know the Pittsburg management thinks my arm is completely gone and from what I hear they think they have made \$2,000 rather easily. Well, I will show them."⁶¹ (Defensive statistics are,

⁵⁸ "The Association" O.P. Caylor, *The Sporting Life*, March 10, 1886, 2.

⁵⁹ David Nemecek, *The Beer and Whiskey League: The Illustrated History of the American Association—Baseball's Renegade Major League*, (New York: Lyons and Burford, 1994), 111.

⁶⁰ "Cincinnati News" O.P. Caylor, *The Sporting Life*, January 20, 1886, 2.

⁶¹ "Barkley's Release" Circle, *The Sporting Life*, April 11, 1888, 1.

as described in Appendix A, notoriously imprecise for this era, but it appears he did play better in the field in 1888. His fielding percentage improved markedly, from a below average .900 at second base in 1887 to an above average .938 mark in 1888.)

Eventually, the American Association decided to suspend Barkley for his controversial actions in 1886, but in time softened their punishment to a \$500 fine. In addition, to satisfy Baltimore, Pittsburgh released first baseman and expert hand ball player “Mikado” Milt Scott to the Orioles as recompense to smooth over the harsh feelings generated by the case.⁶² Billy Barnie took further satisfaction in helping engineer the ouster of Association president Denny McKnight, whom Barnie blamed for duplicity in the Barkley standoff.⁶³ However, the controversy left hard feelings amongst some of the owners of the American Association. Although it may have been no more than a convenient excuse, Pittsburgh owner Nimick later claimed that the way the Association handled the Barkley case spurred his decision to leave the Association and join the National League in 1887.⁶⁴ McKnight, meanwhile, headed west to New Mexico Territory to head a ranching operation there, an avocation he pursued for parts of the next two years. Not satisfied with the cowboy lifestyle, by September 1887 McKnight was in the mining business. “He has located a claim at Gold Hill, near Silver City, New Mexico, and is now building a mill. Denny, so his friends say, expects to make a fortune there.”⁶⁵ After

⁶² “Barkley Reinstated” NA, *New York Times*, April 11, 1886, 3.

⁶³ “Barkley to be Reinstated” NA, *New York Times*, April 6, 1886, 1; “Off With His Head” Cincinnatus, *The Sporting News*, March 29, 1886, 1.

⁶⁴ “Pittsburg Pencillings” CMB, *The Sporting Life*, December 8, 1886, 1. CMB was Clarence Bixby, who became managing editor of the *Pittsburgh Referee* after departing *The Sporting Life* early in 1887.

⁶⁵ “Denny McKnight in Luck” NA, *The Sporting Life*, September 14, 1887, 1.

purchasing a crushing and stamping mill from Arizona, McKnight teamed up with “a number of El Paso capitalists” to put the operation in motion.⁶⁶

These types of controversies were quite common in the 1880s. Besides the stories of Tony Mullane and Sam Barkley, the 1885-1886 off-season also featured a major controversy between the New York Metropolitan and Brooklyn Grays over two players, first baseman Dave Orr and outfielder Chief Roseman. After the Metropolitan got the better of things, the two clubs immediately started sparring over a third player, outfield Ernie Burch. This time, Brooklyn got the better of the deal. Roseman had a rather rough off-season, as it turned out, as besides the uncertainty over his ball club for 1886, an assailant stabbed him in the arm during a fight with a street gang near Penny Bridge. One of his ball-playing friends became involved in the ruckus, and Roseman stepped in to help extricate his pal once the man started getting the worst of things. The police finally arrived and took about thirty men, Roseman included, into custody. After his arrest, he explained his role in the fracas, and got off with a slight fine.⁶⁷

Barkley’s capers apparently stole the show from the big developments in New York, as by January and February most of the key players for the Giants signed contracts to play in 1886. Buck Ewing, Joe Gerhardt, John Ward, Jim O’Rourke, and Danny Richardson all inked deals in those two months, though the sporting press remained curiously silent as to what caused their change of heart.⁶⁸ The players involved seemed to keep a low profile over their negotiations as well, leading to the usual speculation over whether the salary rule had stood up. One sportswriter offered that, “we would like to see the expression on President Young’s face when

⁶⁶ “From Pittsburg” Circle, *The Sporting Life*, October 26, 1887, 1.

⁶⁷ “From the City of Churches” Regular Reader, *The Sporting Life*, February 24, 1886, 4.

⁶⁸ “Baseball News” NA, *New York Times*, January 12, 1886, 8.

he reads the contracts of these players preparatory to approval” because the writer believed “this salary limit rule, as we remarked some time ago, would be observed only in its breach.”⁶⁹

A few members of the New York club continued holding out, however, most notably the excellent pitchers “Smiling” Tim Keefe and “Smiling” Mickey Welch. In addition to sharing nicknames, both men also shared the opinion that “they are the main-stays of the New York Club” and that “neither will sign until the New York Club comes to their terms.”⁷⁰ All through March and into April, the holdout continued. Keefe eventually signed, but with almost no comment in the press, the terms were open to speculation. He first appeared on the diamond for an exhibition game with Amherst College on April 9. Welch, on the other hand, who also owned a saloon in Holyoke, Massachusetts, could not come to terms with the Giants after two days of negotiations in early April, and so decided to attend to his business interests until New York’s management was ready to get serious.⁷¹ Some commentators pleaded for compromise between the two sides. “Welch has not signed a contract yet. . . . It is thought, however, he will be engaged shortly. The New York Club cannot afford to play without this clever pitcher, and Welch cannot afford to remain idle all summer.”⁷² Team owner John Day protested that “Welch only wants the earth for his services, and that his demand is so extortionate that compliance is simply out of the question,” and so Smiling Mickey remained unsigned into late April.⁷³ Even a mid-April home visit from manager Jim Mutrie could not persuade Welch to come to terms with his club.⁷⁴ He did not sign until the week before the regular season began, and almost certainly did not sign for \$2,000 or less. “The exact inducement is not known, of course, but is variously

⁶⁹ “New York News” Layman, *The Sporting Life*, February 17, 1886, 2.

⁷⁰ “Notes and Comments” NA, *The Sporting Life*, February 24, 1886, 4.

⁷¹ “Welch Goes Home Mad” NA, *The Sporting Life*, April 7, 1886, 1.

⁷² “Baseball Games” NA, *New York Times*, April 9, 1886, 2.

⁷³ “Mickey Welch’s Case” NA, *The Sporting Life*, April 21, 1886, 1.

⁷⁴ “Notes and Comments” NA, *The Sporting Life*, April 21, 1886, 5.

estimated at from \$2,500 to \$3,500 for the season. It would be pretty safe to say, however, that Mickey's stipend will exceed the limit."⁷⁵

Throughout February, the stories of two prestigious pitchers stoked further speculation in the press. "Parisian" Bob Caruthers, of the St. Louis Browns, announced an agreement to play for 1886. Caruthers spent the winter threatening the club with various and sundry warnings of what might happen should they not meet his terms of a \$2,900 salary. After Caruthers claimed a desire to join his brother in the shoe-selling business (a successful one, too, according to reports), announced a possible retirement for health reasons, let slip that his parents objected to his playing ball for a living, and finally, considered a world tour by steamer at the behest of relatives, the Browns finally announced that he intended to sign a contract. On whose terms, however, was an open question, as owner Von der Ahe publicly took a hard line on the question of employing Caruthers for 1886.⁷⁶ There was, likewise, great speculation when ace pitcher Charlie Buffinton came to terms with the Boston Beaneaters. Buffinton pulled down a salary of \$2,800 in 1885, and no one could confirm how near that was to his figure for 1886.⁷⁷

Later in February, however, the Bob Caruthers story took a turn worthy of a soap opera. The stories of his signing were premature, after all. When Browns owner Von der Ahe went to Chicago to get Parisian Bob's signature and make everything official, he found Caruthers absent. Instead, he was in Gotham making plans to put to sea on an extended European vacation. (Caruthers came from a wealthy family, and had recently inherited a considerable sum as well.) When Von der Ahe telegraphed Caruthers at the Windsor Hotel in New York in a final attempt at persuasion, he cannot have been pleased when Caruthers answered, "Will stay for \$5,000." Von

⁷⁵ "Notes and Comments" NA, *The Sporting Life*, April 28, 1886, 5.

⁷⁶ "From the Mound City" NA, *The Sporting Life*, February 10, 1886, 1; "The Sale of Barkley" NA, *New York Times*, January 18, 1886, 1.

⁷⁷ "From the Hub" Mugwump, *The Sporting Life*, February 10, 1886, 1.

der Ahe did not take the bait, and Caruthers set out for Europe with his uncle and a rumored \$7,000 for gambling purposes. Some St. Louis teammates continued to hope Caruthers would appear in time to toe the rubber at some point in 1886, but one sportswriter had his doubts. “This is not likely. . . . If he desires to go onto the ball field again he will do it with the St. Louis Browns and at terms dictated by Mr. Von der Ahe, for the latter says he will hold him down to the limit now though the heavens fall. It is not improbable that Caruthers will not be seen again on the diamond.”⁷⁸

Despite such dire predictions, Caruthers appeared on the diamond in 1886 after all. In mid-March, Parisian Bob cabled from, appropriately, Paris, (it appears this is where the nickname came from) to announce he would join the St. Louis nine for the coming season, having received a satisfactory answer to ongoing negotiations with Von der Ahe.⁷⁹ Some in the sporting press speculated that “satisfactory” equated to a \$3,500 salary for 1886, later revised downwards a bit to \$3,000 or \$2,800, depending on the week in which the speculation occurred.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ “Overshot the Mark” NA, *The Sporting Life*, February 24, 1886, 2.

⁷⁹ “Caruthers Coming” NA, *The Sporting News*, March 17, 1886, 1.

⁸⁰ “From the Mound City” JCP, *The Sporting Life*, March 17, 1886, 2; “From the Mound City” JCP, *The Sporting Life*, March 24, 1886, 3; “Caruthers’ Bluff” NA, *The Sporting Life*, March 31, 1886, 1. The author of the last piece also speculated, after an examination of the manifests of all vessels leaving for Paris on the supposed day of departure, that Caruthers never left the States at all, but went into hiding while an associate communicated on his behalf. Most other sources either deny this or make no mention of it, however. JCP was the pen name of Joe Pritchard, who soon dropped the initials and wrote with his full name as his byline.

The true amount was the subject of much debate. After the season, *The Sporting Life* stated the actual sum was \$3,600, although teammate and fellow pitcher Dave Foutz claimed it was exactly \$3,500. *The Sporting News*’s correspondent claimed Caruthers told him personally it was \$3,200. “From St. Louis” Pritchard, *The Sporting Life*, December 8, 1886, 2; “In The World Of Sports” NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, February 26, 1887, 6; “Caruthers and Hudson” Eli, *The Sporting News*, March 19, 1887, 1.

Not surprisingly, given his history of financial capers, Tony Mullane was among the last players to come to terms for 1886. Despite rumors of a voluminous bankroll held in reserve, he was still waiting for something to turn up as of February. At one point, rumors spread that The Count formed a partnership with a former umpire named John Dyer to open a saloon on Vine Street in Cincinnati,⁸¹ and those rumors soon became fact.

Tony Mullane is the latest accession to the ranks of ball players who mix long flies, foul tips, and strike-outs with mint juleps, sherry flips, and other palatable bar decoctions. The great pitcher has not yet signed a \$2,000 contract, and he is not likely to while he has as much business on hand as he has just now. . . . He has about completed all arrangements, however, and will soon open a saloon on Vine street, near Eighth, which, to use his own words, will be a 'dazzler.' He will call it 'The Base Ball Headquarters,' and will have for his partner Johnny Dyer . . . the bar fixtures will be of cherry wood, and the beveled-edged, plate-glass mirror behind the bar will be in the shape of a base ball diamond.⁸²

The Apollo of the Box did finally sign, in mid-March, for terms not disclosed to the press, but that did not cause him to abandon his plans to have the finest bar and pool hall in the city. "The place is in a splendid location . . . a large blackboard is mounted in the middle room, on which all base ball scores will be posted during the season. Messrs. Mullane & Dyer will make it a strictly first-class, orderly place."⁸³ Mullane even set aside a room for his new Porkopolis teammates that they used for relaxing and entertainment.⁸⁴ The Count's establishment ran into serious trouble the next year, however, when the city of Cincinnati seized his saloon fixtures, and eventually shut down the entire operation, for non-payment of the city's

⁸¹ "From Cincinnati" O.P. Caylor, *The Sporting Life*, February 10, 1886, 2.

⁸² "Mullane Goes Into 'Business'" NA, *The Sporting Life*, February 24, 1886, 4.

⁸³ "Cincinnati's Giants" Cincinnati, *The Sporting News*, March 17, 1886, 7.

⁸⁴ "News and Notes" NA, *The Sporting Life*, April 28, 1886, 5.

saloon tax.⁸⁵ This, combined with a bank failure that cost him \$2,000, and paying the bills for his brother's long sickness in 1887, meant that by autumn of that year, Mullane was broke.⁸⁶

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Whether the \$2,000 salary cap worked depends on the definition of "work," of course, but player salaries certainly seem to have shrunk. St. Louis owner Chris Von der Ahe flaunted his financial success in August, showing observers that his wallet was \$12,000 fatter than at the same time the previous year.⁸⁷ By the end of the 1886 campaign, he also reported that his Browns set a team record for attendance. Von der Ahe also predicted that salaries for his players would continue to stay the same or fall. When asked about players seeking an increase, he responded, "Some of them have but with them I have done nothing. They will come around at the right time. I have signed others at a rate similar to that of last year."⁸⁸

There was, however, one thing lacking in all the discussions over salary, the worth of players, the rights of team management, and so forth. What was lacking was a sense of proportion. As mentioned earlier, when Al Spalding incorporated his sporting goods business in New Jersey in 1892, the business had a capitalization of \$4 million. By then, his sporting goods empire included factories in Chicopee Falls, Massachusetts, manufacturing bicycles, skates, tennis racquets, dumbbells, and other sports equipment requiring steel, a baseball bat factory in Chicago, and a Philadelphia plant for leather goods. There were new factories in Ogdensburg, New York, for boat manufacture, and Brooklyn, where a new four-story plant of 40,000 square

⁸⁵ "Notes and Comments" NA, *The Sporting Life*, January 26, 1887, 3.

⁸⁶ "Notes and Comments" NA, *The Sporting Life*, October 5, 1887, 6.

⁸⁷ "News and Notes" NA, *The Sporting Life*, August 18, 1886, 5.

⁸⁸ "The St. Louis Browns" NA, *The Sporting News*, November 13, 1886, 5.

feet employed over 1,000 workers creating bicycle shoes, stocking caps, football shoes and pants, jackets, hunting gear and clothing, and other general sportswear. All told, Spalding's sporting goods company employed about 3,500 workers and pulled in profits of several million dollars each year.⁸⁹ Spalding was the president of no less than five corporations, A.G. Spalding Bros., The Spalding Manufacturing Co., The Casino Rink Co., The Chicago Ball Club, and The Western Arms and Cartridge Co.⁹⁰ He had a near-monopoly in the sporting goods industry, having bought out his primary competitor, the A.J. Reach Company, in 1889.⁹¹ With such vast resources, it is difficult to understand why a handful of players earning \$2,500 in a season rather than \$2,000 should matter so much. It is also unclear why an owner would endanger such a profitable system by angering the players who contributed so much to the game's popularity over a couple hundred dollars per year.

Boston owner Arthur Soden presents a situation similar to that of Spalding. Soden, a roofing construction magnate, and two others, J.B. Billings (owner of a shoe factory) and William Conant (whose business was hoop skirts and, some time later, rubber goods), owned about two-thirds of the voting stock in the National League Boston Beaneaters. Collectively, people referred to them as the Triumvirs, and they acted the part of haughty Roman aristocrats. Once they had a controlling interest in the franchise, they blocked smaller shareholders from sharing in the team's profits and refused to issue dividends. Once club official, Chicago White Stockings secretary John Brown, described Conant as "the closest fistful Judas I ever ran across. His mere connection with the Boston Club sours me against the whole business. I do not see how any player or business man can do business with him voluntarily and maintain his self-

⁸⁹ Levine, *AG Spalding and the Rise of Baseball*, 79-80.

⁹⁰ "From Chicago" Harry Palmer, *The Sporting Life*, April 20, 1887, 6.

⁹¹ "A Bold Stroke" NA, *The Sporting Life*, September 4, 1889, 1.

respect.” Brown also related how, after one game in which he had requested four complimentary tickets for the family members of one player, the Boston treasurer demanded payment after the fact. Brown could not contain his amazement, stating, “your people are the meanest set of skunks I ever saw engaged in the business. By God, sir, they are a disgrace to the game.” Brown won his point, but the fact that Boston management was willing to alienate another club’s executives over three dollars speaks volumes.⁹²

In 1880, Soden blacklisted once of the league’s best players, outfielder Charley Jones, for having the audacity to ask for his June 1 paycheck on June 1.⁹³ This was either extraordinarily petty, extraordinarily stupid, or both. Jones might not have been a paragon of virtue, as “it would be an exception to the general rule to see him retire before two or three o’clock in the morning,” but he was one of the best outfielders in the game and at the time was working on a .300/.326/.429 season for a gaudy OPS+ of 157, which was actually his worst OPS+ season since his rookie year of 1875. Jones did not get back into major league baseball where he belonged until 1883, when the American Association’s Cincinnati club found a place for him after O.P. Caylor did some work behind the scenes to get him off the National League’s blacklist.⁹⁴ The Red Stockings were glad to get him into the fold, and he resumed his slugging ways, posting four consecutive seasons with an OPS+ of 132 or greater. He remained one of baseball’s top sluggers through the 1885 season, but then began to decline as age took its toll. There was also the fact that his wife tossed Cayenne pepper into his eyes during a domestic dispute in December of 1885 over alleged marital infidelity, damaging his vision.⁹⁵ In the meanwhile, however, Soden’s profits from the Beaneaters multiplied, to the point where veteran sportswriter and former major

⁹² “Chicago Gossip” Harry Palmer, *The Sporting Life*, March 7, 1888, 3.

⁹³ Nemeck, *The Beer and Whiskey League*, 23.

⁹⁴ “St. Louis Siftings” Joe Pritchard, *The Sporting Life*, December 26, 1888, 5.

⁹⁵ “Look Out for Your Eyes” NA, *The Sporting Life*, January 23, 1889, 1.

league player Tim Murnane estimated the franchise pulled down a profit of \$300,000 for the decade of the 1880s. Contemporary estimates put the profits of the Triumvirs at \$100,000 for 1889 alone after that year's terrific pennant race amplified the team's popularity and the turnout at Boston's South End Grounds.⁹⁶

Soden was not scared to spend liberally to acquire good players in order to win and draw spectators. In February 1887, he paid Al Spalding \$10,000 to acquire superstar Mike Kelly from Chicago. The previous record payment for a player had been Detroit's purchase of Fred Dunlap from St. Louis for \$4,700 the previous year. Many doubted the story, because they did not believe a team could afford to pay so much for a player. Soden displayed a framed photograph of the check in a store window to prove otherwise. At the end of the 1887 season fellow Triumvir Billings offered Detroit \$12,000 for the versatile Hardy Richardson and outfielder Sam Thompson, but Detroit management replied that \$20,000 was insufficient recompense for the pair. Also during the winter of 1887-1888, Soden repeated the feat of acquiring a Chicago superstar, sending \$10,000 more in Spalding's direction for superb pitcher John Clarkson. Prior to the 1889 season, as the Detroit club looked to sell off some of its premium performers as it ran into financial difficulties and prepared to disband its ball club, Soden dropped \$30,000 for the outstanding trio of catcher Charlie Bennett, first baseman Dan Brouthers, and Richardson, with utility player Charlie Ganzel also part of the bargain. Soden offered \$7,500 for shortstop "Pebbley" Jack Glasscock that same year, but Indianapolis rebuffed him. He was a fan of Glasscock, having also tried to get the infielder in 1887, when he wrote Glasscock's team, the St. Louis Maroons, "that Boston will give more money for Glasscock than any other city in the League, and I mean it. He can find out what all the others will give for his release, and then we

⁹⁶ "St. Louis Siftings" Joe Pritchard, *The Sporting Life*, December 26, 1888, 5.

will raise the figure.” Soden’s figure was, reportedly, \$6,000, later raised to \$7,500. Soden was at it again in 1890, prying away promising young shortstop Herman Long from the reborn Kansas City franchise for \$6,000.⁹⁷ He wanted Long so badly because his efforts to acquire John Ward from New York for \$12,000 before the 1889 season had not worked, and after all his spending, shortstop was about the only position left where Boston could possibly upgrade to a better player by that time.

While Soden clearly did not mind paying handsomely to acquire choice players to bolster the standing of his nine, he was militantly and passionately against paying them any money once he acquired them. The players, for their part, seeing the yawning chasm between their sale price and their actual salary in Boston, took note and responded predictably. Jim O’Rourke, who had played in Boston in the pre-Soden days of the 1870s, believed that no player of quality would willingly play in the Hub City. “Good men are obtained by clubs whose backers are noted for their good usage of players in days gone by,” opined Boston writer Tim Murnane, who went on to describe some of the ways current ownership did not meet this standard.⁹⁸

Soden further hurt his popularity by declining to spend much money on the upkeep of the South End Grounds where his team played, even after the field earned derision for its poor condition in 1887. “The Boston ground has been so neglected that for the past three months it was the worst to play on in the League. The entire diamond needs re-sodding, else there will be great dissatisfaction among the players.”⁹⁹ Another writer noted that, “Boston has the roughest

⁹⁷ See Soden’s SABR biography, available at <http://sabr.org/bioproj/person/a1b2e0d0>, accessed May 30, 2014; “League and Brotherhood” NA, *San Francisco Evening Bulletin*, November 18, 1886, 4; “From the Hub” Mugwump, *The Sporting Life*, December 29, 1886, 4; “From St. Louis” Pritchard, *The Sporting Life*, January 19, 1887, 2; “From St. Louis” Pritchard, *The Sporting Life*, February 2, 1887, 4; “Base-Ball” NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, April 20, 1887, 3.

⁹⁸ “The Boston Boys” Tim Murnane, *The Sporting News*, January 22, 1887, 3.

⁹⁹ “Notes and Comments” NA, *The Sporting Life*, September 28, 1887, 6.

infield in the League, it being full of ruts, and there is evidently no attention paid to the grounds.” Even when Boston tried to upgrade its facilities, it still alienated some commentators. The management constructed a new grandstand at significant cost prior to the 1888 season. It did so, however, at the expense of the sportswriters reporting on the club’s games. “The men are cramped, some have no desk to write upon at all, and, worst of all, receive from above the exhortations of the patrons in the smoking pavilion. . . . The Boston reporters and papers give more space to their club and get less recognition in return for it than any other set of reporters in the country.” The reason for the cramped accommodations for writers was that this created more space for paying customers who fattened the wallets of Boston’s Triumvirates.¹⁰⁰ The trio repeated the trick the following season, reconfiguring its outfield to add more seats to the ballpark. In Boston, at least, management spared no expense to acquire prestigious players or find room for more spectators, but spent little or nothing to provide those expensive players with a decent field on which they could display their talents.¹⁰¹

Observers compared this to the excellent condition of the Recreation Park grounds in Detroit that same year. “There would not be half as many errors made in a season if every club would have grounds like Detroit. . . . A player can also slide bases without fear of injury from sand and small stones on the Detroit grounds, as the paths are filled up with soft clay.” Jerry Denny, considered the premier defensive third baseman in baseball, certainly favored the Detroit grounds. “Jerry Denny invariably goes into raptures over the Detroit ball ground. He says it is the only place where he can play his game.”¹⁰² Detroit, it appears, was one of the few clubs in the National League to devote much attention to the quality of its field. Besides the problems in

¹⁰⁰ “Strange, But True” NA, *The Sporting Life*, June 20, 1888, 4.

¹⁰¹ “The Boston Club” A.G. Merwin, *The Sporting News*, February 2, 1889, 3.

¹⁰² “Notes And Comment” NA, *The Sporting Life*, July 4, 1888, 7.

Beantown, “the New Yorks never cut their grass until a visiting club makes a vigorous kick about it; the Philadelphia grounds were new this year, and naturally poor; the Washington grounds are very bad, being full of holes in the infield as well as in the outfield, and the Chicago and Indianapolis grounds are too hard.”¹⁰³

The only other club in the NL to get even lukewarm praise for its grounds was Pittsburgh, where writers praised the infield but found the outfield wanting. “Pittsburg has a good diamond—the only skinned diamond in the League—but its outfield is also rough and full of ruts.”¹⁰⁴ Another writer agreed on the state of the outfield at Pittsburgh’s Recreation Park. “It is claimed that it is full of ruts and a man can never try to stop a ground ball with his hands. He must shin it. Peter Hotaling, Esq., says it is the worst he ever ran across, and this assertion is certainly very sweeping.”¹⁰⁵ Another problem in Pittsburgh was all the heavy industry located in that city. “There is a smelting furnace on Grand avenue right near the grounds, and almost every game recently has been bothered by a huge supply of smoke blown from the stack. Several times it has been impossible to locate the fielders from the scorers’ box.”¹⁰⁶ Not for nothing was Pittsburgh known as the Smoky City. The same was true of where the New York Metropolitan played in 1884, Metropolitan Park. Besides being on low ground near the East River, and near a dump to boot, the factories located on the other side of the river belched out smoke and chemicals. When the wind blew in the wrong direction, the smokestacks “wafted noxious fumes into the park and made it all but lethal for fans, of which there were precious few.”¹⁰⁷

¹⁰³ “Pay Attention to Your Grounds” NA, *The Sporting Life*, January 11, 1888, 1.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ “Pittsburg Pencilings” Circle, *The Sporting Life*, April 18, 1888, 9.

¹⁰⁶ “Pittsburg Pencilings” Circle, *The Sporting Life*, May 30, 1888, 3.

¹⁰⁷ Nemeč, *The Beer and Whiskey League*, 62.

This discussion of the quality of the playing fields clearly demonstrates the tendency of most teams to choose profit over the quality of play and accommodations they offered to their spectators. It appears most owners concluded that the names of the players drew fans to the park more than any other considerations, including the quality of play or the comfort of the patrons. As a result, they eschewed expenses that were extraneous to that goal, such as a level and well-kept playing field.

Poor decisions by management hurt the grounds in other ways as well. In its never-ending quest for more money, the management of the Washington Nationals agreed to lease a traveling circus the use of their grounds while the team was away from home in May of 1889. The team got its field into good condition for the 1889 season, only to see it ruined after the first homestand. “Prior to the advent of the circus, the diamond and outfield was almost perfection, and many visiting players pronounced it unequaled anywhere. The circus rings, heavy wagons and indiscriminate travel over the field during the past week has well-nigh ruined the base ball park. It will be many months before it will be in good condition.”¹⁰⁸

Realizing that grounds in poor condition not only hurt the quality of play, but even more importantly to the owners, could injure players in which they had invested financial resources, a few clubs tried to improve their facilities eventually. Prior to 1888, the Indianapolis Hoosiers made major improvements to their grounds at Seventh Street Park. “The diamond will be sodded, and it is the intention to dig out the base paths to a depth of about three feet and fill up the trenches with clay and soft dirt, from which every particle of sand and gravel will be

¹⁰⁸ “Washington Whispers” R.M. Larner, *The Sporting Life*, May 15, 1889, 5.

separated. Last year the men were often hurt sliding into bases, because of the rough ground, and the management will remedy this matter right on the start.”¹⁰⁹

However bad playing conditions were in the National League, things were not exactly top notch in the American Association, either. Baltimore writer Albert Mott described the grounds of his home club at Oriole Park in 1887 by writing, “the shed called by courtesy a grand stand is anything but grand, unless it be a grand humbug. It has a roof, but is neither sheltered from sun or rain. Hard, untidy wooden benches are the sittings. . . . Only this and nothing more in the creature comforts offered by the managers.” Mott thought this was especially problematic because the Association voted to raise its ticket price to fifty cents for the coming season. He feared that if fans saw no better performance on the field, and did not get to watch the action from a more comfortable position, the cranks of the Monumental City would vote with their feet and stay away from Oriole games.¹¹⁰

Things seemed no better at Sportsman’s Park in St. Louis. While owner Chris Von der Ahe vowed to upgrade the facilities significantly, he would not do so unless he had sole ownership of the property. This was an important reason other clubs did not have top notch grounds, as teams saw no point in spending too much money upgrading something they did not own themselves.¹¹¹ (This was a fake on Von der Ahe’s part, however. In reality, he had the controlling interest of the property where the Browns played. This was a ruse to gain sympathy from the public.¹¹²) Regardless of the reasons, the results for the quality of baseball were disastrous. In St. Louis, “during the latter part of last season the infield, or diamond, was in a rather ‘humpy’ condition and a first-class ground man will no doubt be secured to remedy this

¹⁰⁹ “Indianapolis News” A.G. Ovens, *The Sporting Life*, February 29, 1888, 2.

¹¹⁰ “Baltimore Bulletin” TTT, *The Sporting Life*, January 18, 1888, 2.

¹¹¹ “St. Louis Siftings” Joe Pritchard, *The Sporting Life*, January 25, 1888, 2.

¹¹² Nemeč, *The Beer and Whiskey League*, 97.

matter. The ground man that was employed at the park last season did not know a hump from a hole in the ground.”¹¹³

Given such difficult circumstances, it is no wonder fielders in the 1880s frequently made errors. The players in greatest danger were the outfielders, because chasing fly balls requires the fielder to track the ball consistently; they cannot afford to take their eyes off the ball just to watch out for ruts in the outfield grass. Players who were especially skillful at navigating the obstacle courses of a rough outfield, therefore, earned special praise. Joe Sommer of Baltimore was one such outfielder. “He knows the ground thoroughly and so can run with his eye on the ball without fear of being balked of his prey by the proximity of fence, ditches, or inequality of the surface. He is as near a dead sure catch as can be gotten.”¹¹⁴

In sum, this discussion of field conditions reinforces the point that owners often spent freely to acquire top players, but did not worry much about the player’s treatment once acquired. Returning to the issues with Soden in Boston, the 1887 situation of Charles “Old Hoss” Radbourn demonstrated the stinginess of the management in the Hub City. Radbourn was one of the game’s premier hurlers, as we have already seen. In 1887, however, Radbourn suffered through the worst season of his career up to that point, in part because changes to the pitching rules hurt his effectiveness, causing his performance, measured as a function of walks and strikeouts per nine innings, to fall off. In any case, in September of that season Soden suspended Radbourn “by reason of unsatisfactory work as pitcher.” In his public comments on the situation, however, Soden gave a glimpse of what he thought was really happening. He stated that the Triumvirs “have been played for suckers long enough” and that they did not intend to take it any more. In other words, Soden believed Radbourn, softened by his fat paycheck, was

¹¹³ “St. Louis Siftings” Joe Pritchard, *The Sporting Life*, January 25, 1888, 2.

¹¹⁴ “Baltimore Budget” TTT, *The Sporting Life*, April 11, 1888, 2.

not giving the team his best each day in the pitcher's box. By suspending the Old Hoss, Soden and company avoided paying him his salary, and because Radbourn's salary was among the highest in the game, they saved several hundred dollars thereby. Radbourn also believed that was the motivation behind their actions, as he stated in an interview, "they are sore because they think I have not pitched as well as Madden, who gets a very small salary. As I get a big one they feel that I have somehow cheated them out of some money. Now, I signed a contract to pitch to the best of my ability. I have done that, and because they are disappointed in my work I am not to blame. I have lived up to my contract."¹¹⁵ The club countered that Radbourn had, more than once that season, pitched with excessively high blood alcohol content levels. Nonetheless, it soon reinstated Radbourn, and thus the salary question became moot. Boston ownership's actions, however, begs some consideration of the wisdom of purposefully antagonizing one of the most important and visible members of the team over, from the team's standpoint, an amount of cash so small it was essentially irrelevant.¹¹⁶

Not all owners operated by the Spalding/Soden model. Ironically, considering that it was players from his team that formed the original core of the Brotherhood, New York Giants (and Metropolitans until selling them to Staten Island developer Erastus Wiman in 1885) owner John Day was personally popular among many of his players. He compensated his Giants players better than most (although given New York's fan base and revenue stream, he could certainly afford to without much fear of what it would do to his bottom line), and made sure the team traveled in first-class conditions, even traveling with them at times. Occasionally, he even sided with their interests on such issues as the salary limit and the sale of players. Although he played

¹¹⁵ "From The Hub" Mugwump, *The Sporting Life*, September 14, 1887, 3.

¹¹⁶ "Radbourn On Deck Again" NA, *The Sporting News*, September 17, 1887, 1; "Notes and Comments" NA, *The Sporting Life*, September 21, 1887, 5.

an important role for the players in creating the Brotherhood of Professional Base Ball Players, Giants outfielder Jim O'Rourke was on good terms with Day, once refuting newspaper rumors of a contract language dispute by writing that he considered Day "the very embodiment of honor . . . his word is his bond." This characterization is somewhat ironic, given that Day had Tammany Hall connections (but O'Rourke was also a Democrat, so perhaps he could overlook Day's ties with the sachems of Tammany), but made most of his money from his tobacco business.¹¹⁷

Another owner who operated by less adversarial standards, at least initially, was John Brush. He was the owner of the first department store in Indianapolis, "The When Clothing Company," and when his Hoosier team joined the National League in 1887 (partly so Brush could use the team and ballpark to advertise for his store) and finished a distant eighth place with 37 wins and 89 losses, he took things in stride. In an 1890 interview he stated, "I run a ball club . . . for the interest I take in the game and the recreation it gives me. I sell *pants* for money." He did very well in his business, too, and so did his partners in Indianapolis. A writer described Brush's company as "a mammoth concern which is a pride of the city" while another of the team's investors, Henry Levi, operated a rival clothing store named "The Model." A third investor, Charles Mayer, owned "one of the largest miscellaneous stores in the West" named "The Bazaar," A.J. Treat was one of the city's leading merchant tailors, M.H. Spades the largest dry goods dealer in the city, and Harry New was the editor of the Indianapolis *Journal*. These backers were worth, in the aggregate, more than two million dollars. They could certainly afford to run a baseball team for interest and recreation. While his attitude towards the business of baseball morphed over the course of the 1890s, and he began leaning strongly towards the hard-

¹¹⁷ See Day's SABR biography, available at <http://sabr.org/bioproj/person/c281a493>, accessed May 30, 2014; "Jim O'Rourke Objects" Jim O'Rourke, *The Sporting Life*, January 15, 1887, 1; Bryan DiSalvatore, *A Clever Base-Ballist: The Life and Times of John Montgomery Ward* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1999), 137-138.

core anti-player model in that decade, in the 1880s it was a refreshing change from the way most of his colleagues behaved.¹¹⁸

Even with team owners who generally kept a low profile, such as Baltimore owner Harry Vonderhorst, the sporting public clearly understood that the operation of a baseball team posed no serious threat to their financial standing in general. Vonderhorst's Orioles were more likely to finish in the lower half of the American Association standings in the 1880s than in the upper half, forcing one of their sportswriters to admit in 1887 that, "the club treasury badly needs all it can possibly get in this close of the season to come anywhere near paying expenses." However, as the same writer also admitted, "Mr. Vonderhorst can, without serious consequence, submit to loss on his base ball venture, as it is but a side speculation—indeed, many a wealthy man has a more costly hobby."¹¹⁹ Later, the same writer stated, "Mr. Vonderhorst unhesitatingly volunteers the information that he is not in base ball to make money . . . he is infatuated with the game and can afford to indulge his desires by running a club. He would be glad to have financial returns from his pleasure, of course, but he would not starve or fret if there was some loss."¹²⁰

These profiles demonstrate that there were many possible approaches to the issue of how to run a team and how teams could compensate their players. As for the players, there were the fortunate few who continued to pull down more money than the official limit allowed, no doubt, and many players submitted to the new cap without public complaint. However, this attempt at a salary cap was like the first rolling rock that creates a landslide. Unknown to most, in 1886 the New York players who had held out unsuccessfully as a group formed plans that, in four years'

¹¹⁸ Charles Alexander, *Turbulent Seasons: Baseball in 1890-1891*, (Dallas: SMU Press, 2011): 13; Brush's SABR biography, available at <http://sabr.org/bioproj/person/a46ef165>, accessed May 30, 2014; "In Earnest" GWB, *The Sporting Life*, January 5, 1887, 1.

¹¹⁹ "From Baltimore" TTT, *The Sporting Life*, September 21, 1887, 4.

¹²⁰ "Baltimore Bulletin" TTT, *The Sporting Life*, August 29, 1888, 4.

time, would shake baseball to its core. That winter, two players, John Ward and Jim O'Rourke, took courses in political science and law, respectively, Ward at Columbia (he had already earned his law degree, *cum laude*, from Columbia in May 1885) and O'Rourke at Yale. Led by Ward, they laid the groundwork for the Brotherhood of Professional Base Ball Players in the winter of 1885-1886, although the Brotherhood's existence was not generally known to the public until nearly a year later.¹²¹

¹²¹ "Baseball Notes" NA, *New York Times*, November 2, 1885, 8; Di Salvatore, *A Clever Baseballist*, 175-176, 183; David Stevens, *Baseball's Radical for All Seasons: A Biography of John Montgomery Ward*, (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, 1998), 39. Stevens differs from the *Times*, which wrote that Ward enrolled in the law school, rather than the political science department. Di Salvatore relates that Columbia established a School of Political Science in 1881 (182). As Ward already had a law degree, it would appear the *Times* confused its story. Ward also won a \$50 prize for being the department's top student, according to Stevens.

Chapter 4

The Origins of the Brotherhood, 1886-1887

The Brotherhood of Professional Ball Players (BPBP), formed October 22, 1885, was baseball's first significant and lasting players union. The Brotherhood's charter, primarily authored by John Ward, pledged the organization to "protect and benefit its members, promote a high standard of professional conduct, and advance the interests of the national game."¹ In addition, members pledged to

- Strive to promote the objects and aims of this Brotherhood, in accordance with the Constitution and By-Laws;
- Never to take advantage of a brother in good standing;
- Never to permit an unjust injury to be done to, or continued against, a brother in good standing, while it is in my power to prevent the same;
- To assist a brother in distress;
- To render faithful obedience to the will of the Brotherhood, as expressed by the decree of the council, or vote of my chapter.²

Based on these statements, the Brotherhood appeared to differ little from any number of the benevolent associations and societies common in the late nineteenth century. Many trades and

¹ Stevens, *Baseball's Radical for All Seasons*, 42.

² Di Salvatore, *A Clever Base-Ballist*, 176.

professions had similar codes of conduct for their members. However, if the Brotherhood's merely served these purposes, why keep it a secret from the public in 1885?

Clearly, Ward and company intended it to be much more than a mutual aid society, although it certainly could fill that role as well. In fact, Ward was one of the first players to donate to the February 1886 benefit for Curry Foley. The reason, then, why the organization did not announce its existence to the public until nearly a year later was that Ward and the other founders wanted to secure a large membership before drawing attention. They envisioned the BPBP as a vehicle to redress their accumulating grievances over such issues as abuses of the reserve clause, player sales, and the 1886 salary cap, but knew that in order to do so, the players must present a united front to management. Before the Brotherhood could expand its influence, therefore, it was going to need some members. Ward and Jim O'Rourke, along with New York Giants teammates Tim Keefe, Roger Connor, Buck Ewing, Mickey Welch, Daniel Richardson, Mike Dorgan, and Joe Gerhardt, formed the organization's original core. This group contained men who were not only tremendous players on the field (Ward, O'Rourke, Keefe, Connor, Ewing, and Welch would all gain election to the Baseball Hall of Fame), but also, in accordance with the Brotherhood's charter, were highly regarded for their comportment off the field. The organization sought to build its reputation through recruiting reputable players who met certain standards of morality and sobriety, and who would encourage prospective members to reform if necessary before joining.

All knew of Ward's learned stature, of course. O'Rourke, who had been in baseball so long that he actually participated in the 1874 tour of England to popularize the game there, was a civic leader in his hometown of Bridgeport, Connecticut, who refused both alcohol and tobacco. He graduated from Yale's law school in June 1887 and passed Connecticut's bar examination in

November. At one time, he declared his intent to run for office on the Democratic ticket.

Following the Brotherhood War, after retiring from major league baseball, O'Rourke returned to his hometown and organized a team there, which included fellow Bridgeport native Harry Herbert, who was black, a rare occurrence after professional baseball adopted its color line in 1883. He also served on the Bridgeport Paving Commission, was a member of the Royal Arcanum, the Connecticut Bar Association, the Bridgeport Elks, and the Knights of Columbus. He died, appropriately enough, after contracting pneumonia from braving a blizzard to consult with a legal client on New Year's Day, 1919.³

O'Rourke was also, undoubtedly, among the most loquacious and sesquipedalian players in the game of the 1880s. So much so that the sporting press poked fun at his polysyllabic verbiage from time to time. In 1887, *The Sporting Life* printed a mock interview between Orator Jim and his team's owner, John Day. Here are some excerpts:

Day: "How is everything down in Barnumville?"

O'Rourke: "You mean Bridgeport, do you not?"

Day: "Certainly; you don't suppose I mean any other place?"

O'Rourke: "I will tell you, Mr. Day, Barnum's 'Equescurriculum of Megatherian Monstrosities' have evacuated the town, and the grief of the demoralized and isolated population is inexorable."

Day: "What do you think of the umpiring for next season, Mr. O'Rourke?"

O'Rourke: "I will tell you, Mr. Day, we want unostentatiousness and the effervescence of imputrescibility conglomerated, and all umpires who are unsophisticated, incapacitated, or even

³ Stevens, *Baseball's Radical for All Seasons*, 42-43; Di Salvatore, *A Clever Base-Ballist*, 175-177; O'Rourke's SABR biography, available at <http://sabr.org/bioproj/person/b7e9aba2>, accessed May 22, 2014; "From New York" Looker On, *The Sporting Life*, January 5, 1887, 4.

men who get intoxicated, should be emasculated. My mottos are: Sesquipedalia Verba; Sic Semper Tyrannis Paregoric; Vive La Republique.”⁴

O’Rourke also was considered among the most honest and reputable players in the game. The story of how he came to play for the Giants in the first place illustrates the point. In 1884, he was a member of the Buffalo Bisons, and when that team prepared to disband at the end of its season, O’Rourke was in great demand from other clubs looking to secure his talents. Owner Day met with O’Rourke, told O’Rourke that he would like to see him in a New York uniform the following season, and they agreed the salary would be \$4,500. Shortly thereafter, an agent from the Philadelphia Athletics contacted O’Rourke and offered \$5,500 to him to play in Philadelphia. O’Rourke had only a verbal agreement with Day, not a written contract, and could have easily gone back on his word, but did not. Furthermore, “O’Rourke, while a member of the Buffalo Club, was never reserved. He is one of those players that you don’t have to reserve. You tell him at the end of the season that you want his services next year and if he says ‘all right’ that is sufficient.”⁵

There was also the time when, while playing for Boston, O’Rourke tried to score but the defense threw him out in a close play at the home plate. The Hub City crowd immediately called for the umpire’s head. O’Rourke calmed them down, shouting, “What is the matter, my friends? I was fairly out, and the umpire was clearly correct in his decision.” The crowd then sat down, the game continued, and the umpire avoided an unpleasant confrontation that might have gone ill

⁴ “Jim O’Rourke’s Return From Yale College” Charles Foley, *The Sporting Life*, March 30, 1887, 1. Bridgeport was also the home of circus entertainer P.T. Barnum, thus the reference to Barnumville.

⁵ “New York News” George Stackhouse, *The Sporting Life*, September 19, 1888, 7.

for him. Ironically, the umpire who O'Rourke saved was none other than future National League president Nick Young.⁶

The other founders of the Brotherhood were similar in attitude and comportment, if lacking O'Rourke's refined and Latin-laced vocabulary. First baseman Roger Connor (owner of baseball's record for career homeruns prior to Babe Ruth, at 138, to go with 233 triples, most of any player who played exclusively in the nineteenth century) was a quiet and dignified player who played in 1,998 major league games without a single ejection and rarely captured the public spotlight. He "seldom, if ever, questions a decision of an umpire. He is beloved by his associates, and always has a kind word for everybody." However, Connor held firm views regarding the rights of labor, and spoke strongly to encourage player solidarity in the new organization.⁷

The same was true of ace pitcher "Smiling" Tim Keefe. An early recruit to the cause of labor, following an incident at age twenty when he had to sue simply to collect the wages due

⁶ "Worthy Of Emulation" NA, *The Sporting Life*, August 28, 1889, 4.

⁷ Quote from "League First Basemen" GNB, *The Sporting Life*, December 29, 1886, 4; Connor's SABR biography, at <http://sabr.org/bioproj/person/4ef2cfff>, accessed May 22, 2014. His power was such that in 1886 an anonymous poet wrote some verse in his honor which appeared in *The Sporting Life*:

A comet went whizzing across the night sky;
A star (stationary) asked: What makes you fly?
It answered so weary, with voice of deep woe:
"My head's a base ball, knocked up here years ago,
By big Roger Connor, to never drop back,
And keep me e'er coursing this heavenward track;
While grabbing stray kites and such things for a tail,
I sad see my speed will always prevail;
For, muscle he put on that 'cloud-piercer' blow,
Will keep me e'er circling the firmament, oh!"

It might not quite be "Casey at the Bat" or "Baseball's Sad Lexicon," but the author has seen worse. No title, NA, *The Sporting Life*, August 25, 1886, 1.

him for his work as a carpenter, Keefe's support for the concept of unionization solidified when his Troy team placed him on its reserve list in 1881. He tried to hold out for more money, but his gambit failed, and he played for the same contract, \$1,500, as he had the previous season. He caught a break when the National League booted Troy out of its circuit before the 1883 season and he was free to sign with the New York Metropolitans of the American Association, where both his pay, now \$2,800, and his performance soared to new heights. However, he soon grew restive over the restraints imposed by the reserve clause and the way team owners manipulated it to the detriment of the players.

The next chapter of his personal story illustrates his frustration, and the manipulations of ownership, perfectly. As the 1885 season neared, one man, John Day, owned both the New York Giants of the National League and the New York Metropolitans. Day favored the Giants, and wanted to move Keefe from the Metropolitans to the Giants to strengthen that club. To do so, however, he would have to release Keefe from his reserved contract with the Metropolitans, giving Keefe ten days to negotiate with other clubs. Knowing that a bidding war would result, Day instructed the Giants' manager, Jim Mutrie, to take Keefe and infielder Dude Esterbrook (who was not, of course, actually named Dude, but all the sporting press called him Dude rather than Thomas because of his efforts to live a stylish, high-class lifestyle⁸) on a boat to Bermuda to visit an onion farm Mutrie owned on the island. While returning from the Caribbean, on the eleventh day of the trip, Mutrie signed Keefe and Esterbrook to new contracts with the Giants of the National League. Keefe did get a three-year contract, along with some rest and recreation

⁸ One writer met him in 1887 and reported the Dude was wearing salmon-colored corduroy pants, a sky blue vest embroidered "liberally" with yellow wreaths, a shirt of red and white bars with a flop-cornered white collar, a pea-green necktie, a black hat, trimmed with ribbon, terra cotta-colored gloves, and sporting a cane. "Caylor's Comment" O.P. Caylor, *The Sporting Life*, October 5, 1887, 4.

under the tropical sun, but he also wondered what he might have earned in a free market.⁹ (Esterbrook, to finish the story, did not even enjoy the trip very much, as he returned to Gotham with an acute case of seasickness that prevented him from manning his position at third base in some of the exhibition games the Giants played in mid-April.)¹⁰

How Jim Mutrie, the Giants manager, became the team's manager is somewhat similar to Keefe's story. Mutrie managed the Metropolitans to the American Association title in 1884, the team posting a sterling record of 75 wins against just 32 losses. In the off-season, owner Day decided to transfer Mutrie to the Giants, and Mutrie agreed—sort of. In early March of 1885, he showed up at the American Association's yearly preseason meeting to represent the Mets. At this meeting, the AA passed a resolution to honor the National Agreement. This included provisions whereby the member teams of the NL and AA would honor player contracts. Mere weeks later, however, Mutrie transferred his allegiance officially, and on March 26 departed on his notorious Caribbean cruise with Keefe and Esterbrook. Because of his treachery, the AA banned Mutrie and nearly abandoned the National Agreement in anger over this breach of faith. They held a vote to expel the Metropolitans from the league, as well, although there was insufficient support for the idea when the final vote occurred. The outrage was futile; Mutrie went on to manage the Giants through the 1891 season, by which time the American Association was on its last legs and set to dissolve.¹¹ Mutrie's actions, however, did earn him his derisory nickname, "Truthful Jim," from the angry pen of venerable baseball writer Henry Chadwick as well as a reputation from his enemies in baseball for questionable dealings that he never fully shook.

⁹ Keefe's SABR biography, at <http://sabr.org/bioproj/person/6f1dd1b1>, accessed May 22, 2014.

¹⁰ "Baseball News" NA, *New York Times*, April 20, 1885, 8.

¹¹ Mutrie's SABR biography, at <http://sabr.org/bioproj/person/430838fd>, accessed May 24, 2014; Seymour, *Baseball*, 166.

When the opportunity to team with Ward and O'Rourke in forming the Brotherhood came around, Keefe wasted no time in joining. Like O'Rourke, Keefe neither smoked nor drank. Though not quite as well educated as Ward or O'Rourke, he studied shorthand at night, and when the Brotherhood held its first meeting in November 1885, the group selected Keefe as secretary-treasurer. He played an especially important role in Brotherhood affairs in 1889.¹²

* * * * *

The Brotherhood of Professional Ball Players went public in the summer of 1886 as President Ward gave a special interview to *The Sporting Life* on July 27 describing the new organization and its goals. Ward chose his interviewer well, a lawyer friend named James Blackhurst, who wrote under the pen name of "Layman."¹³ In the interview, Ward was conciliatory and careful. The idea of unionism was not truly novel or radical in 1886, at least not to all. In fact, none other than Al Spalding had tried to form a union almost fifteen years earlier. In addition to the usual things in which unions interested themselves, "As far back as 1872 Al Spalding, George Wright, Jim White and the other members of the old Boston Reds sat around the gymnasium on Eliot street and talked over the question, and finally drew up a paper and presented it to members of the other clubs. . . . The object was to play with no club containing a player thought to be in the hands of the gamblers."¹⁴

¹² Keefe's SABR biography, at <http://sabr.org/bioproj/person/6f1dd1b1>, accessed May 22, 2014.

¹³ Stevens, *Baseball's Radical for all Seasons*, 46.

¹⁴ "From The Hub" Tee Eye Emm, *The Sporting Life*, October 5, 1887, 5. Tee Eye Emm was filing in for Boston's usual correspondent, "Mugwump," (W.D. Sullivan, of the *Boston Globe*) for this week, as Sullivan had married during the preceding week, and this writer was probably Tim Murnane. Not only was Murnane a Boston sportswriter for the *Boston Globe*, with the

Nonetheless, Ward wanted to highlight the respectability of the Brotherhood and downplay the threat it posed to the established order within baseball. The tragedy at Haymarket Square in Chicago on May 4, after which eight labor leaders were in prison awaiting trial for murders they did not commit while Chicago newspapers offered money to juries to convict them, must have been on Ward's mind. He disclaimed explicitly any personal desire to eliminate the reserve rule. When asked if the Brotherhood would attack the rule, Ward answered, "I should say that it will not be. I believe that the majority of ball players regard the reserve rule as a necessary institution, though they may consider that some abuses have arisen under it."¹⁵ Instead, the BPBP would "meet the league officials, and in a spirit of fairness draw up a contract in which the equities of each might be reasonably protected."¹⁶ Rather than emphasize how the new organization would challenge ownership, Ward focused on the mutual compatibility of this relationship.

I believe this organization will be of positive benefit to them. Base ball, as a profession, has many features peculiar to itself. There is probably no other business in which the interests of employers and employees are so nearly identical. With the possible exception of the question of salary, they seem to me to be entirely so, and even here there is not so much difference as would appear at first sight. . . . In all other respects I consider the interests of the players to be identical with those of the clubs.¹⁷

Ward expanded on how the organization would help management, or at least not threaten it. "There is one thing, however, which this organization does not propose to do. *It will not protect any man in wrong doing.* If any member of this organization misbehaves and subjects himself to discipline by his club, that is a matter with which the brotherhood should not and will

appropriate initials, he was also a player in the National Association in 1872 when this event took place, in fact the only player in the National Association that year with the proper initials.

¹⁵ "A Big Surprise" Layman, *The Sporting Life*, August 4, 1886, 1.

¹⁶ "The Brotherhood of Professional Ball-Players" NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, August 4, 1886, 3.

¹⁷ "A Big Surprise" Layman, *The Sporting Life*, August 4, 1886, 1.

not have anything to do.” He did note that if a punishment was extreme or vastly different in magnitude from the seriousness of the offense, the Brotherhood might consider action, but he hoped these would be rare instances, and that arbitration would suffice to remedy any gross injustices that might occur.¹⁸

In addition, both Ward and the interviewer went out of their way to demonstrate that the men in the Brotherhood were of the highest caliber morally.

The organization embraces *the entire intelligent and reputable element of the profession*. It includes among its members such men as Ned Hanlon, John Morrill, Jim O’Rourke, Arthur Irwin, Dave Rowe, Ed Williamson, Al McKinnon and Cliff Carroll. This is an array of names of which any organization may be proud. The mere publication of that list will insure the confidence and support of the public.

Finally, Ward announced that the Brotherhood claimed a membership of nearly 100 National League players he and his fellows recruited while the 1886 season was in progress.¹⁹ Given that there were eight National League teams, featuring thirteen or fourteen regular players, this signified that almost ninety percent of National League players had joined. The Brotherhood had even turned away a few players, unnamed in the interview, because of their moral failings. Only one Giant was not a member, catcher and outfielder Pat Deasley, who many observers believed had the undesirable moral failings in abundance.²⁰

In addition to being an organization featuring men of good habits, the BPBP was democratic: “It is organized by chapters, each having its local officers; each chapter will choose one delegate or representative and all the representatives so chosen (eight in all) will constitute the council. This is the supreme executive and judicial body and its officers are the general officers of the brotherhood.” Furthermore, and in marked contrast to the capricious discipline

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid. Writers often referred to Williamson as Ed Williamson at the time, probably because his given name was Edward, but most baseball references refer to him as Ned.

²⁰ “Notes and Comments, NA, *The Sporting Life*, August 25, 1886, 5.

system of the owners that gave players no opportunity for arbitration, “the council shall have power to discipline any member by fine or suspension, but only after charges shall have been preferred in writing by his chapter or by any three members, and after the accused shall have been given an opportunity to be heard in defense.”²¹

In early interviews, members of the Brotherhood continued hammering at these themes concerning the organization’s purpose and plans. In late October, *The Sporting Life* interviewed Sam Crane on these very questions. When questioned on when the Brotherhood would call its first strike, Crane responded,

I don’t suppose such a thing will ever occur. That is not the purpose of the order. People think because it is a union, that like other unions, it must get up a strike, but there you make a mistake. The union was established mainly for the purpose of equalizing the rights and privileges of contracts between managers and players. . . . It is not the intention of the union to meddle with the salary question except that we believe there should not be a limit. . . . A man should be paid what he is worth.

Crane also emphasized that nearly all National League players were in the Brotherhood, and for that reason, believed that the NL would do the “square thing” and deal fairly with their concerns.

With possibly two or three exceptions, every man on the League reserve lists is a member of the union . . . we will also probably have all professional players in the union by next season. If the joint committee [of NL and AA owners] . . . should formulate one set of rules for the League and Association, it will be but a short while until all Association players have combined with us, for then we will all be under the same contract.²²

The actions of National League owners often contributed to the ease with which the Brotherhood bolstered its ranks. There was the incident in Detroit, for instance, in which the team fined pitcher Charlie “Pretzels” Getzien (also spelled Getzein) \$100 for giving up an excessive number of runs in the eleventh inning of a game against the lowly Kansas City

²¹ “The Brotherhood of Professional Ball-Players” NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, August 4, 1886, 3.

²² “The Players’ Brotherhood” NA, *The Sporting Life*, October 27, 1886, 1.

Cowboys, then chewed out the rest of the team after the contest ended. Unsurprisingly, the Wolverines' entire roster proclaimed their willingness to join the Brotherhood shortly afterwards. It is true that Getzien may have deserved some of the blame for this fiasco, however, according to news reports. Feeling let down by his teammates and the umpire, he lost his temper and his composure, and began laying the ball in nicely for the Cowboys, who teed off and plated ten runs in the inning.²³ Still, the idea of fining a player just for giving one poor performance did not sit well with the Wolverines.

Nor was this the only time that team manager W.H. Watkins had done such a thing. "It was his custom to threaten to 'soak' a player \$10 or \$25 for a costly error." Wolverine players despised Watkins so greatly that following their 1887 championship season, they essentially demanded his removal by refusing to play for him en masse from that point forward. Detroit management did not buckle under in the face of this threat, however, engaging Watkins for 1888 "at a handsome advance in salary."²⁴ Detroit's president, Fred Stearns, did not really believe the threat, anyway, and did not intend to allow his players to dictate to him how to run his ball club.²⁵ Stearns and Detroit management later tried to lay the blame for the whole episode on malingering second baseman Fred Dunlap (see chapter eleven), claiming he was behind the whole scheme in his efforts to extort more salary for 1888. Dunlap denied this, stating in an interview, "some one has accused me of trying to work up the Detroit players not to sign unless Watkins ceased to be manager. That is also a lie. I never even thought of such a thing."²⁶ In the

²³ "The Home of the Big Four" NA, *The Sporting News*, August 2, 1886, 1.

²⁴ "Detroit Dotlets" MAT, *The Sporting Life*, December 14, 1887, 3.

²⁵ "Detroit's Great Loss" Mac, *The Sporting News*, December 24, 1887, 1.

²⁶ "Fred Dunlap" Hincker, *The Sporting News*, December 31, 1887, 4.

end, the two sides achieved something of a compromise when Watkins stayed on as team manager but did not sit on the players' bench during games.²⁷

Most players seemed satisfied, but veteran third baseman Jim "Deacon" White was not. White was forty years old by 1888, and had been in the game since before the National Association began play in 1871, so he had seen a thing or two. Evidently displeased with Watkins, he maintained his refusal to take the field into March of 1888, to the distress of all Detroiters, as the team had no other player to take the Deacon's place at the hot corner.²⁸ White claimed his manager "backcapped" him repeatedly, and adamantly refused to sign a contract. Opinions on the justness of White's decision seemed mixed. While some saw his move as another example of players agitating to gain greater control over their fates, other backed the veteran, with the *Chicago Daily Tribune* writing, "there must be some strong grievance to make Jim White angry at anybody, for it is hard to find his equal as a man among ball-players."²⁹ When Watkins met White in March at the National League's meeting, he tried to talk the Deacon into signing a Wolverines contract for 1888, but White would not have it. "In this the manager utterly failed, and in addition received an extensive piece of the Deacon's mind, including the information that he would do no business whatever with Watkins."³⁰

White felt so insulted, in fact, that by the next week he threatened retirement, while the team's new president, Smith, tried to talk him out of such a drastic step.³¹ This prompted Watkins to issue a public apology through the local newspapers, which appeared partly honest and partly intended to lure White back, as the Wolverines scamped about to find another third

²⁷ "Chaff From Detroit" NA, *The Sporting News*, February 4, 1888, 4.

²⁸ "Jim White Wrathful" Mac, *The Sporting News*, March 3, 1888, 1.

²⁹ "Base-Ball Notes" NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, March 13, 1888, 6.

³⁰ "Detroit Dotlets" MAT, *The Sporting Life*, March 14, 1888, 2.

³¹ "Jim White's Position" NA, *The Sporting News*, March 17, 1888, 1; "Hanlon, White, Baldwin" NA, *The Sporting News*, March 17, 1888, 1.

baseman in case White was unmoved. The Deacon accepted some of what Watkins said, writing, “I accept them as one gentleman is in duty bound to accept an apology from another,” but also replied, through the same local papers, that he did not consider the matter settled. Private issues did not prompt White’s stance; instead, it was disparaging remarks about White’s professional conduct and performance that impugned White’s public reputation. “As you very well know, a ball player’s stock in trade is his reputation as a man at all times and his skill on the field. Mr. Watkins, it is the using of your official position in giving out newspaper items intentionally reflecting on my professional reputation of which I accuse you and which I stand ready to prove.”³² White finally signed with Detroit for 1888, but this was not the last time he entered the lists against the magnates of the National League.

Other teams, imposing fines and other punishments in an arbitrary manner, also provided Ward and friends with ammunition to recruit new members. In August, Washington Nationals manager Mike Scanlon fined Cliff Carroll one hundred dollars and suspended him for the rest of the season. Simultaneously, he docked second baseman Jimmy Knowles and outfielder Sam Crane fifty dollars just for poor fielding.³³ Writing about Knowles and Crane, a local sportswriter stated, “Of course it was a very bitter pill, but they had to swallow it. This was very harsh, especially so when these men were *trying* to do their work. . . . The effect of the above fines will work against the club, as the other players, not caring to share a similar fate, will not attempt to field difficult balls.” This writer elaborated on Carroll’s punishment as well: “Another error of judgment was the suspension of Carroll, which was wholly unwarranted and very harsh treatment, simply because he had spunk enough to object to the continual experiments with amateur pitchers. The public is very tired also of these moss-agate failures and think it is

³² “Detroit Dotlets” MAT, *The Sporting Life*, March 28, 1888, 2.

³³ “Scared to Death” SAM, *The Sporting News*, August 9, 1886, 1.

about time that some of the profits be used in securing another pitcher.” The players already felt aggrieved when Nationals management released Bob Barr, a mediocre pitcher having a down year because of an injured finger, and these episodes simply added fuel to the fire. At least Barr looked on the bright side of things. “He is happy, however, and several of the players envy him, going even so far as to ask how he succeeded in getting the prize they want—his release.”³⁴

Carroll’s punishment was so scandalous that Nationals manager Mike Scanlon wrote a piece for *The Sporting Life* in an effort to clear his name and the air surrounding the incident. He claimed that fining Carroll was necessary, “as that player was not only meddlesome and very free with his unasked advice, but was unsteady in his habits and independent and insolent to such a degree that it could no longer be borne, and a lesson was needed. He got it, and the result is that since his reinstatement, after duly expressed penitence, he has played excellent ball.” Rumors continued circulating, however, regarding the poisonous relationship of management and players in Washington. They were so bad that manager Scanlon used the same piece to refute claims that he inflicted corporal punishment on some of his ballplayers.³⁵ Whatever the

³⁴ “From the Capital” WUD, *The Sporting Life*, August 11, 1886, 1. Following his release, despite speculation that some other club might sign him, Barr went to work in the US Patent Office instead, but then moved to the countryside in 1887 in an attempt to deal with health issues, and there he tried his hand at raising poultry. He also claimed a sore arm, and declined the offer of the Philadelphia Athletics to join their nine in 1887 on that account. After signing to pitch with Rochester in the International League, he reappeared on a major league diamond during the Brotherhood War in 1890 when that city joined the American Association as the Rochester Broncos, and actually had the best season of his career for them (ERA+ of 111) despite leading the Association by walking 219 batters (not as bad as it might sound, considering he worked 493 innings) but, given the depletion of talent in the AA due to the Players League thinning its ranks, it is difficult to conclude that he truly pitched all that well. National League hitters abused him rather badly in 1891, to the tune of 47 hits in 27 innings, and he left major league baseball for good after appearing in five games for the New York Giants. “From The Capital” WUD, *The Sporting Life*, November 3, 1886, 1; “From The Capital” WUD, *The Sporting Life*, April 6, 1887, 3; “Notes and Comment” NA, *The Sporting Life*, September 14, 1887, 6.

³⁵ “Notes and Comments” NA, *The Sporting Life*, August 18, 1886, 5.

facts of his relationship with his team, it was soon irrelevant, as Scanlon stepped down as manager the following week, with ex-umpire John Gaffney taking his place at the helm.

Had there been an American Association counterpart to the Brotherhood, its players would have voiced some of the same grievances. Always mercurial, to say the least, Chris Von der Ahe in St. Louis was notorious for fining his men for poor play. Whenever the team went on a losing streak, even a short one, and his temper was up, St. Louis players were at risk of fines for making mistakes. In 1888, for example, star left fielder Tip O'Neil was very sick and struggled to play his usual hard-hitting game. Choosing to disbelieve that O'Neil was ill, Von der Ahe instead concluded that O'Neil was purposefully dogging it to secure his release from the team. He then mulcted O'Neil seventy-five dollars and laid him off without pay. At the same time, he fined pitcher Silver King one hundred dollars for not pitching at his usual level, then accused rival Brooklyn of tampering with O'Neil and encouraging him to play poorly.³⁶

Nor was such high-handed treatment of players confined to the major leagues. In 1886, the directors of the Brockton club in the Eastern New England League hit the majority of their roster with fines, some major, for their "indifferent playing." Team captain Bill "Gunner" McGunnigle, who had played in the major leagues as recently as 1882 and is most famous as the inventor of the catcher's mitt, took a twenty-five dollar hit. Teammates identified as Hawes, McCarthy, and Meister fared worse, at fifty dollars per head, while Cudworth, Tuckerman, Patton, and Thayer had their wallets lightened by ten dollars each. "This wholesale fining of players excites considerable indignation among their friends, who think the boys have been

³⁶ "A Bad Break" NA, *The Sporting Life*, July 18, 1888, 1.

playing as good ball as they know how. Captain McGunnigle was instructed to administer the fines, but refused, and . . . has asked for his release.”³⁷

Even players with no particular complaint joined the Brotherhood readily in many cases, perhaps in the realization that even if they had no issues with their team at the moment, something would probably happen soon enough. Seven members of the Philadelphia Quakers swelled the ranks by mid August, with rumors that the rest of the team would follow in short order.³⁸ This was, more than anything else, a response to the general stinginess of Quakers ownership when it came to rewarding its players.

The Brotherhood had not yet signed up any players from the American Association, however. Possibly, this was due to the AA’s reputation as the “Beer and Whiskey League,” although this title referred more to how the owners of various AA franchises made their wealth outside of baseball, and the fact that the league did allow its teams to sell alcohol at the ballpark, rather than to any elevated level of dissolution on the part of its players as compared to other leagues. The BPBP also thought it wise to take on just one league at a time.³⁹ It also reflected the fact that Association players and League players did not have exactly the same contracts, and so could not negotiate for exactly the same things.

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³⁷ “Trouble in a Club” NA, *The Sporting Life*, August 25, 1886, 1; McGunnigle’s SABR biography, available at <http://sabr.org/bioproj/person/3f7c0c00>, accessed June 1, 2014. McGunnigle earned his nickname with the strength of his throwing arm. His biographer reports, based on newspaper accounts of the time, that in one season he threw out twenty-eight men at first base who had hit the ball to him in right field. Apparently, he had a terrific sense of humor as well. His biographer quotes McGunnigle’s son that he was “a story teller in several dialects, had a good singing voice and a hearty appreciation of friendships.”

³⁸ “The Local Season” NA, *The Sporting Life*, August 11, 1886, 5.

³⁹ Stevens, *Baseball’s Radical for All Seasons*, 45-46, 48-49.

Ownership and management's reaction to Ward's announcement was not uniform. Although he would change his mind soon enough, National League president Nick Young appeared friendly at first, stating,

It seems to be a move on the part of the most reputable men in the profession to secure for themselves and associates fair and equitable treatment at the hands of those in authority over them as well as to promote the general welfare of the sport. With such an object the organization is above criticism, and the fact that such men as John Ward, Jim O'Rourke, John Morrill, Ed Hanlon and Dave Rowe are the prime movers in the scheme, insures for it the respect and consideration of all who may be brought in contact with the workings of the institution.⁴⁰

Ironically, considering the role he would play in the drama to come, Al Spalding also gave the Brotherhood a cautious endorsement. Shortly after the organization came into existence, he stated, "if they get the right men at the helm, such an organization can be made a power for the general good of the game, and for the benefit of ball players the country over in particular. I have great confidence in Johnny Ward's ability and energy, and if any man can make a success of such an organization he can." Spalding hoped, above all, that the organization would prove useful to curtail drinking amongst the players. Clearly, this issue was on his mind constantly, as his hiring of private detectives to shadow his men and watch their after-hours behavior demonstrates.⁴¹

What did baseball observers think about the Brotherhood? The Chicago *Daily Tribune* believed the Brotherhood offered the proper balance to the labor-management relationship in baseball. The *Daily Tribune* praised the organization for its intention to rectify the injustice of "the illegal and unjust contracts required in some clubs, where the parties of the one part sign away all right and the party of the other 'reserves' all." Furthermore, regarding the clause in the

⁴⁰ "Nick Young Friendly to the Players' Union" NA, *The Sporting Life*, August 18, 1886, 1.

⁴¹ "From Chicago" Remlap, *The Sporting Life*, November 17, 1886, 4.

BPBP constitution stating that the organization could fine or discipline members only after a fair hearing, the paper regarded this as “a principle of justice which might fairly command the attention of the associations themselves.” It closed its early coverage of the Brotherhood by stating its belief that “this profession shows a most commendable appreciation of the rights of the individual members, and the section quoted is only a fair sample of the discrimination and conservatism which pervades the entire document.”⁴²

Another Chicago baseball writer, Harry Palmer, saw the Brotherhood’s emergence as the natural consequence of dictatorial and tyrannical moves by the magnates. As later events showed, Palmer was not exactly enamored of the organization and its course of action, but he clearly recognized why players joined. Throughout 1886 and 1887, some owners began applying the blacklist with greater frequency than hitherto, and enthusiasm for the practice was on the rise among some of baseball’s capitalists. Palmer, seeing this, was not surprised when the players decided to band together.

When the blacklisting power began to be applied unjustly and innocent men were made to suffer by being deprived of the power to earn a livelihood at their profession, when fines began to be indiscriminately imposed upon players and other arbitrary measures exercised from which the player had no redress whatever . . . the spirit of self protection which is strong in every man and only needs to be called forth began to show itself, and the result was the formation of the Brotherhood of Ball Players . . .⁴³

Palmer then cut to the heart of the matter regarding salaries, with reasoning both logical and prescient:

Club managers will acknowledge that if the same effect could be obtained through any other means it would be better to abolish the reserve rule and the odious black list, and yet it is a remarkable fact which no club manager can deny that the clubs themselves are directly responsible for the necessity of the existence of such rules and the abuses that occur as the result of their existence. If a club did not feel that some other club would

⁴² “The Brotherhood of Professional Ball-Players” NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, August 4, 1886, 3.

⁴³ “From Chicago” Harry Palmer, *The Sporting Life*, March 30, 1887, 3.

offer a crack player more money than the first club was paying him, there would be no reason for reserving that player, for the probabilities are that he would play with his old club so long as his salary and treatment were satisfactory. The manner in which the effort to check the exorbitant salary evil was prosecuted by the clubs of the National League is an evidence of their own weakness. The fact that an organization of professional ball clubs, organized for their own protection and benefit, should in meeting assembled have adopted a measure for their protection against exorbitant salary lists, and then each and severally have deliberately planned to defeat its object is a travesty upon base ball legislation, and such a policy, if continued, will create a feeling of distrust, perhaps open hostility, between players and managers which will eventually result in the death of base ball as a professional pursuit. Men will not be shipped about the country at the will of any base ball organization. Ball players are not nomads or Arabs.⁴⁴

Henry Chadwick, witness to innumerable baseball campaigns, also gave the new organization his endorsement. "Almost every line of labor in this country has its protective organization, and why not the ball players? The idea of the association is to uphold the players of the country, and prevent the enforcement of the unlawful rules which the managers have adopted . . . these rules are distasteful to the players, as they allow managers to impose fines upon them for little or no cause." Chadwick also agreed with Ward regarding the mutuality of interest for players and teams. "The interests of the players and of the leagues are of necessity identical, for what damages the pecuniary interests of the clubs must injure the Brotherhood." He ended by encouraging the new organization to take some kind of stand on the buying and selling of players against their will. "Its movement against the now prevalent custom of selling the release of players . . . is timely. I trust that the paying of \$10,000 by one club to another for the virtual sale of the services of a player, held only under the reserve rule, and bound by no legal contract, is the culminating point of this new phase of the old slavery times of thirty years ago."⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ "Chadwick's Chat" Henry Chadwick, *The Sporting Life*, March 30, 1887, 2.

Not all observers greeted the Brotherhood enthusiastically, however. *The Sporting News* jabbed at the new organization, remarking, “There is nothing for Messrs. Young and Wikoff to do now but resign as John Much Gall Ward and the ball players’ union have assumed the management of the base ball business.”⁴⁶ The overall response of management was muted, however, perhaps because, while distrustful of anything that might be termed a labor organization, the magnates wanted to wait and see exactly what the new organization would do before they decided how great a threat to their arbitrary power it really was.

* * * * *

After seeing how player salaries had suffered the previous winter, The Brotherhood, as Sam Crane explained, wanted to do away with salary limits, however easily teams evaded them when they believed the situation called for it. They did not want the reduced salaries of the 1886 season to become a new baseline of what was normal. The owners, in contrast, publicly hoped that these lower figures did become a new basis for acceptable pay. In fact, they even wrote the salary limit into the second article of the National Agreement in the off-season. That article read, in part, “no club shall pay to any of its players for one season’s services a *salary in excess of two thousand dollars, nor any advance payment for such services* prior to the first day of April.” (Regarding this rule, Henry Chadwick observed wryly, “this rule of the National Agreement, which is now in force, seems to have been lost sight of by a majority of club managers, or else the salaries paid to players have been greatly overstated.”)⁴⁷ In private, however, they apparently made no serious effort to hold the line on salaries for 1887. Chris Von der Ahe of St. Louis was

⁴⁶ “Caught on the Fly” NA, *The Sporting News*, August 9, 1886, 5.

⁴⁷ “Chadwick’s Chat” Henry Chadwick, *The Sporting Life*, February 16, 1887, 2.

at the forefront of this pseudo effort at salary control, as he was at the forefront of most things that were controversial, although his public statements tried to preserve the charade. “The reason why the St. Louis Browns are not being signed more rapidly is because the players have gotten the idea into their heads that champion players ought to draw champion salaries. Mr. Von der Ahe is patiently trying to teach them the error of their way of thinking.”⁴⁸ Von der Ahe himself put it thusly: “When anybody offers me \$4,000 for one of my players he gets him. No player in the country is worth \$4,000 above his salary. You hear a great deal of talk about \$3,000 or \$4,000 being offered for this and that player, but you may set it down as a fishing excursion and investigate no further.”⁴⁹

In an effort to form its policy and draw up some plans regarding the salary issue, the Brotherhood held its first annual meeting in mid-November of 1886, just prior to major league baseball’s winter meeting of the Joint Rules Committee. There was one chapter present from each club in the National League, represented by John Ward (New York), Mert Hackett (Kansas City), Sam Crane (St. Louis Maroons), Cliff Carroll (Washington), Charlie Bastian (Philadelphia Quakers), Arthur Irwin and Charlie Buffinton (Boston), Dan Brouthers (Detroit) and Ned Hanlon (also from Detroit but delegated to represent Chicago). They chose officers for the coming year, electing Ward as president, Brouthers as vice president, and Tim Keefe of New York as secretary and treasurer. With monthly dues for each player set at fifty cents, they reported \$1,000 in the Brotherhood’s treasury. The most important thing on the agenda, however, was to choose a representative to attend baseball’s Joint Rules Committee meetings,

⁴⁸ “Notes and Comments” NA, *The Sporting Life*, December 1, 1886, 3.

⁴⁹ “Notes and Comments” NA, *The Sporting Life*, December 8, 1886, 3.

and to no great surprise, Ward received the nod from his brothers, along with instructions to recommend certain revisions to the rules of play on their behalf.⁵⁰

The winter meeting of the National League and the American Association to discuss changes to the rules of play was an important moment in the history of the Brotherhood. For the first time ever, the players had representation when baseball's moguls sat down to discuss business about the game. Although only John Ward went on behalf of the Brotherhood, fellow players Cap Anson of Chicago, John Morrill of Boston, Ed Swartwood of Brooklyn, Charles Comiskey of the St. Louis Browns, and Harry Stovey of the Philadelphia Athletics were also invited, though only Ward, Anson, and Comiskey actually made it to Chicago for the meeting. Officially, the magnates of the game invited these men so that those who actually played could discuss the merits and demerits of proposed rule changes. In any case, it was a victory for the players, as no player had ever gone to this conference before, and that included the Brotherhood.⁵¹

Ward's mission on behalf of his brothers, therefore, primarily included airing their views on various rule proposals. One was to simplify the responsibilities of the umpires to lessen the number of judgment calls they typically had to make. Another umpire-related suggestion was that only team captains could discuss calls with an umpire, and then only to question the interpretation of a rule, not the accuracy of the umpire's decision. This was in order to produce a more orderly and fast-moving game that more fans would appreciate, rather than one bogged down by constant complaining and challenges to the umpire's judgment, of which most spectators disapproved. Ward also declared a desire to prohibit coaching, for the same reasons.

⁵⁰ "The Players" JFB, *The Sporting Life*, November 17, 1886, 1.

⁵¹ "Better Baseball Rules" NA, *New York Times*, November 15, 1886, 8; "The Maroons Victory" NA, *The Sporting News*, November 20, 1886, 1.

(In the 1880s, “coaching” was the term used for what later observers called heckling or trash talking. It did not refer to the role of the team’s manager or captain in instructing players.) Ward wanted to regularize the method by which the pitcher delivered the ball to home plate to eliminate the chaotic variety of motions and deliveries employed by many pitchers in their efforts to deceive the batter, as well. This would allow more batting, something fans liked. Finally, Ward and the other players wanted to have pitches hit into foul territory declared strikes, in part in reaction to abuse of this rule by players such as Arlie Latham.⁵²

Interestingly, none of Ward’s aims at the meeting had anything to do with player rights, the salary situation, the reserve clause, or any related issues. Besides the fact that, technically, the owners only wanted to consult Ward and his fellow players on the issue of potential rule changes, it appears he and the rest of his brothers were still feeling their way as to how aggressive their organization should be in promoting their mutual cause off the field. The list of proposals the players made did have a consistent theme, however, and one in line with the Brotherhood’s avowed intent to promote the game. Each of the rule changes attempted to make the game cleaner and more orderly, less confrontational, and more pleasing to the fans by promoting action over delay and disputes. Ward and the BPBP felt these changes would advance the interests of baseball among the patrons of the game.⁵³ (See chapters six, nine, and ten for more on these important issues.)

Although it confined its formal actions to suggestions on refining the rules, this is not to say, however, that the Brotherhood sat idle all winter. Far from it. Instead, the players sought

⁵² “Better Baseball Rules” NA, *New York Times*, November 15, 1886, 8.

⁵³ Besides the incidental fact that the owners did adopt most of the rules proposed by the players, one of the most interesting changes made by the Joint Rules Committee was to substitute a square of white rubber instead of a stone for home plate. Prior to this, home plate itself was a frequent source of injury to players. “The Maroons Victory” NA, *The Sporting News*, November 20, 1886, 1.

legal advice regarding what contractual practices of baseball's magnates were legitimate and which were questionable. Although perhaps showing some premature bravado, one anonymous player told the *Chicago Daily Tribune* that the BPBP had "obtained the best legal advice in the country as to our rights and know that in a court of justice the league and association's contracts and rules which give them the right to discharge us, reserve us, or sell us, are not worth the paper they are printed on." Despite this, "we don't propose to make any trouble so long as members of the brotherhood are treated fairly. . . . There is one thing that base-ball managers must stop, and that is fining men because they happen to play badly. . . . Fines must not hereafter be imposed on members of the brotherhood without cause; whenever they are there will be lawsuits."⁵⁴

In all, the organization kept a low profile for most of the year following its formation and statements of intent in the summer of 1886. Participating in drawing up new rules for the game was a step towards greater involvement, but only a small step. Building the membership so effectively was rather more significant, with 107 players in the fold representing every National League team by the end of the 1886 season.⁵⁵ Baseball's owners, at least in their public statements to the sporting press, seemed not to take much notice of, or interest in, the BPBP during the winter of 1886 and 1887, and as the organization did not issue any major public challenges on behalf of its membership during those months, perhaps the magnates hoped they could ignore the new organization. In August 1887, however, the situation changed. As the '87 campaign wound down, Ward and his brethren began, in the eyes of ownership, taking an unhealthy interest in the salary and player contract questions.

⁵⁴ "Base-Ball" NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, March 13, 1887, 22.

⁵⁵ Stevens, *Baseball's Radical for all Seasons*, 46.

Chapter 5

The Winter of 1886-1887

Going into the winter of 1886-1887, many baseball observers had one big question on their minds besides the usual rumors about which team might try to purchase what star player. It was the salary question. By this time, all realized that clubs had honored the salary limit of 1886 only in the breach as far as the best players were concerned. The question of the day, therefore, was whether teams would try to keep up the fiction of holding the line on salaries or would admit what everyone already knew and resume doing things as they had prior to 1886.

When the Pittsburgh Alleghenys sent out contracts for the 1887 season, they made clear their intent to keep their costs down. One of their sportswriters estimated the payroll for the upcoming season as follows:

Ed Morris, pitcher - \$2,500 (and probably more)

Fred Carroll, catcher - \$2,200

Pud Galvin, pitcher - \$2,300

Sam Barkley, second base - \$1,800

Otto Schomberg, first base - \$1,800

Pop Smith, shortstop - \$1,800

Art Whitney, third base - \$1,800

Tom Brown, outfield - \$1,600

John Coleman, outfield - \$1,500

Fred Mann, outfield - \$1,500

Bill Kuehne, utility - \$1,500

Jim Handiboe, pitcher - \$1,800

Bill Bishop, pitcher - \$1,000

Jocko Fields, outfield - \$1,200

The Pittsburgh correspondent estimated the team's total outlay for the upcoming campaign at \$30,000, give or take, which included the cost of renovating the team's grounds at Recreation Park so that it could seat 10,000 spectators. Team management lamented the fact that, "during the season just closed an unusually large crowd always slopped over into the fielders' territory." The renovation would remedy that situation and improve revenue simultaneously. Although the club later upped their payroll, trading Schomberg for Alex McKinnon, whom they paid \$2,500 in 1887, the team was still a parsimonious operation, even by the standards of 1887.¹ However, it did try to take up St. Louis owner Von der Ahe on his claim that anyone could purchase any player on his team for \$4,000, targeting controversial third baseman Arlie Latham. "If he really said this and means business, he can draw on the Pittsburgs for the amount any time he gets ready. Phillips said yesterday that the Pittsburgs would give \$4,000 for Arlie's release any time between now and the opening of the championship season."² Von der Ahe did not bite, and Latham won another American Association championship with the Browns while leading the American Association in times at bat in 1887.

¹ "Pittsburg Pencillings" CMB, *The Sporting Life*, November 3, 1886, 1.

² "From the Smoky City" CMB, *The Sporting Life*, January 19, 1887, 1.

Some players still simmered with resentment over their treatment the previous winter, making them enthusiastic supporters of Sam Crane's statement against salary limits (see chapter four). Chicago White Stockings teammates King Kelly and Jim McCormick were among this group. Team owner Spalding had fined each man \$375 the previous season, mostly for excess drinking, and both were sore about that. In addition, McCormick stated that his deal with the White Stockings promised him bonuses (to evade the official salary limit of \$2,000) that would raise his pay from \$2,000 to \$3,000 (Spalding claimed \$2,500) if his team won the National League championship, but that the team did not follow through and pay the bonuses. Consequently, both men threatened retirement over the winter of 1886-1887.

Joining Kelly and McCormick in their outrage, although not in their threat of retirement, was veteran catcher Frank "Silver" Flint. A major leaguer going back to the National Association days of 1875 when he caught for the St. Louis Red Stockings as a nineteen-year-old, Flint was not much of a hitter by 1886, just finishing his third consecutive campaign with an OPS+ below 70. However, he had been with the club since 1879, and anyone who had taken the wear and tear of catching in the major leagues for that long had some professional credibility. In an interview, Flint described how players such as himself, McCormick, Kelly, and others knew that, technically, they had violated the section of their contract promising bonus money if they both won the National League championship and abstained from intoxicating liquors while doing so. Flint reasoned that, since the point of a clause about not drinking was there to help the team win the league championship, and the team had indeed won the league championship, whether or not players had imbibed in the course of doing so was unimportant. "We had no idea Spalding would hold it out until he did so, and what makes us kick is that the club won the championship and the stockholders made a lot of money." When his interviewer asked Flint why the players

had not insisted on having their contracts worded with this scenario in mind, he replied, “Oh we didn’t ask for it, and had been in the habit of taking Spalding’s word for everything. All I want now is my release and he can keep the money.”³

President Spalding, predictably, had a different take on the situation. He claimed that part of the bonus money was contingent upon the players upholding a contractual clause that they would abstain from intoxicating beverages during the season, and provided the *Chicago Daily Tribune* with copies of the contract to prove his case. In the process, he thereby admitted to breaking the spirit, if not the letter, of the \$2,000 salary limit rule, although the fact that many teams did so was familiar to all who read the sporting press by this time, anyway. When asked if these revelations meant that the NL and AA had rescinded their salary rule, he replied that the rule remained in place, then announced his intent to continue evading the rule through more “booze contracts.” Regarding the disgruntled players, Spalding retold the story of how his private Pinkerton detectives had caught certain players, McCormick, Flint, and Kelly included, imbibing spirits, and that this meant he was not obligated to pay. In an effort to appear forgiving and magnanimous, Spalding also claimed that had the players ceased their drinking after he fined them the first time, he would have let the matter drop, and that this was the first time in three years the team had actually gone so far as to fine players. (This was false, however, as Spalding had fined Flint and outfielder George Gore fifty dollars each in May of 1884 for dissipation. He threatened to double the fine on their next offense and instructed team captain Anson to enforce

³ “Only Temperance Men” NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, December 2, 1886, 2.

the nightly curfew with greater diligence.)⁴ In fact, however, Spalding stated that about six players continued drinking openly, and for that reason he decided to withhold their pay bonuses.⁵

Spalding then pleaded his case for why he was so earnest over penalizing his men for drinking. He claimed the drinking contributed to Chicago's unexpected defeat to the St. Louis Browns in the 1886 World Series, especially the second game, which the White Stockings lost 12-0, getting just two hits and committing ten errors in the field. Feelings against McCormick and his excessive drinking ran so high that when the teams traveled to St. Louis to finish the series, Chicago did not even allow McCormick to go. Spalding also disparaged the burly pitcher by saying, "he drank about as much as all the rest of them put together."⁶

Speaking about alcohol use in general, Spalding said in December, "Now, that sort of thing has got to stop. We owe it to the patrons of base-ball in this city that we have trained athletes on the field and we are going to have them. Our detective's report shows that before one game one of our men drank thirteen glasses of beer. . . . Next year we will have a temperance club." Regarding the recalcitrant Mike Kelly, Spalding stated, "So far as Kelly is concerned the Chicago club will go on even if he does not come here; it will go on if he does; but I am free to say I hope he will be here. I consider him the best ball-player in the country and will pay him more money than any other man in the nine. He is a great ball-player and is popular and I like him; still it would be all nonsense to say he can come here and do as he pleases."⁷ Spalding held fast to this line throughout the winter. Although Kelly still had not signed as January wore away, Spalding continued to profess his admiration for Kelly's skills, personality, drawing power,

⁴ Levine, *A.G. Spalding and the Rise of Baseball*, 43.

⁵ "From Chicago" Remlap, *The Sporting Life*, November 17, 1886, 4; "Only Temperance Men" NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, December 2, 1886, 2.

⁶ "Only Temperance Men" NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, December 2, 1886, 2

⁷ Ibid.; "Pitcher Jim McCormick" NA, *The Sporting News*, January 22, 1887, 1.

ability to work with younger players, and ingenuity in devising creative ways to bend the rules.⁸ Kelly played right along. He continued to maintain that he would not don the Chicago uniform in 1887. “I was perfectly satisfied with the amount of salary that I received, but my objection to becoming a member of the Chicago Club for 1887 was solely because I would have to play under Spalding, Anson & Co. If Mr. Spalding refuses to let me go I will retire on my laurels.”⁹

In another interview, Kelly tried to stand up for the players fined by Spalding, himself included, whom the White Stockings wanted to part ways with in the off-season of 1886-1887. He said that, “President Spalding and Capt. Anson have not treated me properly . . . the officials of the Chicago Club never fail to take advantage of any opportunity to impose a fine upon a player. McCormick, Gore, Flint, myself, and several other members of the team were fined for no cause whatsoever.” When queried about the Pinkertons and the proof that players were drinking, Kelly replied, “As for McCormick and myself, I will say that there is no truth in this charge. . . . McCormick pitched splendid ball at the beginning of last season, as every follower of the game is aware, and only fell off when the officials of the club treated him badly.” Kelly finished by stating his belief that all the drama over alcohol, “was simply drummed up in order to lessen the salary list of the club. If the team lost money and a scheme of this kind were resorted to in order to simply lessen expenses it could be overlooked, but they made plenty of money and have no such excuse to offer.”¹⁰

McCormick also offered an additional reason for his desire to leave the Pale Hose: his wounded pride. It seems that, for much of 1886, the team only allowed him to pitch against the National League’s weakest opponents. He did not have the chance to face the stronger clubs of

⁸ “Spalding and Kelly” NA, *The Sporting News*, January 15, 1887, 1.

⁹ “Kelly Will Not Play With the Chicago Nine” NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, February 10, 1887, 3.

¹⁰ “Tired Of Chicago” NA, *New York Times*, January 3, 1887, 8.

the NL, those being the Giants, Wolverines, and Quakers. McCormick interpreted this to mean that his team lacked confidence in his work and did not trust him. (This did do wonders for his won-lost record as a pitcher, however. He won his first eighteen decisions of the season, on his way to 31 wins against just 11 losses.) This perceived lack of trust, in addition to the fines, left him with no desire to pitch in Chicago in 1887.¹¹

Some in the press supported the players in their actions against the team. The Chicago *Evening News* agreed with those observers who felt the buying and selling of players without their permission was wrong, and singled out Kelly and McCormick for praise because “they are the only members of the Chicago nine who have had the pluck to stand out against the petty tyranny of the managers of the organization . . . so that they were able to resist the Russian methods of the Chicago club directors and earn a living in the face of the apparently determined efforts of their former employers to reduce them to the level of serfs.” The paper wondered why their teammates did not join them, writing, “Kelly and McCormick are, however, exceptions. They have been able to throw off the yoke, but it is time that the other players vindicated their privileges as American citizens. The courts are open to them, and they should appeal to the law to protect them from the rapacity of the stockholders who interfere with their right to earn their living wherever they choose.” The *Evening News* claimed that the people of the city backed the two men, as well. “The purchase and sale of human beings inaugurated by the directors of the Chicago club is disgusting, and it is time that the system that permits it should be wiped out. This traffic has been unpleasantly commented upon by the people of Chicago, and they are

¹¹ “Kelly And McCormick” NA, *The Sporting News*, February 12, 1887, 1.

prepared to applaud the action of the only two men who have dared to defy these dealers in white slaves.”¹²

By February, however, Spalding became more confrontational when asked about the King. As Kelly continued holding out, Spalding said, “if he keeps on in that spirit I’ll make him eat hay with his horses before he is much older. He has been mad long enough now, and it is pretty near time somebody was getting mad at this end of the line. . . . If Mr. Mike Kelly does not sign a contract with Chicago pretty damned quick, he will have cause to regret it. That is all.”¹³

It was a bluff. The next week, Spalding cut his losses and sold the incomparable Kelly to the Boston Beaneaters for \$10,000. Kelly did well out of the deal, in some respects at least. Although he saw none of the sale price personally, he did negotiate a new contract with Boston’s ownership that rewarded him with \$2,000 a year for playing baseball and \$3,000 per year for use of his photographic likeness. The combined value, \$5,000, was a nice jump over the \$2,000 and potential no-drinking bonuses the White Stockings rewarded him with in 1886. His teammates were stunned, however. Shortstop Ned Williamson, when apprised of what had happened, lamented, “We were like brothers on the Chicago nine. We traveled together in fair weather and foul. When Kel went broke I went with him. When he was flush I too had money.” When asked about Chicago’s chances at a pennant without the King, Williamson was honest, or depressed, enough to admit, “No, it will hardly be able to do that.”¹⁴

¹² “Kelly and McCormick Defy the Chicago Slave-Dealers” NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, April 22, 1887, 3. The “Russian methods” refer to the autocratic government of the Russian Empire under the rule of the tsars, which still had a reputation, in many ways deserved, for oppression even though Tsar Alexander II had ended serfdom in 1861.

¹³ “From Chicago” Harry Palmer, *The Sporting Life*, February 16, 1887, 2. The reference to eating hay with his horses was a response to the rumor that Kelly’s brother wanted him to retire and join him in his horse breeding enterprises.

¹⁴ “The Only Mike Kelly” NA, *The Sporting News*, February 19, 1887, 1.

Williamson also understood the drawing power Kelly wielded. “Why, Mike was an attraction, viewed in a commercial sense, who has brought thousands of dollars to the Chicago treasury, and Spalding will never again have a man in his team who will be to it what Mike Kelly has been. He is unquestionably the most popular player on the diamond today.”¹⁵ Chicago sportswriter Harry Palmer agreed: “The enormous figure paid for Kel’s release is more than double that ever paid in the history of the games to the best of my knowledge. Yet I believe that Kelly will prove himself worth several times the amount to Boston, for he is just the man to imbue it with the confidence and incite it to increased effort.”¹⁶ Williamson also demonstrated how demoralizing Kelly’s loss might be to holdover players, regretting his decision to sign with a team that seemed determined to clear out his friends and battle-tested teammates. “When I signed I supposed we would have the old nine; if I had thought that Kelly and Gore were going to be released my signature would never have gone on that contract.”¹⁷

Boston’s Triumvirates had offered \$5,000 for Kelly at first. Spalding cabled back, “we couldn’t think of letting Kelly go at the figure you offer, but perhaps for double that amount we might consider it.” The Triumvirate soon raised their figure to the stratospheric sum of \$9,000. When Spalding stood firm and again asked for ten grand, they decided a mere \$1,000 would not stand in the way of acquiring the defending National League batting champion and most popular player in the game, and decided to meet Spalding’s asking price. Jubilation reigned in Boston at the electric news, and forecasts of increased patronage abounded. “People here have been in the habit of going to see the Chicagos play here who never see any other games. . . . Many who have

¹⁵ “From St. Louis” Joe Pritchard, *The Sporting Life*, February 23, 1887, 4. Pritchard, incidentally, had somewhat of a reputation in baseball, at least enough that when the American Association considered removing their active president, Wheeler Wikoff, during the 1887 season, some people tossed his name into the ring as a possible replacement.

¹⁶ “From Chicago” Harry Palmer, *The Sporting Life*, February 23, 1887, 5.

¹⁷ “Diamond Dust” NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, March 6, 1887, 16.

never seen a game of professional baseball are talking about going to see the \$10,000 man. The interest in the game which has seemed in danger of waning has taken a boom.” Furthermore, when Kelly’s old team, the White Stockings, came to town, “those Chicago games alone will about pay for Kelly’s release.” The team also promised Kelly he would be the team captain, which did raise a little bit of a question mark, as “Honest” John Morrill had held that title, along with that of team manager, for several years. A man described as having a “quiet, retiring temperament,”¹⁸ and respected by the team because “he does not address his companions with vituperative language after a game, because he is quiet, yet firm, and because his head is not inflated,”¹⁹ but ever the professional, Morrill pledged to work with Kelly (he retained his title of manager) to make the Boston nine a winner in 1887.²⁰

Perhaps Morrill realized that all the situation truly required was patience on his part. By late August, Kelly’s ways and decisions as captain were, in the judgment of the Triumvirs, hurting the team, so they removed him and restored Morrill to his former dual status as team captain and manager.²¹ By that time, Kelly’s captaincy had resulted in irreparable damage, unfortunately, because while Kelly’s tenure lasted, Morrill could not back up his decisions as manager against Kelly’s will. As one unnamed Boston player said, “How could Morrill discipline the nine last season when the one needing discipline the most of all was the captain himself. If Morrill had fined anybody he would have had to begin with Kelly. You see the predicament he was in.”²² All concerned were relieved when, prior to the 1888 season, Kelly

¹⁸ “The Kelly Deal” Mugwump, *The Sporting Life*, February 23, 1887, 1.

¹⁹ “Notes And Comments” NA, *The Sporting Life*, January 11, 1888, 5.

²⁰ “The Kelly Deal” Mugwump, *The Sporting Life*, February 23, 1887, 1.

²¹ “Mike Kelly Deposed” NA, *The Sporting News*, September 3, 1887, 1.

²² “Notes And Comments” NA, *The Sporting Life*, January 11, 1888, 5.

renounced any ambition to serve as captain once again, ceding the post to Morrill to relieve the uncertainty.²³

Prodding Spalding in this surprising direction was White Stockings captain Anson. When Spalding first broached to Anson the possibility of releasing Kelly and selling him, the burly first baseman replied, “let him go.” When the owner, surprised, asked Anson how the club could get along without the King, Cap replied the team could “get along without anybody who don’t want to stay with us. If there is anyone else dissatisfied, let him go, too.” To reporters, Anson kept up the bravado. “The Chicago Club without Mike Kelly, is stronger than it ever was before. . . . Oh, well, you may howl, but I tell you we’ll be around next fall, as usual, when the pennant is given out.” He later remarked, “It would be necessary for Soden to purchase the entire Chicago team before he could have the slightest hope of capturing the much coveted rag.”²⁴

Joining Anson, somewhat surprisingly, was Harry Palmer. Despite the fact that he extolled Kelly’s virtues at the turnstiles and on the field, Palmer thought the White Stockings well stocked with talent and depth. “I have said that Kel’s release will not materially weaken the Whites this year, and my reasons for thinking so may be found in the personnel of the team as it now exists. We are far better off today in playing strength and resources than we have been for two years past.”²⁵ Perhaps Palmer, usually friendly to owner Spalding in his columns, was trying to spin a bad situation into something less dire for the Chicago faithful, or perhaps he shared Spalding’s delusion that any player was replaceable. In any case, it appears that this time he confused quantity with quality. The idea that the White Stockings could continue to win 70% of

²³ “Caught On The Fly” NA, *The Sporting News*, February 11, 1888, 5.

²⁴ “Evidently Not Stuck on Kelly” NA, *The Sporting Life*, February 23, 1887, 1; “Chats With The Ball Men” NA, *The Sporting News*, April 23, 1887, 5.

²⁵ “From Chicago” Harry Palmer, *The Sporting Life*, February 23, 1887, 5.

the time while still removing star players and replacing them with younger, unproven ones seems wishful thinking in retrospect. It is also interesting that all commentators on the Kelly situation managed to forget his penchant for strong drink in their euphoria (or disappointment) over the sale.

All, that is, except for Al Spalding. By this point, it is clear that Spalding obsessed over the alcohol issue. Personally hiring detectives to shadow his players and observe their drinking habits, advising other clubs to do the same, selling off players who drank, putting ironclad temperance oaths into player contracts, and making other personnel decisions based on perceived sobriety levels as much as perceived talent levels carries a tinge of fanaticism. This reflects his approach to running the White Stockings and to baseball generally. What he wanted, above all else, was respectability for the game. He hoped to attract the “respectable” middle class professionals of the Windy City to the club’s grounds at West Side Park, and equally “respectable” people in other cities to parks throughout the nation. Any perception of professional ballplayers as drunken riff-raff hindered him in this goal.²⁶ He was not alone in this desire. Prior to the 1887 season, Cincinnati Red Stockings owner Aaron Stern planned various events to go with Saturday home games in order to “cater to the best elements of society.” These “gala” events included orchestral concerts and the engagement of musical celebrities. In a special effort to cater to cranks on the outskirts of its rapidly growing city, the club also had a “Suburban Day.” Every Saturday, games in Porkopolis started an hour early so suburban fans could make it home during daylight hours.²⁷

²⁶ Levine, *A.G. Spalding and the Rise of Baseball*, 43.

²⁷ “Local News” NA, *The Sporting Life*, February 23, 1887, 5; “From Cincinnati” Ren Mulford, Jr., *The Sporting Life*, February 16, 1887, 4. Mulford replaced O.P. Caylor as the Cincinnati correspondent for *The Sporting Life* in February of 1887. Caylor left to edit a new journal that exclusively covered baseball based in New York City. He also left his post at the Cincinnati

Spalding, however, took his anti-liquor crusade to new heights for the 1887 campaign. The godfather of the box score, Henry Chadwick, described Spalding's plan to enforce temperance: "Every spree will cost League players this season \$200, and the fine will be enforced every time." Spalding himself said, "The Chicago Ball Club is bound to have its games played by sober men or not at all. . . . We are bound to weed out the whiskey drinkers from the ranks of the White Stockings, and we are impelled to this course both for the good of the men and the good of the game." Spalding continued to try to strike a high moral tone: "I may have peculiar and somewhat advanced ideas on this subject, but I am only anxious to elevate this great game of base ball and put it on a plane of respectability where we shall be proud to acknowledge it as our National sport."²⁸

There might be a price for his campaign on behalf of morality, however, as his purge of players with suspect morals would probably cost the White Stockings on the field and in the National League standings. But did it? How all the off the field maneuvering played out on the diamond presents a complex picture. The teams Spalding assembled in 1885 and 1886 were, and remain, among the best in baseball's long history. The '85 club went 87-25 for a gaudy .777 winning percentage, and while they only beat out the New York Giants by two games for the National League pennant that year, they topped all other teams in the league by thirty games or more. The following year they fell a bit in winning percentage but still posted an exceptional 90-34 record and won a second straight pennant. Only one major league team has equaled this feat of two consecutive seasons winning more than seventy percent of their games since 1885-1886:

Commercial-Gazette in the process. Caylor's replacement at the Cincinnati paper was none other than Bancroft "Ban" Johnson. Not only would Johnson "rather see a game of base ball than eat," he was also, of course, the man who organized the American League to challenge the National League's monopoly on professional baseball in 1901.

²⁸ "Chadwick's Chat" Henry Chadwick, *The Sporting Life*, March 9, 1887, 3.

the great Chicago Cubs (same franchise as the White Stockings, but with a new name) teams of 1906 and 1907. The 1885-1886 White Stockings teams had three Hall of Fame players (Cap Anson, Mike Kelly, and John Clarkson) plus three others (George Gore, Jimmy Ryan, and Jim McCormick) who at least merit some consideration for baseball's highest individual honor. That means that nearly half of the team's roster consisted of men of historically exceptional abilities.

This was the roster Spalding decided to rearrange for 1887 with an eye towards finding players more in his image of middle class respectability. King Kelly, with his WAR of 7.3, went to the Boston Beaneaters for \$10,000, outfielder Abner Dalrymple (0.5 WAR) shipped out for Pittsburgh, and the Giants purchased outfielder George Gore and his 4.5 WAR, as well. Pitchers Jim McCormick, WAR of 7.2, and Jocko Flynn, 4.8, also departed after that season, McCormick to Pittsburgh and Flynn to the bottle and after injuring his arm and hand. In January of 1887 Spalding wrote to the venerable baseball writer Henry Chadwick (he published his first book about baseball, *Beadle's Dime Book of Base Ball*, in 1860), "you can put it down as a positive fact . . . that the Chicago Ball Club for 1887 will be a total abstinence crowd ready to wear red ribbon, blue ribbon or any other emblem that may be suggested showing their loyalty to the cause of temperance." Chadwick added, "it is a pity the New York Club does not follow Chicago's example, not to mention other League clubs."²⁹

Chadwick agreed that Spalding was taking the proper course. He claimed that the only effective player lost by the White Stockings was Gore, (although at the time of his letter, the team had not yet sold Kelly) and that even his loss was not so bad, as his frequent disagreements

²⁹ "Chadwick's Chat" Henry Chadwick, *The Sporting Life*, January 19, 1887, 2. As a reminder, WAR stands for Wins Above Replacement, the number of games the team won because of the player that season as compared to how many it would win with a replacement level player in that position. See Appendix A for a lengthier description of WAR and why it is a useful statistical measure.

with team captain Anson negated his performance on the field. He regarded McCormick as a quality pitcher when sober but worthless when not, and claimed the Scotsman had ceased to be of use to the team.³⁰ “Now, Mac is worth fighting for—with a proviso, and that is, that he will stop ‘working the growler.’ Otherwise he is comparatively useless. . . . In the St. Louis games . . . he materially helped the Browns to victory.”³¹ As writers speculated on where McCormick would finally end up in 1887, they echoed Chadwick, one writing, “there is no question that Mac would make a valuable addition to any club if he would divorce himself from strong drink. That Spalding should let him go is pretty conclusive evidence that Al has very little hope of Mac doing so.”³² It is interesting, however, that a player Spalding appeared to value so little still brought \$2,000 plus young pitcher George Van Haltren to the team when Spalding finally released McCormick to Pittsburgh in late April, so it appears that once again, appearances were not what they seemed with the Chicago magnate. Furthermore, Spalding valued McCormick highly enough that he did not sell him to rivals New York or Boston, fearing to strengthen either of those nines too much, but made sure the Scotsman went to comparatively non-threatening Pittsburgh instead.³³

Others agreed with Chadwick regarding Chicago’s roster facelift. *The Sporting News* asserted that Chicago would be stronger for every departure (although again, Kelly was still a White Stocking and predicted to stay one at the time) because, while he was a great player, Gore “was an element of trouble and the best interests of the club dictated his retirement. . . . his habits and temperament are far from being desirable, and as the effect of his example upon younger players was not salutary, Chicago can spare him and New York is welcome to him.” This writer

³⁰ “Not Much” Henry Chadwick, *The Sporting Life*, December 15, 1886, 2.

³¹ “Chadwick’s Chat” Henry Chadwick, *The Sporting Life*, January 12, 1887, 5.

³² “Caught on the Fly” NA, *The Sporting News*, January 15, 1887, 5.

³³ “In The Field Of Sports” NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, April 21, 1887, 5.

also offered high praise for the newcomers replacing the departed men, especially for Marty Sullivan, an outfielder from the New England League with a reputation as “a fine fielder and heavy batter.”³⁴ The team’s captain, Anson, predicted that trouble would find Gore in Gotham, stating, “Unless Gore changes his habits next season he will have more trouble than he ever had. The club he signed with is not noted for sobriety, and the chances are that he will not improve in habits or playing.”³⁵

Nor was Chadwick simply demonstrating a dislike for McCormick. He offered similar advice to any team considering paying large sums of cash to acquire any players of questionable comportment:

Who are these men for whom the sum of \$5,000 each is demanded? Are they men of marked integrity of character, of temperate habits, of a high degree of intelligence, and possessed of other exceptional qualifications as to warrant such phenomenal salaries? What are the facts? [Jack] Glasscock is one of the noted Cleveland trio who broke his written contract with a club who had brought him up and always treated him liberally. [Jerry] Denny is an illiterate man of dissipated habits, and lacking in those special attributes which are prominent in a ‘headwork’ team player . . . is it any wonder that intelligent, honorable players who are in receipt of salaries less than half the amount asked by these puffed up players begin to kick at such an uneven distribution of financial favors?³⁶

As it turned out, these judgments on the merits of replacing the supposed lushers with more sober ballplayers were only partially correct, and Spalding’s makeover of the White Stockings started a downward slide from the apex of the National League to the middle of the pack. While it won no more championships, the team stayed quite competitive through the 1880s, but by the early 1890s struggled to win half its games on a yearly basis. The decline in

³⁴ “The White Stockings” NA, *The Sporting News*, December 18, 1886, 1.

³⁵ No title, NA, *The Sporting Life*, December 29, 1886, 4. Anson and the other observers proved correct to some extent, as Gore played respectably for the Giants in 1887, but not quite to the form he displayed in Chicago.

³⁶ “Chadwick’s Chat” Henry Chadwick, *The Sporting Life*, February 2, 1887, 2.

1887 was not the fault of the team's pitching. For 1887, instead of McCormick and Flynn in the pitcher's box, Spalding complemented John Clarkson, the team's mainstay, with a pair of rookies, Mark "Fido" Baldwin, who was "a magnificent specimen of manhood, and has the muscle to make him a tower of strength," and George Van Haltren, which actually turned out fine. The duo combined for an entirely respectable WAR of 8.2. While this was 3.8 below what Flynn and McCormick compiled in 1886, the two departed pitchers combined for just 2.6 WAR in 1887, as Flynn did not pitch at all. Had these new pitchers teamed with a returning McCormick and Clarkson, the team's pitching would have been deep in quality and quantity in 1887, as Clarkson upped his WAR from an excellent 7.1 to an almost unthinkable 14.9 mark. Team captain Anson leaned so heavily on Clarkson that year that in August, when the team faced the Detroit Wolverines in a crucial three game series, Anson sent Clarkson to the pitcher's box for all three games.³⁷

The everyday lineup was a much different story, however. Replacing Kelly, Gore, and Dalrymple were another pair of rookies, Tom Daly and Marty Sullivan, plus a collection of undistinguished players in the outfield, of whom future evangelist Billy Sunday played most frequently. These three new starters combined for 0.3 WAR, costing the team about five wins in 1887, as the departed trio collectively posted a WAR of 5.4 even with Gore and Kelly having sub par seasons. Spalding justified jettisoning his convivial veterans and making the move towards these young, unproven, but hopefully temperate players by saying, "nothing in the world demoralizes a new player so quickly and so thoroughly as to see the older members taking their toddy right along. At any rate, I won't have it." On the surface, it appears that without these superb players, the White Stockings did not recover their glory for two decades. The team did

³⁷ "The White Stocking" Petit Roche, *The Sporting News*, April 2, 1887, 1.

not acquire its next pennant until 1906, by which time the moralist Spalding had married his former mistress, recognized the illegitimate son that resulted from their liaisons, joined the Raja Yoga Theosophical Society, located near San Diego in Point Loma, California, and virtually retired from his business interests.³⁸

The experience of the White Stockings showed the relative risks of relying on talented but unsteady players on the one hand or (hopefully) predictable but less spectacular players on the other. It also demonstrated the usefulness of modern statistics in evaluating teams from the past and providing us with a more detailed picture of why events unfolded as they did. Spalding knew, just as everyone else did, that men such as Kelly were capable of better play if they would just let the bottle alone. He also should have known that players as talented as Kelly, Gore, or McCormick did not simply materialize out of thin air, yet his quoted comments in the sports papers gave no indication that he did, a surprise considering the number of years Spalding had been around the game. Realizing, however, that he could never turn Mike Kelly into a teetotaler, he had to choose to either keep trying, or let Kelly go. He chose the latter course and sold him to Boston.

Only in hindsight does the team's decline appear inevitable, and even after accounting for the statistics for 1887, it is not at all clear that making personnel decisions based on player morality was necessarily to blame. Consider the subsequent performances of the five key players the team lost after 1886. Flynn played just one more game in the majors, hurt his hand

³⁸ "Pitcher Jim McCormick" NA, *The Sporting News*, January 22, 1887, 1. For more on Flynn's meteoric rise to success in Chicago, and his equally meteoric disappearance from the major leagues, see his SABR biography at <http://sabr.org/bioproj/person/dd24ba1b>, accessed July 15, 2014. For more on Spalding's theosophical retirement in California, see chapter seven of Levine, *A.G. Spalding and the Rise of Baseball*. Spalding's childhood acquaintance, mistress, and second wife, Elizabeth Mayer Churchill, was a devotee and personal pupil of Madame Blavatsky and a follower of Blavatsky's student, the "Purple Mother" Katherine Tingley, who founded the Point Loma community.

trying to catch a ball in right field, and never appeared on a major league diamond again. Dalrymple played two years in Pittsburgh and one in Milwaukee after leaving Chicago, posting a combined WAR of 0.0 over those three campaigns. Pittsburgh got decent value from employing McCormick in 1887, as noted above, but just like Flynn, 1887 was his last major league season. Gore lasted six more years, and was an above average player still, with 11.5 WAR to show for those years (1.9 average), but this is only about half as many WAR as he posted in an average season with Chicago in the 1880s. King Kelly's story is similar to Gore's. He toiled seven more years and played well for the most part, totaling 14.7 WAR for a 2.1 average season.

What of the replacements Spalding found for these men? Baldwin worked just two years in the Windy City, but his WAR of 6.0 in 1887 went a good portion of the way towards making up for the five departed players (combined WAR of 8.0 that year) all by himself. Chicago's other new pitcher, George Van Haltren, made up the rest of that deficit with a little to spare, so that even with the three new hitters contributing nearly nothing, Chicago came out ahead on this exchange of players. The blame for the team's decline, it seems, was not due to making personnel transactions based on morality. The responsibility, apparently, must go elsewhere.

Or does it? The career trajectories of the players replacing Gore, Kelly, and friends show the story is still more complex. Van Haltren went on to a fine major league career, although mainly as an outfielder rather than a pitcher, but spent only three seasons with the White Stockings. Fido Baldwin lasted seven seasons (he also enjoyed the high life of partying and carousing, but after his career ended reformed his ways, got a medical license, and became a surgeon) but left Chicago after 1888. Parson Sunday, like Spalding an ardent prohibitionist, joined the exodus to Pittsburgh after 1887 (Spalding, when letting Sunday go, stated he was "as honest as a Quaker," but parted with the outfielder because "he does not stand newspaper

criticism well” and the team was struggling to find playing time for him³⁹), while Sullivan joined Indianapolis after another mediocre season in Chicago in 1888. Tom Daly, like Van Haltren, had a lengthy and respectable career, both offensively and defensively, lasting until 1903. Teammate Ned Williamson credited Daly with being one of the earliest catchers to get his body in position to throw out base stealers before even receiving the pitch, allowing him to throw to the bases quicker.⁴⁰ Others commented on his defensive prowess as well. “Half his value as a catcher was in his wonderful throwing. I don’t remember a back stop whose very position seemed to be so perfect for quick throwing to second.”⁴¹ Chicago, however, saw none of his productive years, as he left the fold after the 1888 season when Spalding dismissed him from the team for, yes, drinking.

It seems, then, that the reason Chicago fell off was not so much the loss of the original quintet, only two of whom remained productive major league players after 1887, but a combination of three developments that followed its effort to replace those men sent packing after 1886. One, those players who proved adequate replacements in 1887 did not remain adequate, partly because they often adopted the bad habits of those they replaced. Most of the blame for this falls on Baldwin. He was legitimately ill at times in 1888, curtailing his contributions that season, but Baldwin still enjoyed enough of Spalding’s confidence that he invited Baldwin on the world tour of 1888-1889 as a member of the Chicago team, and Baldwin pitched many of the games. Fido’s bad habits were ever-present on the tour however, especially his love of alcohol. The low point came when a monkey attacked Baldwin, biting him on the leg, after he had given the monkey pretzels and beer. Another source claimed it was a cheese

³⁹ “From Chicago” Harry Palmer, *The Sporting Life*, January 25, 1888, 4.

⁴⁰ “Base-Ball” NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, May 1, 1887, 6.

⁴¹ “Hub Happenings” Mugwump, *The Sporting Life*, May 1, 1889, 6.

sandwich rather than pretzels, but at any rate, “within ten minutes after Mr. Monk had swallowed the malt juice he buried his teeth in Baldy’s legs and played tag all over his face at about one and the same instant. Mark declared war upon the hairy son of Ceylon forthwith, but the latter was too keen for the ball player, and has since nimbly avoided him.”⁴²

Outfielder Marty Sullivan and catcher Tom Daly also went on the trip, and too often, they joined Baldwin at the bar. Spalding was so infuriated by the behavior of the youthful trio (all were twenty-five or younger) that he released all three, along with outfielder Bob Pettit, when the tourists returned to the states. The result, from the perspective of the White Stockings, was that by the late 1880s the team was becoming a revolving door for players as it searched for ones with proper moral values, even when this revolving door resulted in the team parting ways with quality young players who might have improved their habits and contributed to the team’s success for years to come. Spalding continued to come up with some talented replacements for his lineup, like outfielder Hugh Duffy in 1888 and catcher Duke Farrell in 1889, both recommended to him by former player, Boston sportswriter, and unofficial White Stockings scout Tim Murnane, but by then, the pitching staff had begun wearing thin.⁴³ (Boston’s owners, displeased at Murnane’s “betrayal” of his hometown nine, once decided to retaliate against his

⁴² “Tedium Relieved by Fun” Harry Palmer, *The Sporting Life*, March 13, 1889, 2.

⁴³ For more on Baldwin’s life and career, see his SABR biography at <http://sabr.org/bioproj/person/41f65388>, accessed June 15, 2014. We should also note that Spalding himself did not find these new players, but employed people who we can describe as unofficial scouts to find them for him. Both Marty Sullivan and Hugh Duffy, for example, signed with Chicago thanks to the work of Boston *Globe* sportswriter Tim Murnane, who recommended them to his friend and Spalding’s captain, Cap Anson. In addition to being former teammates, Murnane and Anson both went on the 1874 European tour, and Anson simply passed along Murnane’s recommendations to Spalding. For more on Murnane, see his SABR biography at <http://sabr.org/bioproj/person/b2017f67>, accessed August 22, 2014.

perfidy by making him pay for tickets to Beaneaters games rather than providing him complimentary tickets as was customary for hometown sportswriters.⁴⁴⁾

This leads to the second core reason for the team's decline, selling the incomparable John Clarkson to Boston before the 1888 season. Spalding, working from his belief that "there is no player so good but that his equal can be found" and "no position in life was ever filled so well but that a man could be found for it when occupant No. 1 had gone," was never more wrong than in the case of Clarkson, who even today probably ranks among the top fifty or so pitchers in baseball's history. It is nearly impossible to replace players of this caliber overnight. The pitcher, for his part, wanted out of Chicago because he felt underpaid compared to less gifted pitchers who made a higher salary than he did. The result was that, as with Kelly before him, Spalding sold Clarkson to the Boston Beaneaters for \$10,000, just prior to the 1888 season. Clarkson toed the rubber in Boston for five years and compiled an incredible 42.7 WAR (there are players in the Hall of Fame with fewer WAR for their entire careers), including an Olympian mark of 16.7 in 1889.⁴⁵

A final reason for the team's decline was the Brotherhood War of 1890. The team had a strong infield in the mid-1880s, with Cap Anson at first base, Fred Pfeffer at second base, Ned Williamson at shortstop and Tom Burns at third base. All played at approximately the same level through the end of the decade, and collectively, earned the nickname of the "Stone Wall Infield." When the Players League formed in 1890, however, both Pfeffer and Williamson went across town and played with the Chicago Pirates. Van Haltren joined them, along with fellow outfielders Hugh Duffy and Jimmy Ryan, and catcher Duke Farrell went over to the Pirates as

⁴⁴ "Notes And Comments" NA, *The Sporting Life*, January 18, 1888, 5.

⁴⁵ For more on Clarkson, see his SABR biography at <http://sabr.org/bioproj/person/47feb015>, accessed June 15, 2014; "From Chicago" Harry Palmer, *The Sporting Life*, January 19, 1887, 4.

well. Three of the team's four primary pitchers from 1889 (future politician John Tener, Frank Dwyer, and Ad Gumbert) also joined various PL teams, leaving the White Stockings (known as the Colts by then) with Anson, Burns, pitcher Bill Hutchinson, and few others familiar to the cranks at West Side Park. They finished in second place anyway in 1890, because most other NL teams lost just as much talent as they did, but when that talent returned to the NL in 1891, the Colts did not recover all their former players and the team declined once again, finishing better than fourth place just once in the next twelve seasons.

Still, by 1889 Spalding and Anson thought that they finally had the right combination of men to lead Chicago back to the promised land of first place. Harry Palmer described the Chicago nine of that year by writing, "the Chicago team as it stands is certainly a clean-cut body of men. All are well-bred, well-mannered, intelligent fellows of excellent habits and even dispositions, and all are ball players . . . whatever demoralizing or disturbing element the team may have contained in the past has been eliminated." He concluded by writing, "The day for lushing, saloon-keeping and profanity among ball players has gone."⁴⁶ That might have been true, but decorum is not the same thing as talent, and decorum was not enough for the White Stockings. They managed but 67 wins in 1889, finishing a discouraging 19 games back of the less sober but highly talented New York Giants.

This close look at the fate of the great White Stockings teams of the mid-1880s reveals several significant points, two of them especially pertinent to the story of the Brotherhood. First, the teams of 1885 and 1886 were not merely great, but were historically great. Yet, no team can remain at that level of success indefinitely. Spalding's strategy of removing the players with questionable behavioral traits from the 1886 team did not undermined

⁴⁶ "Chicago Gleanings" Harry Palmer, *The Sporting Life*, May 8, 1889, 4.

that level of success. He required a few seasons to test and find new players who lived up to his moral standards while playing quality baseball. Just as the Brotherhood sought men of high moral caliber to burnish its public image, the same thought colored Spalding's decisions of how to run his organization.

The other motive behind the Brotherhood's actions, as we have seen, was the issue of player compensation, and that also was central to Spalding's personnel decisions. Had he been willing to pay a little more money to keep John Clarkson happy, in all likelihood the White Stockings would have contended for, and quite possibly won, every league championship between 1888 and 1891, with the possible exception of 1889. Even without the mighty Clarkson, the team was still strong enough to contend until its treatment of its best men caused the club to lose so many talented members to the Players League in 1890. The dispersal of those players to other teams, rather than coming back to Chicago, was the death knell that plunged the franchise into a dozen years of mediocrity.⁴⁷

To finish the story of Jim McCormick, he did accept the sale to Pittsburgh and play in the Smoky City in 1887, although that was his last year in major league baseball. After deciding to hold out for his release over the winter, it appears he stonewalled Spalding, not bothering to reply to Spalding's missives about where he wanted to play. As a result, although both the New York Giants and Boston Beaneaters inquired about securing McCormick's services, he ended up with the Alleghenys in Pittsburgh. True to his history of difficult salary negotiations, rumor in the sporting press had it that McCormick wanted \$4,000 to sign with his new club, with

⁴⁷ Among the minor themes this examination reveals is the fact that running a baseball team is no simple matter because there are a number of moving parts to consider, and things outside the control of management that team executives must estimate when making decisions. Teams must also consider player morale and the effect on the fan base of making changes that include popular players. In short, events that happen in real baseball situations are multi-causal, just like other historical events are.

Pittsburgh offering \$3,000. Pittsburgh manager Horace Phillips did not believe the situation too dire, however, stating that McCormick promised he would sign, and that his word was good.⁴⁸

The Chicago *Daily Tribune* reported his salary as \$2,500, while also declaring that McCormick was “very fleshy, but in good condition” to go in the pitcher’s box against the fearsome Detroit lineup at first opportunity. Pittsburgh management claimed that McCormick’s release from Chicago and salary had cost them considerably more, although some observers concluded this was a feint on management’s part to drum up more interest in McCormick and the club, as with Boston and Mike Kelly.⁴⁹

* * * * *

Beyond these events in Chicago, other players hoped to increase their salaries for 1887. Arlie Latham, the popular and charismatic third baseman of the champion Browns, wanted to improve his compensation by over fifty percent, asking for a \$1,000 raise over the \$1,900 Von der Ahe had paid him to lead the league in opponents infuriated in 1886. While Von der Ahe offered a slight increase once the season ended, Latham’s only response was, “it ain’t enough.” Latham’s teammate Bob Caruthers appeared willing to relive the drama of the previous off-season, declaring he would travel to Jerusalem rather than play for less than \$4,000 in 1887. In classic form, Von der Ahe’s response to Caruthers’ bravado was, “when I want Mr. Caruthers I’ll send for him.” He explained his penny-pinching by describing his players as ungrateful for his

⁴⁸ “McCormick And Van Haltren” NA, *The Sporting News*, April 23, 1887, 1; “McCormick Wants \$4,000” NA, *The Sporting News*, April 23, 1887, 1; “Mac Wants Only \$4,000” NA, *The Sporting News*, April 30, 1887, 1.

⁴⁹ “McCormick Signs with Pittsburg” NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, April 30, 1887, 3; “From Pittsburg” Circle, *The Sporting Life*, May 4, 1887, 4.

liberality and by asking anyone who would listen, “who were they when I took them in hand? I made them what they are, or at least gave them the first opportunity to make themselves.”⁵⁰

Parisian Bob did not back down. Tossing out some reliable bargaining chips, he told his hometown paper, the Chicago *Daily Tribune*, “I will not play for \$3,000, as Von der Ahe wants me to. I am not obliged to play ball; my folks want me to quit it, my health is not as good as I would like, and it’s a pretty sure thing I won’t play any more. . . . I am losing weight and am not satisfied with my condition.”⁵¹ The claims of sickness were real enough, as Von der Ahe verified in a personal visit to see Caruthers at his home in the Windy City, and Caruthers said he would see how he felt in March and consider a contract at that time.⁵² The condition afflicted both his heart and lungs, according to the family physician, and as January melted into February, Caruthers was limited to a combination of bed rest and daily “electric baths” in his efforts to pull out of his malaise.⁵³

His teammate and fellow ace pitcher, Dave Foutz, was also unhappy with his remuneration from 1886 and vowed not to play for the same salary again. After all, he had led the American Association in various statistical categories recognized as crucial at the time, including wins (41), winning percentage (.719), and ERA (2.11), but had also led the league in ERA+ at 162 while pitching 504 innings. “I never got a cent more than the limit, \$2,000, and, what’s more, I’m not going to play ball for another season for that kind of salary.” Not only was his salary a 50% pay cut over 1885’s \$3,000. When asked how that compared to Caruthers, “Scissors” stated, “He got \$3,500, for the season. That’s \$1,500 more than I got, and I’m blessed

⁵⁰ “The St. Louis Browns” NA, *The Sporting Life*, December 15, 1886, 3.

⁵¹ “Is It Another Bluff?” NA, *The Sporting Life*, January 5, 1887, 1.

⁵² “From St. Louis” Pritchard, *The Sporting Life*, January 26, 1887, 5.

⁵³ “The Browns’ Pitcher” Eli, *The Sporting News*, January 29, 1887, 1.

if I am not worth as much to the club as he is.”⁵⁴ Foutz later added, “I don’t want the earth, but I will insist on having what is right. If Mr. Von der Ahe has another pitcher that is worth \$1,000 more than I am, I don’t want to play with the club. However, I think things can be arranged satisfactorily.”⁵⁵

When March arrived with Parisian Bob still unsigned, owner Chris Von der Ahe escalated the situation. Relying on a new provision in the American Association’s constitution that allowed for blacklisting players who would not sign the contracts offered to them—a provision Von der Ahe had personally pushed through at the most recent American Association meeting—Von der Ahe threatened his pitcher with that punishment, should he not sign and report for the season by March 21. Because he was fairly wealthy, however, Caruthers had the option of consulting legal counsel, which he did. His lawyer told him to disregard the notice and initiate a suit in US District Court if Von der Ahe chose such extreme measures.⁵⁶ It was not long before others decided to join the suit, should the situation go that far. Teammates Dave Foutz and Arlie Latham, as well as outfielder Hub Collins, shortstop Bill White, and first baseman Paul Cook, all three of Louisville, announced their intent to challenge the same rule just one day after Caruthers.⁵⁷

This left Von der Ahe in a conundrum. He was bombastic and strong-willed, and used to getting his way, but by the end of the second week of March, only five of his fifteen men had reported for duty, and all of his pitchers were absent. Many threatened to hold out for better pay, but he adamantly opposed paying more than he felt was right.⁵⁸ Yet, his club was also supposed

⁵⁴ “In The World Of Sports” NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, February 26, 1887, 6.

⁵⁵ “From St. Louis” Joe Pritchard, *The Sporting Life*, March 2, 1887, 4.

⁵⁶ “Von der Ahe’s Threat Against Caruthers” NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, March 15, 1887, 3.

⁵⁷ “Base-Ball Brevities” NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, March 16, 1887, 9.

⁵⁸ “Von der Ahe’s Predicament” NA, *The Sporting Life*, March 16, 1887, 1.

to play the Chicago White Stockings in a rematch of the World Series from the previous fall in just three weeks, with a decent amount of both pride and prize money on the line for the winner, and of course his highly competitive nature rebelled at the thought of taking on Spalding's boys with anything less than his full arsenal. More than money was at stake. He felt his Browns carried the flag for the entire American Association. Most observers had considered them the underdogs in the 1886 World Series because they perceived that the talent level of the Association was inferior to that of the League. When the Browns triumphed over Chicago, however, and fairly decisively at that, the prestige of the entire Association received a boost in the public's estimation.

All these considerations made Von der Ahe's situation complicated indeed. He threatened to blacklist all the recalcitrant players, but the threat was not very convincing, given the consequences. In the meantime, Foutz, like Caruthers, sought legal counsel, with the Louisville contingent potentially joining the legal challenge his lawyer prepared. Former Louisville manager Jim Hart summarized their situation: "Give a superior player an inferior salary, and what do you get? . . . Do you blame them for asking for their releases and postponing the signing of their contracts? Yet these men are compelled to play for meagre salaries, because, if they refuse to sign, the blacklist stares them in the face." On the legal question, Hart offered, "the St. Louis pitcher reasons that the blacklist interferes with the player's means of earning a living, and that the refusal to grant a release interferes with his chance to better his financial condition; consequently both are unlawful."⁵⁹ With his two top pitching arms, Foutz and Caruthers, pursuing lawsuits and threatening to quit the game for good, and with the Browns' third pitcher, Nat Hudson, also rumored to sit out the season to care for his dying mother (she

⁵⁹ "To Appeal To The Law" Jim Hart, *The Sporting Life*, March 16, 1887, 6.

died in late August that year), the defending champions were in turmoil just six weeks before the championship season began.⁶⁰

Things seemed so dire for the Association champions that, at least according to some rumors circulating in March, other ball clubs even offered help for the Chicago series. To uphold the honor of the American Association against their rivals, president Aaron Stern of Cincinnati offered Von der Ahe the use of any of his players, from crack pitcher Tony Mullane on down. Likewise, the Metropolitans managing director, Watrous, offered to donate any player from his roster that the Browns needed to take on Anson's men. Von der Ahe appreciated that the Association's other members had his back, but respectfully declined their assistance.⁶¹ It is doubtful the White Stockings would have allowed these men to take part in the series even if the offers were legitimate, but apparently Von der Ahe knew what he was doing. Within a week, he had inked both Caruthers and Foutz to new contracts, making them both happy with identical \$3,000 salaries. Hudson, however, was not available due to his family difficulties (he pitched in just nine games for the Browns in 1887). That left The Dude, Arlie Latham, still to sign, although observers predicted it would not be long, due to Latham's spendthrift ways and his "depleted exchequer."⁶² The Dude came to terms about two weeks later, his exchequer replenished by about \$3,000, roughly what he had asked when his personal salary saga began.⁶³

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⁶⁰ No title, NA, *The Sporting Life*, March 19, 1887, 4; "Mrs. Hudson's Funeral" Eli, *The Sporting News*, September 3, 1887, 1.

⁶¹ "Around The Bases" NA, *The Sporting News*, March 19, 1887, 5.

⁶² "Around The Bases" NA, *The Sporting News*, March 26, 1887, 5.

⁶³ "Latham Signed; Busach Released" Joe Pritchard, *The Sporting Life*, April 13, 1887, 1.

The threat of retirement was one strategy available to players disgruntled over their compensation. Players such as Jim McCormick, Fred Dunlap, and Bob Caruthers used this ploy in their disputes with team management prior to the 1886 season, and McCormick trotted it out again after the 1886 season concluded. It was a very popular approach, although not always a successful one. Charles “Lady” Baldwin of the Detroit Wolverines tried out the “retirement racket” in an attempt to secure a fatter paycheck for the 1887 season.⁶⁴ His teammate, outfielder “Big Sam” Thompson, considered doing the same, once remarking he might sit out 1887 and spend the year “resting.” Thompson eventually compromised with the club, however, and by late January both he and Baldwin were on board for the upcoming campaign.⁶⁵ A good thing, too, as Thompson lived up to his nickname by putting up a punishing batting line of .372/.416/.565, for an OPS+ of 166. He led the National League in both batting average and slugging percentage, not to mention at bats, hits, triples, runs batted in, and total bases.

For other players, owning a business, or threatening to open one, was a popular technique to gain leverage in negotiations. They often stated that their business, real or envisioned, offered enough profits that they could do without the game and retire if their clubs did not see things their way. Washington’s Cliff Carroll, still angry over the heavy fine leveled on him by manager Scanlon in 1886, asked the club’s owners for \$2,500 in 1887, saying he would sign for that figure or else devote his attention to the billiards parlor he recently opened in Bloomington, Illinois.⁶⁶ He also made plans to open a restaurant across the street from Washington’s ballpark, the Swampdoodle Grounds, and the establishment, known as “The Boquet,” opened in March.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ “Notes and Comments” NA, *The Sporting Life*, November 17, 1886, 3.

⁶⁵ “The Detroit Club” NA, *The Sporting News*, January 29, 1887, 1.

⁶⁶ “From the Capital” WUD, *The Sporting Life*, December 15, 1886, 4.

⁶⁷ “Caught on the Fly” NA, *The Sporting News*, February 19, 1887, 5; “The Washington Club” Sam, *The Sporting News*, March 19, 1887, 1.

Carroll's defiant stance stemmed from this spat with Washington's management, as the conclusion of his situation nearly produced the first grievance between baseball's magnates and the BPBP.

As reported in *The Sporting News*, after the 1886 season concluded, Carroll went to Washington's president, Walter Hewitt, to discuss a new contract for 1887. Carroll protested the fine from 1886, believing it unjustified, and Hewitt expressed his sympathy and agreement. Furthermore, Hewitt attempted to smooth things over with the disgruntled player by telling Carroll he would pay back the \$100 if Carroll signed the contract. His dignity satisfied, Carroll signed, but when he went to the bank to present his check and receive the \$100, the bank refused to pay because Hewitt had ordered the bank to stop payment on the check. Carroll immediately concluded, correctly, that Hewitt had hoodwinked him just to get his signature on a new deal, and he informed the Brotherhood of this rank injustice. The BPBP formed a committee to confront Washington's president. Hewitt finally paid, but only after his fellow National League owners urged him to settle quietly. Apparently, Hewitt's shenanigans were so petty and unfair that they were out of bounds even for baseball's capitalists.⁶⁸

Once in a while, however, a player actually did follow up on the threat of going into business rather than playing ball, or already was in business and doing well, thus endowing the claim with a veneer of plausibility. For example, as they tried to put their team together for 1887, the American Association's Cleveland Blues lost out on a pitcher they coveted, Charley Klump. Klump's family objected to his playing sports for a living, and he had a comfortable position in the Eberleard Manufacturing Company.⁶⁹ Even when so notable a baseball personage as Cap Anson attempted to persuade the young man to try out for his Chicago nine, he would not

⁶⁸ "The Washington Club" NA, *The Sporting News*, December 31, 1886, 1.

⁶⁹ "From Cleveland" F.H. Brunell, *The Sporting Life*, January 12, 1887, 4.

budge.⁷⁰ The same held true for a player the Philadelphia Athletics were after in 1888, an amateur pitcher named W.H. Whitaker. Other professional teams had attempted to sign him previously, but because his parents objected, and he already had a solid position with the Pottstown Iron Works, none succeeded. The only reason the Athletics got their man is that Whitaker was a relative of one of the club's directors, although he never actually pitched in the major leagues that year.⁷¹

Yet another example was shortstop Frank Fennelly of Cincinnati. The club's president, Aaron Stern, paid Fennelly a personal visit in an effort to ink the player to a contract for the 1888 season. To his considerable surprise, Stern discovered Fennelly was the owner of a Fall City, Massachusetts, grocery with "four wagons and as many clerks constantly employed." Realizing that Fennelly's business had the potential to bring in about twice the money he planned to offer in salary, Stern said, "I saw at once that he was independent of base ball as a means of a livelihood, and, though pleased to find him so prosperous, was fearful after all that he might remain firm in his purpose and refuse to come to Cincinnati." As a result, the owner had to offer Fennelly \$2,000 plus "a handsome bonus besides." He did, however, safeguard his interests a bit by including in the contract a clause stating that Fennelly would have to remit \$500 in salary should he touch liquor during the playing season.⁷²

Better off still was Otto Schomberg of Indianapolis. Following a fine season with the Hoosiers in 1887, he looked towards his life off the field (unusual for a player just twenty-two years old) and employment in a family business, Henry Schomberg & Co., manufacturing hardwood lumber and coopers' stock in Good Harbor, Michigan. He spent the off-season scaling

⁷⁰ "Brunell's Budget" F.H. Brunell, *The Sporting Life*, August 1, 1888, 3.

⁷¹ "Philadelphia Pointers" NA, *The Sporting Life*, January 18, 1888, 2.

⁷² "One of Cincinnati's Two Grocerymen" NA, *The Sporting Life*, January 11, 1888, 1.

logs at the head of a platoon of 150 men. While his father and brother opposed his returning to the diamond for 1888, Schomberg decided to play one more year. “His physician ordered him to quit using tobacco and assures him that he will never again experience any trouble with his heart, if he leaves tobacco alone. He proposes to follow his physician’s advice and feels confident that he will lead the League in batting next season.” Schomberg did not make good on his boast concerning his batting prowess, stumbling to a mere .214 batting average in 1888, and did not appear in the major leagues again. The heart condition was serious, as it turned out. It seems that it rendered him physically incapacitated at times in 1887, making his batting record for that season (OPS+ of 142) all the more noteworthy.⁷³ He tried to play with various minor league teams for a few more years before giving up playing ball in 1890 and attending to his lumber business. He eventually incorporated the operation, putting up \$15,000 in capital, and the mill cut about 8 million board-feet of timber at its peak, while the company (by now named Schomberg Hardwood Lumber Company) also operated a hotel, two stores, and a saloon in Good Harbor.⁷⁴

Another approach to getting a team to increase its salary offer, besides the “retirement” and “going into business” ploys, was to form a group and try to bargain collectively. Hoping that this would work better than quarrelling with management over salaries individually, players on the Philadelphia Quakers, grumbling about the fact that even with the reduction of the maximum salary in 1886, only two team members had made even that much money, decided to form a “combination” to see that the same tragedy did not befall them in 1887. Only outfielder Ed Andrews and shortstop Charlie Irwin got the maximum in 1886, and this seemed a tad harsh

⁷³ “Notes And Comments” NA, *The Sporting Life*, January 18, 1888, 5.

⁷⁴ Schomberg’s SABR biography at <http://sabr.org/bioproj/person/d6ce5342>, accessed November 10, 2014.

to the other Quakers. Although the team finished in fourth place, its record of 71 wins against 43 losses gave it a winning percentage of 62.3%, one of history's greatest performances by a fourth place team. As a reward for their winning ways, various players pressed management for better pay for 1887, and some pulled out creative reasons for their demands. They needed all the creativity they could muster, as "it is a notorious fact that the Philadelphia club has had the cheapest salaried team in the League ever since it joined that organization."⁷⁵

Outstanding pitcher Charlie Ferguson (ERA+ of 161, not to mention a OPS+ of 104 at bat) and fellow hurler Dan Casey (also coming off an excellent season with an ERA+ of 132) justifiably looked to get their hands on a bit more currency in the year to come, Ferguson hoping for a raise from his \$1,800 compensation for the season just completed. Outfielder Jim Fogarty wanted more than \$1,600, \$900 more in fact, claiming he had an offer to play in his native San Francisco for \$1,500 plus no traveling across the country. Charlie Bastian put in a claim for a raise from \$1,600 and said that if he did not get it, he would retire to his liquor business. Catcher Jack Clements, best known for being the last regular catcher in major league baseball to throw left-handed, wanted his recompense doubled, from \$1,400 to \$2,800, on the theory that his work in 1886 greatly exceeded his reward, and so doubling his salary for the current season would even things out for the two seasons put together. Clements also used another familiar threat, that being that his well-to-do mother objected to him playing ball for a living, to prove he had sufficient fallback if the Quakers thought he was bluffing.⁷⁶ Clements did not hold out that long, however, signing by mid-December for an undisclosed amount that was "not the extravagant figure he at first demanded, and yet is a deserved increase on this season's stipend."⁷⁷

⁷⁵ "The Philadelphia Club" NA, *The Sporting News*, March 26, 1887, 5.

⁷⁶ "The Local Clubs" NA, *The Sporting Life*, November 17, 1886, 4.

⁷⁷ "Philadelphia Chat" NA, *The Sporting Life*, December 15, 1886, 4.

The “combination” was not the iron-wrought brotherhood the players originally hoped it would be. Shortly after Clements inked his pact, Fogarty and third baseman Joe Mulvey also agreed to new deals. Fogarty may have lost money in the saloon business, requiring him to take a sure thing rather than hold out for more but risk getting less.⁷⁸ Outside of this trio, however, some Quakers continued agitating for more pay. Despite the three defections mentioned here, Quakers management could not persuade Ferguson, Casey, Bastian, outfielder George Wood, reserves Ed Daily and Andy Cusick, and first baseman Sid Farrar to sign so easily. Ferguson sought \$3,000, but because his team was “opposed in principle to excessive salaries, and believes in graded increases year by year to such as are deserving,” the holdout lingered into March.⁷⁹

When the Quakers departed for their southern exhibition tour in late March, Ferguson was not on the train. Casey and Bastian were not, either. Farrar did sign “for a substantial increase over last season,” but Ferguson, even after lowering his demands to \$2,800, would not budge further when manager Harry Wright countered with \$2,500 for 1887. Ferguson coached the Princeton college team on the side, and claimed he was content to continue doing so, should the Quakers continue to hardball him. Bastian also had a fallback option, his liquor business, and he stated, “I am not compelled to play ball, and I do not propose to play for the Philadelphia club for a thousand dollars less than I can command with some other club.” Ferguson finally signed in early April, in time to enter the pitcher’s box for the exhibition series with the Quakers’ city rivals, the Athletics.⁸⁰ (Tragically, the 1887 season was Ferguson’s last. He died, of typhoid pneumonia, on April 29, 1888. He was only twenty-five years old, and his early death ended what promised to be a remarkable career. Between his pitching and hitting skills, he had already

⁷⁸ “Local News” NA, *The Sporting Life*, January 5, 1887, 1.

⁷⁹ “The Local Clubs” NA, *The Sporting Life*, February 23, 1887, 5.

⁸⁰ “The Philadelphia Club” NA, *The Sporting News*, March 26, 1887, 5.

accumulated 32.1 WAR in a mere four years. Ferguson had married just two years prior and had one child, but the child, too, died shortly after birth. He certainly ranks amongst the best players that baseball history has forgotten.⁸¹⁾ Later, one Philadelphia writer revealed that the salaries for some of these holdout players were as follows: Farrar and Casey, \$1,750 each, Ferguson \$2,500, Andrews and Fogarty, \$1,800, Wood \$2,200, and Joe Mulvey, who had not held out, \$1,600.⁸²⁾

This news from Philadelphia and other points was, however, unusual, as the winter of 1886-1887 was a somewhat quiet one, especially compared to all the wrangling and commotion over the attempt at a salary limit the previous year. The situations of a few other clubs merit a passing mention, however. In addition to Philadelphia, Washington was another team that struggled to fill its roster for 1887. The Nationals had a quartet of quality men hold out for more pay, and considering how poorly the team played in 1886, they could not really afford to go without the few decent players they did possess. The four Nationals, outfielder Paul Hines, pitcher “Dupee” Shaw, outfielder Cliff Carroll, and catcher Barney Gilligan, realizing this, wanted to leverage their situation into a larger paycheck. There was also the holdout of five Cincinnati players, a situation that resolved itself by early April with all the men eventually signing new deals. These situations aside, however, most ball clubs had a relative relaxed winter, allowing them to enter the 1887 campaign with more hope for the future than acrimony from the past.

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⁸¹⁾ “Pitcher Ferguson Buried” NA, *New York Times*, May 2, 1888, 5; “A Great Player Gone” NA, *The Sporting Life*, May 9, 1888, 3. For more on Ferguson’s remarkable but short life, see his SABR biography at <http://sabr.org/bioproj/person/727aabbe>, accessed December 20, 2014.

⁸²⁾ “In The Quaker City” NA, *The Sporting News*, January 7, 1888, 3.

In all, there was a bit less drama in 1886-1887 than there had been the previous winter. In a way, however, it was not so much that the quarrels over players and salary fell off, but they shifted to a new phase. The major issue of 1885-1886 had been the salary limit. This winter, baseball saw an increase in the number of players holding out, demanding to play for another club, or both as their method of protesting their current situation. As club managers and executives had to deal with more of these demands, rumors naturally started circulating that one club had offered another a large sum for the release of an important player who seemed discontent in his present location. As with most sports rumors, most of the time there was nothing to the stories, but that did not stop teams or the press from believing that there might be some truth somewhere, and that their team might be involved. Rumors, as we know, often take on a life of their own.

A natural response, then, was for teams to increase the number of offers that they made to each other, hoping perhaps to secure a premium performer who might be on the market before a rival did. This created its own problem, however. As news about potential deals of this kind made the rounds, even players who had never complained about their situation started to worry that they would be involved in the next transfer. This increased fear, in turn, gave the Brotherhood another issue in its program for reform. The BPBP could urge resistance to this practice as a recruiting tool to build its membership, even if it already had plenty of useful tools, and portray teams buying and selling their players without consulting the men involved as tyrants building their fortunes on the backs of the aggrieved ballplayer. The average crank, of course, just wanted to see his nine on the field compete and win some games, but the drama surrounding player sales would only build, not decline, in the years to come. We will return to this issue after

a foray into some of the most salient issues that teams and players dealt with in 1880s baseball, and how those issues affected the relationship between players and their teams.

Chapter 6

Alcohol in 1880s Baseball

Maintaining a reputation for upright morals and honest living was very important to the Brotherhood. That is because, in the eyes of many spectators, ballplayers had the reputation of being a rather dissolute group. Ward and others, as we have seen, tried to bill the Brotherhood as useful to management because it encouraged sobriety and other good habits on the part of its members to keep those members in good standing. It stands to reason, then, that understanding the behavior of players, management, umpires, and other individuals involved with the game in the late nineteenth century is important in our effort to understand the nature of 1880s baseball and the importance of the Brotherhood. One of the most important behaviors, for players, owners, and the public alike, was drinking. At times, alcohol rivaled money as the most important factor in management's decision making, and drinking by ballplayers caused managers more headaches than any other daily activity during the season. It is crucial, therefore, to understand the connections between alcohol and baseball in the Gilded Age.

Significantly, the fact that excessive alcohol consumption might diminish the performance of players on the field was only part of the reason teams cared so much about drinking. In addition, another reason was that drinking could diminish a team's performance at the ticket office. Fans wanted to see quality baseball. Teams wanted their fans to return to the

grounds as frequently as possible. More than that, the teams wanted to see certain *types* of fans return on a daily basis. Luring the “respectable classes” to the ballpark was the paramount interest of most teams, especially in the National League, where tickets cost fifty cents for the bleachers and seventy-five for the grandstand. The American Association had more of a reputation as the league for working class fans, as its teams charged but twenty-five cents for bleacher tickets and fifty for the grandstand. Even in the Association, however, there was an incentive, a twenty-five cent incentive, to be exact, to gain the patronage of middle class spectators.

If they were to successfully appeal to middle class respectability, constant drinking by players was intolerable to the baseball’s magnates. Drunkenness, or other forms of loutish behavior such as swearing, fighting, cheating, and so forth, would alienate middle class people and keep them away from the grounds, and teams would lose money. That is why teams felt that they must limit drinking at almost any cost. It was also true, certainly, that fans paid to see winning baseball, and sober players equated to more wins, and this, combined with the bottom line, were the most important considerations.

The leader of this crusade was Al Spalding, owner of the Chicago White Stockings. In his annual baseball guide, he described the type of people to whom baseball teams should appeal:

There are two classes of the patrons of professional baseball grounds which club Presidents and Directors have their choice in catering to for each season, and these are, first, the reputable class, who prefer to see the game played scientifically and by gentlemanly exemplars of the beauties of the game; and second, the hoodlum element, who revel in noisy coaching, “dirty ball playing,” kicking against the umpires, and exciting disputes and rows every inning. . . . But all of the clubs have not followed this example, the majority committing the blunder of considering only the tastes and requirements of the hoodlum class apparently in catering for patronage. This is a great financial mistake. Experience has shown conclusively that it pays best to cater solely for

the best class of patronage. The work in doing this is so much more satisfactory for one thing, and it is sure to be the most remunerative.¹

Even a casual perusal of the sporting papers of the late 1880s reveals that issues of sobriety and player fitness were enormously important in this era. The papers constantly ran stories about the drinking escapades of this or that player. Clubs made personnel decisions based on the drinking habits of the men involved, and the discussions surrounding the trades and releases of players frequently mentioned drinking habits as part of the justification for the decision. Without doubt, abuse (real or potential) of alcohol was one of the most important aspects of 1880s baseball. It is unsurprising, therefore, that teams went to enormous lengths to try to curb lushing by players and keep track of other damaging behaviors, as well.

The issue of the ball clubs trying to keep track of player behavior, and fining players for breaking team rules, was a tricky business. Often, players did do things to hurt their teams with their off-field behavior. It was perfectly natural that owners and managers wanted to prevent this whenever possible. They had both a competitive and financial interest in doing so. Most players, recognizing this, did not kick over fines imposed for obvious and blatant misconduct. A sizable gray area existed, however, between the clear incidents (showing up drunk for a game, going out in public with gamblers, and so forth) and the petty things that teams did simply to antagonize their players by keeping them in fear and taking bites out of their salaries. As we have already seen, several team managers also fined their men if the players performed poorly on the field. These fines, tacked on to ones for certain behaviors off the field, could add up quickly. Even though baseball players received pay that was quite respectable compared to the average

¹ NA, *Spalding's Official 1889 Base Ball Guide*, 56. While the guide listed no official author, Spalding not wanting to share credit with any other names on the cover of his company's publication, Henry Chadwick was probably the most important contributor.

worker, they understandably resented returning that pay to their employer for vague charges of misbehavior that they could not appeal.

For instance, in 1883 a minor league club, Reading of the Inter-State Association, blacklisted its second baseman under the nebulous charges of “general insubordination, ungentlemanly conduct on the field and a refusal to obey rules.”² Then there was the 1884 incident where Jerry Dorgan, outfielder and captain for the Indianapolis Hoosiers of the American Association, incurred a \$10 fine “for a tendency . . . not to take any sleep during the 24 hours which composed one day.”³ In August of 1885, the National League’s Providence team took a similarly tough stance towards second baseman Jack “Moose” Farrell. After Farrell had used “obscene and disgusting language addressed to the audience” the Grays suspended their infielder without pay.⁴

Farrell got a fresh start for 1886, catching on with the Philadelphia Quakers, but it was not long before he wore out his welcome in the City of Brotherly Love, for the same reasons Providence tired of him. The team decided to release him after only seventeen games after he “grossly insulted his late manager, Mr. [Harry] Wright,” to the extent that “the latter felt greatly annoyed at Farrell’s conduct, and seriously contemplated bringing his case to the attention of the league,” but Wright eventually relented after Farrell signed on with Washington, perhaps simply wishing to wash his hands of the troublesome infielder altogether and let the Nationals deal with

² “The League” NA, *The Sporting Life*, June 24, 1883, 2.

³ “From Detroit” MAT, *The Sporting Life*, January 13, 1886, 1.

⁴ “From Providence” MCD, *The Sporting Life*, August 26, 1885, 1. *The Sporting Life* also offered that Farrell might have been faltering on purpose in order to secure his release from the organization, as his batting average had declined from .305 in 1883 to .217 in 1884 and .206 in 1885. The paper also reported rumors that Farrell may have been guilty of dissipation. However, given that his batting average never again topped .225 in any of his remaining seasons, it seems that either loss of talent was to blame for his batting woes, or that he never righted his ways. Farrell himself claimed that an attack of rheumatism was the cause of his problems. “News and Notes” NA, *The Sporting Life*, November 17, 1886, 3.

him.⁵ The Nationals actually appointed him field captain for 1887, and for a few months, he held onto this position, but by September, the team demoted him in favor of third baseman Jim Donnelly. The reason was not poor judgment on the field but poor judgment off it. While in New York, Farrell and one teammate, reserve catcher Barney Gilligan, “engaged in a slugging match with John L. Redeye when they were booked to play.” Farrell then took French leave, not appearing for about a week, and the loss of the team’s captaincy was the predictable result. The team also suspended him for the season, but later changed its mind and reinstated the Moose.⁶ At the end of the 1887 campaign, Washington parted ways with Farrell, who, despite all his capers, still claimed that the Nationals’ management had it out for him. “Farrell has been released and will leave for his home in a few days. I understand that he claims that he was downed. He did it himself, and if he could have curbed his vicious habits he would be today as popular as ever, for he can play ball when he will.”⁷

Farrell received his last major league engagement from Baltimore for the 1888 season. Baltimore manager Billy Barnie seemed to have a soft spot for talented men who let their bad habits get the best of them. Barnie agreed with Henry Chadwick, the great encyclopedist of baseball, who described Farrell as “one of the best second base players in the fraternity,” and brought Farrell to the Monumental City for 1888. Chadwick laid out the reasons for Farrell’s downfall by stating he had, “sacrificed glorious opportunities for rising to the topmost round of the ladder, at the shrine of that curse of the professional fraternity—drunkenness.” Chadwick also described Farrell’s engagement by the Bald Eagle of Baltimore by writing, “Barnie has considerately come forward and given him a chance to recover his lost credit . . . the question is,

⁵ “Diamond Dust” NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, August 4, 1886, 3.

⁶ “From Washington” WUD, *The Sporting Life*, September 14, 1887, 1; “From The Capital” WUD, *The Sporting Life*, September 21, 1887, 1.

⁷ “From The Capital” WUD, *The Sporting Life*, October 12, 1887, 5.

will he have the manliness and strength of mind to benefit by the kindly offer?"⁸ Farrell did not, and it spelled the end of his major league baseball career by age thirty-one.

Another interesting story further demonstrates the attitude of some teams towards controlling player behavior. There was one man, named Horner, who played for a team in Toronto, Canada. Despite being a Canadian city, Toronto at times fielded a club in the International League in the 1880s, which was one of the strongest minor leagues of the day. Horner apparently had one of his fingers mangled while attempting to break up a bar fight. One of the brawlers chewed Horner's finger to the extent he was unable to perform on the diamond for about three weeks. Horner's Toronto club proceeded to fine him \$75, reasoning he was under contract to play ball for them, and, by associating with disreputable types in disregard of the team's warnings, he was the cause of his own misfortune and thus liable for the damages. Equally interesting is that *The Sporting Life* title its article describing the story "A Player Justly Punished," signifying agreement with this method of player discipline.⁹

Capricious and ill defined as some efforts to control player behavior were, this is not to say that such efforts to improve discipline were always bogus. Drinking among players occurred with depressing frequency, and fans and sportswriters knew it. Team management did, too, whether or not they conceded as much to the public or the press, and here once again, the invasiveness of management's response could alienate players. In addition, management had to determine if the goal should be temperance or complete prohibition. Al Spalding opted to try the second option with his Chicago club in 1886, and as mentioned earlier, employed the Pinkerton

⁸ "Chadwick's Chat" Henry Chadwick, *The Sporting Life*, March 28, 1888, 4. Chadwick had, by this time, authored articles on baseball for no less than three encyclopedias, which were Chambers' Cyclopedia, Appleton's Cyclopedia, and Johnson's Cyclopedia. Some observers jokingly called Bernie the "Bald Eagle of Baltimore" for the reason that he was quite bald.

⁹ "A Player Justly Punished" NA, *The Sporting Life*, October 28, 1885, 4.

detective agency to shadow his players at all times over a six week period. These detectives discovered, for instance, that one evening Tom Burns played billiards for two hours, while Ned Williamson and Cap Anson (who was, it seems, almost as good at billiards as he was at baseball) limited themselves to eighty minutes at the billiards table the same evening. Meanwhile Jim McCormick and Silver Flint left their hotel with two men, enjoyed a pair of beers at a nearby bar, and then returned to the team lodgings. Spalding then fined the guilty parties (he had forced them to swear to lay off the drink prior to the regular season) in Kansas City. His detectives rounded up information on the after-hours behavior of players on other clubs, as well. Spalding clearly enjoyed the power this gave him, to the point where he recommended the entire National League do the same. "I shall ask the clubs of the National League to jointly arrange with some detective agency to shadow throughout the League season every player of the National League; and submit a weekly report to President Young at Washington, embracing a statement of each player's habits and of his actions from day to day."¹⁰

It appears some other teams liked the idea. Louisville reportedly imitated the White Stockings in an effort to police the post game behavior of its nine. Manager Jim Hart "has been watching the boys very carefully, and as a result there has been no dissipation to amount to anything. . . . Besides being under the eye of Manager James, a detective, it is reported, is constantly on their track, who takes note of the individual doings of each man and reports them in writing to President Phelps each morning." Although the players naturally chafed at this arrangement, especially those most socially inclined, the author of this piece favored the practice, stating, "In my opinion, and the opinion of a great portion of the public, it is the proper thing. Ball players are paid large salaries to play ball and they should do it well. Spectators do not pay

¹⁰ "A New Scheme" Replap, *The Sporting Life*, August 4, 1886, 1.

admission to see certain men who have been carousing all night, and play in a listless manner as though they took no interest whatever in what was going on. Every club should have a detective in their ranks.”¹¹ Over in Boston, the Triumvirs were listening. They also employed detectives to keep track of their players throughout the 1887 and 1888 seasons. Therefore, when some critics tried to blame Boston’s pedestrian performance on dissipation and carousing amongst the players during the evenings, they put little stock in such stories.¹²

Pittsburgh also tried to enforce a no-drinking policy amongst its men for the 1889 season, but the players on the Smoky City nine were wise to management’s tactics by that point. One unnamed player, who had not drunk at all in 1888, believed that going cold turkey had hurt his play, and declared he would drink in moderation in 1889, come what may. Realizing that detectives could shadow him if he went out for a drink in public, “if Manager Phillips catches him in a saloon through the season he has no doubt but that he will be fined, but he does not propose to give ‘Harry’ a chance, and will keep the article bottled on his own premises and has no doubt but that other players will follow his example. . . . If all the players did their drinking at home it would be next to impossible to detect any infractions.”¹³

This level of surveillance did not sit well with players, needless to say, prompting some to the tactics employed in Pittsburgh. Besides the basic reaction to the invasion of their private lives, and the increased level of control their employers gained over them, they were grown men and professionals. Even a man on good terms with ownership, such as White Stockings captain Cap Anson, took umbrage with being shadowed at times. When his team, locked in a fierce pennant race with Detroit and New York, lost five out of six games on its August road trip to the

¹¹ “On Their Trail” RWL, *The Sporting News*, August 9, 1886, 1.

¹² “Hub Happenings” Mugwump, *The Sporting Life*, June 13, 1888, 9.

¹³ “No Lushing in the Pittsburg Club” NA, *The Sporting News*, March 30, 1889, 1.

East Coast in 1886, he blamed the fines administered by Spalding for disrupting the team's momentum. He did not deny what the reports of the Pinkertons revealed—only that the occasional glass of beer had hurt the team's performance in any tangible way. "It is only natural that such an act on the part of the club management, coming, as it did, in the nature of a complete surprise and then being made public, should have chagrined and displeased the men. Their defeats down East, I believe, are the result of the whole affair. Not that they have deliberately determined to lose games, mind you, but they are sore and are playing with a kind of dogged indifference." When the writer countered that Spalding's primary objective was to ascertain the truth regarding published reports of excess drinking on the part of the players, Anson conceded this might be legitimate, but still held to his statement that the public nature of the discipline embarrassed a team of professionals, who now felt like unruly schoolchildren wearing dunce caps. For his part, the writer did not believe Anson's tale that the fines translated into lackluster play (perhaps for good reason, as some observers then and baseball historians now consider Anson a blowhard) but chalked up the defeats to a string of bad luck instead.¹⁴

While infielder Ned Williamson declared twenty-five dollars a steep price for a mere two beers, claiming that this was the only time so far in the season he had let down his guard against the bottle, at least one White Stocking, burly pitcher Jim McCormick, went further than mere complaining about having Pinkertons shadow him every evening. Just before his team boarded a train for their trip east in August, McCormick noticed one of the detectives in the train depot and decided to repay the detective for his fine by taking the money out of the man's hide. "The detective bolted, but the base ball giant was too quick, and, catching Mr. Detective by the throat, he proceeded to stop his wind. Having squeezed as long as he thought safe he threw the fellow

¹⁴ "Remlap's Letter" Remlap, *The Sporting Life*, August 11, 1886, 4.

from him, and, with a final thump in the eye and a pleasant ‘ta-ta’ he jumped aboard the train, which was already in motion.”¹⁵ Williamson later speculated, as Anson had, that Spalding’s fines hurt the morale of the Chicago nine at a critical time in the season. “Big Ed Williamson says that together Kelly, Gore, Flint, himself and another player were fined \$2,000 at the close of the season for drinking. He believes that the loss of the [World] series of games to the St. Louis Browns was the cause of punishment inflicted by the Chicago president upon these men.”¹⁶

Sporting papers of the day chimed in with their views regarding players with questionable habits. In November of 1885, *The Sporting Life* reported with disgust that the Cincinnati Red Stockings had signed outfielder Fred Lewis and pitcher “Bollicky” Bill Taylor, two players known for their tendency to imbibe freely. “These are two disturbers who were cleaned out from the Association last year, and should be kept out forever. Both are good players when they are in condition, but it is folly to expect them to keep straight. The National Agreement should make a rule for the permanent blacklisting of such men, so that clubs will not be tempted to take them up.”¹⁷ Some recalled the 1884 incident in which Lewis, while playing on the St. Louis Browns, so enraged Chris Von der Ahe that the St. Louis owner suspended him indefinitely for his lushing. Furious, Lewis “grabbed a bat and started to hunt up Chris.” The owner beat the player into the safety of the clubhouse by a nose, at which point he decided his suspension was unjustified, after all.¹⁸ After that event, whenever Von der Ahe wanted to discuss player drinking, he sometimes described it as “conduct . . . of the Fred Lewis order.”¹⁹

¹⁵ “Notes and Comments” NA, *The Sporting Life*, August 11, 1886, 5; “Notes and Comments” NA, *The Sporting Life*, August 25, 1886, 5.

¹⁶ “Notes and Comments” NA, *The Sporting Life*, December 1, 1886, 3.

¹⁷ “Notes and Comments” NA, *The Sporting Life*, January 13, 1886, 3.

¹⁸ “Caylor’s Comment” O.P. Caylor, *The Sporting Life*, November 30, 1887, 2.

¹⁹ “Our New Browns” NA, *The Sporting News*, December 3, 1887, 1.

In any case, Lewis, who “has written a letter to the Cincinnati Club management in which he asserts that he will play ball for all he is worth next season,”²⁰ actually had a fine season for the Red Stockings in 1886, sporting a .318/.365/.417 batting line in 77 games, for a robust OPS+ of 142. It was his last season in the majors, however, and coming at age twenty-seven, we can assume his bad habits were likely to blame for his early departure, given that, when he was not drinking, some of the sporting papers sang his praises: “Fred Lewis . . . is probably the finest specimen of an athlete in the baseball profession; without a particle of superfluous flesh or fat, he will weigh nearly two hundred pounds. . . . He is one of the hardest workers and one of the most quiet men on the team.”²¹ Furthermore, in training sessions before the season, Lewis impressed observers “by the ease and grace with which he handled the 100-pound weights. Fred says he will play the game of his life and his admirers know the meaning of that.”²² His effort at reform continued into the early weeks of the 1886 season: “Fred Lewis has made this city his friend. He has begun to do what he promised he would—play the best ball of his life. He is a great favorite with the patrons of the club, with the club and with the team.”²³

Sadly, Lewis did not complete the season to capitalize on his strong start. A broken ankle shelved him in August, which was a true shame for both he and the Red Stockings, as Lewis was second in the American Association in batting average at the time.²⁴ Following the layoff, his old habits returned. “Lewis, the centre fielder, who last year was one of the heaviest batters of the League, has been behaving very badly. He is drunk a great deal of the time, and is utterly worthless because of his convivial habits. He will undoubtedly be sent to find another

²⁰ “Notes and Comments” NA, *The Sporting Life*, January 13, 1886, 3.

²¹ “Cincinnati’s Giants” Cincinnati, *The Sporting News*, March 17, 1886, 7.

²² “The Coming Champions” Cincinnati, *The Sporting News*, March 29, 1886, 6.

²³ “Caylor’s Letter” O.P. Caylor, *The Sporting Life*, April 28, 1886, 1.

²⁴ “Caught on the Fly” NA, *The Sporting News*, August 9, 1886, 5.

engagement.”²⁵ Some blamed his teammates. “Many ballplayers firmly believe Fred Lewis would have stayed sober this season had the Cincinnati Club played better ball. Fred, it is claimed, became discouraged at the club’s continued hard luck, and utter indifference with which some of the team played while away from home.”²⁶

The next season found Lewis playing for Rochester, a member of the International League. He made the news late in the season for, yes, drinking, when the Flour City club docked him fifty dollars after an appearance in police court.²⁷ It was his only season in Rochester because “the disgraceful antics of some of the players so disgusted the patrons and management that not a single player was reserved for next season. They were all released.”²⁸ Things did not improve for Lewis in 1888, either. In March, he spent ten days in a Utica, New York, jail after assaulting an alderman in that burg. “The latter is a saloon-keeper, and Lewis entered the saloon and struck the official for going back on one of his friends.”²⁹

Billy Taylor ended up with Baltimore by the time the championship season started, and got off to a good start there. “Billy Taylor looks exceedingly well and appears to be in good condition. . . . He showed remarkable speed. Barnie, he says, will never regret engaging him.”³⁰ Once the fur started flying, however, it was a different story, as Taylor posted a poor ERA+ of just 60. Owner Billy Barnie of Baltimore tried to cover his bases with Taylor via an “ironclad contract” that allowed Barnie to withhold some of Taylor’s salary until the end of the month as

²⁵ “Caught on the Fly” NA, *The Sporting News*, August 30, 1886, 5.

²⁶ “Caught on the Fly” NA, *The Sporting News*, December 4, 1886, 3.

²⁷ “Notes and Comments” NA, *The Sporting Life*, October 5, 1887, 6.

²⁸ “Caught on the Fly” NA, *The Sporting News*, October 22, 1887, 4.

²⁹ “Notes and Comments” NA, *The Sporting Life*, April 4, 1888, 5.

³⁰ “Notes and Comments” NA, *The Sporting Life*, March 24, 1886, 3. Comments on a pitcher’s “speed” refer to their velocity when pitching the ball.

“security for his good behavior.”³¹ Bernie should have required greater security. He released Taylor after just eight games started, and by August Bollicky Bill was set to join his third team for the season, Milwaukee, following his release from Memphis of the Southern League.³² Taylor’s tenure in Memphis impressed no one, as the quantity of alcohol he imbibed grew to the point where he brought a gallon of brew to a game against Nashville.³³ Before the dust settled on 1886, papers reported he was at Mt. Carmel, Pennsylvania, and actually doing well, because he had managed to lay off the fire water for a time.³⁴ After the 1886 season, Taylor’s career took a similar trajectory as Lewis’s, as Taylor pitched just one more game in major league baseball.

Taylor tried his best to convince someone in major league baseball to employ him in 1887, but by this time, he had tarnished his reputation so badly no one believed his protestations of sobriety. He went on an off-season exhibition tour in Cuba over the winter, and wrote to a St. Louis sportswriter claiming just one drink had “passed his collar button” since arriving on the island. The writer replied, “The only way I can get around this story is that Bill either takes ‘double’ drinks or he doesn’t wear such a thing as a collar button.”³⁵ Despite the well-earned sarcasm, it appears Taylor was not lying. “President Morrow, of the Southern League, saw him in Cuba recently, and says that he has fallen off so much that he hardly knew him. He actually refused to take a drink when the handsome ‘Pooh-Bah’ of the Southern League offered to ‘set ‘em up.’ Simmons, Scott and all the players who were in Cuba confirm this.” Sources also

³¹ “Notes and Comments” NA, *The Sporting Life*, November 18, 1885, 3.

³² “Notes and Comments” NA, *The Sporting Life*, August 18, 1886, 5.

³³ “Caught on the Fly” NA, *The Sporting News*, August 23, 1886, 5.

³⁴ “Caught on the Fly” NA, *The Sporting News*, September 20, 1886, 5.

³⁵ “From St. Louis” Pritchard, *The Sporting Life*, January 5, 1887, 2.

reported his abstention from spirits had helped him drop fifty pounds.³⁶ This led one writer to comment, “Billy Taylor is the metaphorical ground hog of base ball. He comes out of his hole about this time in the season and remarks that he has sworn off, sees the shadow of past transgressions, and then crawls back again to await the sunshine of managerial touching trust and child-like faith.”³⁷

Nonetheless, Taylor finally ran out of serious chances. He signed a deal with Charleston in the Southern League to start the 1887 season, and the writer describing the transaction showed his share of child-like faith in “Gay and Festive William”: “He has by constant exercise reduced himself considerably and is in the pink of condition. . . . There has been considerable newspaper talk about Billy’s lushing, etc., but when the time comes to play ball he will not be found wanting . . .”³⁸ His performance in the Birthplace of Secession was wanting enough, however, and by 1888 Taylor was back north of the Mason-Dixon Line in Scranton, Pennsylvania. It is unknown whether drink had anything to do with his behavior or not, but he was an accomplice when teammate Sam Crane eloped with a married woman there and carried off \$1,400 of the married couple’s money at the same time.³⁹ Nor was this the only time that Taylor mixed women and baseball. One time, he was the volunteer umpire for a game featuring two touring teams of women. After the game, he hopped on the omnibus with some of the women, and in the drunken cavorting that followed, married one of them.⁴⁰

The last we hear of Taylor is when he and another player engaged to play for Hot Springs, Arkansas, in 1889. Feeling good about their chances, Hot Springs fans bet heavily on

³⁶ “Notes and Comments” NA, *The Sporting Life*, January 12, 1887, 3; “Notes and Comments” NA, *The Sporting Life*, March 9, 1887, 3.

³⁷ “From Baltimore” TTT, *The Sporting Life*, February 16, 1887, 4.

³⁸ “Billy Taylor” Jake, *The Sporting News*, March 5, 1887, 1.

³⁹ “Notes And Comments” NA, *The Sporting Life*, October 24, 1888, 2.

⁴⁰ “Pittsburg Pencilings” Circle, *The Sporting Life*, September 25, 1889, 2.

their nine with Taylor in the points, but instead of helping the team to victory over Pine Bluff, he sold out to Pine Bluff for \$50 and skipped town. The good people of Hot Springs were so incensed that they hired detectives to run Taylor to ground. “Detectives are looking for these people, and if they are caught it will go hard with them.”⁴¹

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The fact that a writer for *The Sporting Life* could provide readers with a report card on drinking among the various teams in 1885 shows that people around the game freely discussed the relationship between players and C₂H₅OH. “On the general average the teams of the Association were pretty temperate last year as to drinking. The Metropolitans and our own Athletics were about the worst,” he wrote. Meanwhile, in Cincinnati, the “lushing tendencies which are growing upon the team” threatened to sabotage a promising run at the next league championship.⁴²

Along the same lines, early in the 1889 season the paper’s Columbus correspondent gave a similar general indictment of the American Association. “I am told that the Columbus team is not alone in endeavoring to combine ball playing and lushing, and seeking to discover a winning combination in it, but that the Athletics are following the same tactics they used last year, and that even Kansas City and Louisville have players that are crooking the elbow oftener than the good results of base ball require.” While the writer admitted he had no authority in the matter, for the good of the game he implored his hometown team to do better, writing, “I am going to engage my pencil, while it lasts, in calling down the members of the Columbus team in their

⁴¹ “Billy Taylor’s Disgraceful Conduct” JHB, *The Sporting News*, August 3, 1889, 1.

⁴² “Intemperate Players” NA, *The Sporting Life*, November 18, 1885, 3.

damphool efforts to sink the pastime of base ball into oblivion in this town plot, and use all my efforts to save the Columbus directors from a heavy financial loss that certain lushing ball players would in a cold-blooded, heartless manner seek to impose upon them.” Part of the reason this writer knew so much was that other papers reported the drinking habits of players to the public freely. When his Columbus nine played Kansas City, one paper wrote, “It is a wonder that Kansas City plays as well as it does, for it is no secret that several of the boys are lushing hard. A number of both Columbus and Kansas City players saw the sights last (Monday) night, and to those who were on the game was better than was expected.”⁴³ The next week, Cincinnati fined one of its men, catcher Billy Earle, fifty dollars for arriving late. “It is not known whether he had been indulging in the ardent, but such is the supposition, as he was out the night previous later than usual, and the next morning he looked very blue.”⁴⁴

The saga of two Louisville players show just how much damage lushing players could inflict on a franchise. Louisville appeared to be in decent shape going into the 1886 season. “The members of the club are all in splendid condition . . . there are only two players of the club—[Tom] Ramsey and [Pete] Browning—who are addicted to the habit of strong drink, but Manager Hart is confident that they will be conspicuous during the coming season for steady behavior and quiet demeanor.”⁴⁵ Manager Hart might have had second thoughts when, seeing Ramsey report for the southern trip of exhibition games in March, “Ramsey came in at the last moment. He did not look in very good condition for playing, showing signs of dissipation.”⁴⁶ Off and on, the issues persisted as the season stretched into July and August. During Louisville’s late July road trip to the East Coast, “President Phelps accompanied the boys on this trip. Result

⁴³ “The Baby Berated” F.W. Arnold, *The Sporting Life*, May 22, 1889, 2.

⁴⁴ “Catcher Earle Fined” NA, *The Sporting News*, May 25, 1889, 1.

⁴⁵ “The Falls City” NA, *The Sporting News*, March 17, 1886, 3.

⁴⁶ “Falls City News” NA, *The Sporting Life*, March 17, 1886, 1.

no lushing.” Pete Browning was absent from the club by this time, however, recuperating from an eye injury. “It is a hard matter for Pete Browning to drink water at the Springs. He is not accustomed to it. He had the picture of a distillery hung in his room. It seemed to afford him much pleasure.”⁴⁷

The personal attention of Phelps seemed to have helped Ramsey in particular, for a time, anyway. “Ramsey is pitching great ball and is taking the best care of himself. In consequence he has hundreds of friends now where he had one in the spring.”⁴⁸ It was not enough for Ramsey, however. By late September, with the team’s chances of catching the St. Louis Browns for first place fading like a rain puddle in the desert sun, “Ramsey from continual carousing and late hours had completely broken down and had to be sent to his home in Indianapolis. He is done playing for the remainder of the season.”⁴⁹ Ramsey did pitch a few more games, but the team’s fortunes did not improve.

Ramsey’s habits did not improve early in 1887, either; rather, he was the first man on the team fined by new manager John Kelly for his lack of commitment to his work. After some early season games in which his “spiritless and sulky playing was manifest to everybody,” Ramsey stayed out boozing past three AM on a night before he was to pitch the next day. Kelly put his foot down with authority. “Today you’ve been behaving yourself like a monkey and you’ve got to pay for it. You are fined the limit—fifty dollars—and every time you do this sort

⁴⁷ “Pete Browning at the Springs” RWL, *The Sporting News*, August 2, 1886, 1. The Louisville club of 1886 certainly was a streaky team. Between July 4 and August 22 they won twenty-seven games against just eight defeats. The rest of the season, however, they mustered just six victories while losing thirty times. According to observers, a combination of alcohol and injuries were the reason for this incredible turnabout.

⁴⁸ “From the Falls City” Rat, *The Sporting Life*, August 18, 1886, 5.

⁴⁹ “Manager Hart Bounced” RWL, *The Sporting News*, September 27, 1886, 1.

of thing again you'll get another fifty." At least Ramsey admitted the error of his ways, and allowed that Kelly had been right to fine him.⁵⁰

Ramsey's history is also a good example of how, once earned, a bad reputation can be difficult to shed. While fully admitting to his fondness for drink, he claimed it had not ruined his performance on the field or hurt the Colonels in any significant way. Following the 1887 season, when Louisville again slumped late in the year, including four straight losses to the last place Cleveland club, and fell to fourth place in the standings, people blamed his drinking. Ramsey had had enough of the criticism. "I admit that I have been a little wrong once or twice, but I have always done my best when I was pitching. I want the club to succeed, and I help it as much as I can. . . . I have pitched in more games and won more than all the other pitchers in the nine put together, and all I ask is fair and considerate treatment from the people." A Louisville sportswriter agreed, stating that while he knew Ramsey imbibed at times, "there are men in this and other clubs who drink more. He is not so shrewd about it as they are, and gets caught oftener." The writer followed up this lukewarm defense of the talented pitcher by writing, "Ramsey is honest. Manager Kelly can depend on him. When the pitcher says that he will do a certain thing Manager Kelly can believe him, and considers his word sufficient."⁵¹

Browning was a different story altogether, seemingly never able to lay off the strong drink for long. (In his defense, however, he suffered from acute mastoiditis, which caused him chronic pain and hearing loss, and this was probably part of his effort to deal with the pain.⁵²) About the same time in 1886 that Ramsey's unsavory habits returned, Browning too allowed liquor to tarnish his play. "Browning has let down again in left field. Too much dissipation is

⁵⁰ "Chadwick's Chat" Henry Chadwick, *The Sporting Life*, April 27, 1887, 7; "From The Falls City" XXX, *The Sporting Life*, April 27, 1887, 5.

⁵¹ "From The Falls City" JA, *The Sporting Life*, October 12, 1887, 4.

⁵² Alexander, *Turbulent Seasons*, 36.

said to be the cause. . . . he has gotten the idea that he can do very near as he pleases. There is no doubt as to his ability to play good ball when he wants to.”⁵³

The writer was absolutely correct in his last statement. The incredible thing about Browning was that, no matter how much alcohol he might drink and how much his defense might suffer, his hitting remained impeccable. His batting line for 1886 was .340/.389/.441, for an OPS+ of 155, and the next season he was far better, slashing .402/.464/.547 for an OPS+ of 177 even though he reported for the 1887 season in poor condition to begin with. As one writer opined, “This man’s recuperative powers are wonderful. They must be fully equal to those of John L. Sullivan. Other base ball players have dissipated as much in a given time as Pete, but I know of no one who has kept it up as steadily for eight regular base ball years and can yet play a good game. And he is still an attraction wherever the club goes.”⁵⁴ All this despite the fact that one day, he came to the Louisville team meal at the Lindell Hotel in St. Louis drunk to the point that, when the waiter asked him what he wanted to eat, Browning declared he was not very hungry and would just have beaver eggs for his meal. When the uncomprehending waiter informed him the hotel did not offer beaver eggs, Browning took the menu to point out what he wanted. His finger eventually landed on the word beverages.⁵⁵

Browning made no secret of his fondness for strong drink, either. Before the 1887 season began, a writer asked him for his thoughts on the club’s new manager, “Honest” John Kelly. Browning replied, “he is a good one; but you can bet he won’t bulldoze me. I am bound to have my allowance of rum, Kelly or no Kelly. Jim Hart tried to stop me from taking an occasional

⁵³ “The Falls City” RWL, *The Sporting News*, September 6, 1886, 1.

⁵⁴ “Louisville Recovering” JA, *The Sporting Life*, July 24, 1889, 3. John L. Sullivan was boxing’s heavyweight champion at the time.

⁵⁵ “From St. Louis” Pritchard, *The Sporting Life*, November 24, 1886, 2; “Browning Surrenders” XX, *The Sporting Life*, April 13, 1887, 1.

drink, but I learned him a thing or two.” According to Browning, however, Kelly knew how to use demon rum as a motivating tool, as well. “Kelly has promised each of us boys a new suit of clothes and a five-gallon keg of the best whiskey in Kentucky if we win the championship next season, so I would advise the rest of the clubs to look out for Louisville.”⁵⁶ As much as Browning enjoyed tipping, however, there was probably no truth to the rumor that when he finally signed his contract for 1887, it was because saloon owners in Louisville forced him to so he could pay off his tabs run up over the winter. He also knew better than to hit the bottle with sportswriters, as he once told a story about excusing himself from a drink with one who had written negative stories about his lushing several times previously, actually going so far as to claim he was going to walk the straight path in 1887.⁵⁷

Ever the character, before he became a major league player with Louisville, Browning played for a semi-professional team in the Falls City. One season, he was not paid in cash, but with a contract that paid him all the ice cream and cake he wanted to eat during the playing season. This cost his club something on the order of thirty dollars per month.⁵⁸ Although he allowed drinking to tarnish his play and had more than his share of quirks, he certainly had some redeeming qualities as well. One of his nicknames was “The Gladiator,” because some perceived him as having a combative personality, but people also knew him as “The Louisville Slugger,” as he was the first to contract with the company Hillerich and Bradsby to make the bats still known by that name today. He also saved a young Louisville boy from death in 1884. A

⁵⁶ “From St. Louis” Pritchard, *The Sporting Life*, January 19, 1887, 2.

⁵⁷ “Notes and Comments” NA, *The Sporting Life*, April 20, 1887, 11; “Browning And The Reporters” RWL, *The Sporting News*, May 7, 1887, 1.

⁵⁸ “Louisville Laconics” JA, *The Sporting Life*, January 4, 1888, 4; “St. Louis Siftings” Joe Pritchard, *The Sporting Life*, May 9, 1888, 4.

team of horses pulling a streetcar was bearing down on the lad when Browning ducked in and pulled the youth to safety.⁵⁹

Predictably, Kelly had to finesse the drinking issue with these two star players as the season progressed. Both men painted the town on drinking sprees in late August and early September, for which Kelly fined Browning fifty dollars and suspended Ramsey indefinitely without pay. Ramsey's arm was in bad shape by that time anyway, so the team did not really miss him, but Browning immediately caught fire with the ash after bracing up, smacking nineteen hits in his next five games. As both men appeared remorseful, however, they quickly returned to Kelly's good graces. Nineteen hits in five games probably helped Browning, too.⁶⁰ By early October, however, he was in disgrace once again. During the season's closing week, the Colonels were battling their hated rivals from Cincinnati when Browning failed to turn up for the first game of the series, having missed the train from St. Louis because he was too liquored up to get to the station on time. Playing the next day, but still hung over badly, he managed to strike a double, but while taking his lead off of second base, fell asleep on the field and was tagged out. No wonder that, when John Kelly set off to scour the country for new talent in the 1887-1888 off-season, he said, "I will take only men of the very best class. I want them sober and reliable, so that I can always depend on them, and I won't have any others."⁶¹

The reader can imagine the baseball world's shock, therefore, when news arrived in April of 1888 that the Louisville club, every single player, took the blue ribbon pledge of abstinence just prior to the season. Seemingly, it took an act of God to achieve this in 1880s baseball, and that is exactly what the Colonels' management produced, in the person of noted temperance

⁵⁹ Nemeč, *The Beer and Whiskey League*, 68.

⁶⁰ "From The Falls City" XX, *The Sporting Life*, September 7, 1887, 4.

⁶¹ "From The Falls City" JA, *The Sporting Life*, October 19, 1887, 5.

evangelist Francis Murphy. He gave the players a lengthy harangue, and “the players seemed considerably affected by his remarks, and when he finished one and all walked up, put on the blue ribbon and signed the pledge. Both Pete Browning and Ramsey put down their signature with good grace, and they mean to keep their word.” Not only that, but “after Browning had taken the temperance pledge he went off with Manager Jim Hart and swore off before a magistrate. He wanted it done officially. Hart has great influence over him.” (Recall Hart had been the Louisville manager prior to Kelly’s appointment. Hart was in Louisville at the time with his current team, Milwaukee, for an exhibition series.)⁶²

Pete Browning’s story was not destined for a happy ending. Nor did his team play the brilliant ball predicted after swearing off liquor. In a case of cruel irony, in 1888 Louisville had its worst season in years, finishing seventh place with a 48-87 mark. It was not a surprise, therefore, when players started weakening and backsliding on their pledge. Browning was among them. By June, on the road in Kansas City, he was so intoxicated that when it rained one day, he bought two fishing poles and proceeded to fish the water flowing through the gutters. Unsuccessful at urban fishing, he went inside the team hotel and acted so obnoxiously that hotel management removed him from the premises, nearly calling for his arrest so he could sober up in the drunk tank. Realizing he was useless in his present state, the team left him in Kansas City when it moved on to Cincinnati for its next set of games. “Since then nothing has been heard of him, but he is expected to telegraph for permission to join the club as soon as he gets sober.”⁶³ By August, things were so bad he was still at home in Louisville while the team took to the road. He was frequently drunk and passed his time throwing poker dice.⁶⁴ He even made a September

⁶² “Louisville Laconics” JA, *The Sporting Life*, April 25, 1888, 3.

⁶³ “Louisville Laconics” JA, *The Sporting Life*, June 27, 1888, 2.

⁶⁴ “Louisville Laconics” JA, *The Sporting Life*, September 5, 1888, 5.

trip to French Lick Springs, “an Indiana resort much patronized by people who wish to boil out,” but even that did not help. “He has been back two or three days, but if reports are to be credited another boiling out is already necessary.”⁶⁵

Ramsey’s story likewise ended on a down note. On June 28, the Colonels suspended him without pay because, like Browning, he had commenced drinking at the end of the Kansas City series and was in no condition to play.⁶⁶ A few weeks later, he landed in jail because various bartenders to whom he owed money pooled their complaints and had him locked up for failing to pay his bills. As Ramsey had already missed the team’s train earlier in the week, and the team had laid him off without pay for the transgression, the left-hander remained incarcerated for the time being.⁶⁷ Saddest of all, considering the amount of money Ramsey made playing baseball, “he was unable to give bonds and spent the night in jail. As he was utterly penniless he was the next day allowed to take the insolvent debtors’ oath and was released. His entire earthly possessions consisted of the clothes he wore. None of the club officials went near him and he even had to borrow \$5 to pay court costs.”⁶⁸

This produced a mixed reaction on the part of the Louisville faithful. Some pointed out the obvious truth that Ramsey tended to lose control of himself and behave in ways detrimental to himself and the Colonels. Because of his talent, the team usually gave him another chance, however, and so this time, he was only seeing the consequences of his actions, as he should have done long ago. Others, more charitable, pointed out that Ramsey’s patronage of the saloons in question had made the saloonkeepers many times the amount of money Ramsey owed them through his magnetism and ability to draw patrons to their establishments in the first place.

⁶⁵ “Louisville Laconics” JA, *The Sporting Life*, September 19, 1888, 3.

⁶⁶ “Ramsey Suspended” JA, *The Sporting Life*, July 4, 1888, 2.

⁶⁷ “In A Dungeon Cell” PSC, *The Sporting News*, July 28, 1888, 1.

⁶⁸ “Louisville Lines” NA, *The Sporting Life*, August 1, 1888, 1.

Furthermore, what they had done was probably not legal anyway, as Kentucky state law at the time allowed for the arrest of debtors only if they planned to leave the state without paying their debts, which Ramsey clearly did not intend to do for any greater period than the length of the team's next road trip.⁶⁹

The two men signed again to play with the Colonels for 1889, as new owner Mordecai Davidson did not learn the lessons that should have been obvious by now. The two men had so much talent, however, that the temptation to keep them around was just too great. As Davidson said of Browning, "if that man would keep sober he would be the greatest ball player living. He has the best eye for a ball that I ever saw, and unless he is drunk on the grounds his playing is not affected, not even by a spree the night before. I expect trouble with him, but I will stand no foolishness." When it came time to sign Browning for 1889, "Pete's arm dropped to his vest pocket, and after much struggling he flushed out a carefully folded document, which he exhibited with much satisfaction to his employer. The paper was a pledge of total abstinence good from date until November 1, and was duly witnessed, signed, and sworn to before a neighboring Justice of the Peace." Davidson could not help a little laugh at the "unique document" but nonetheless gave Browning a contract.⁷⁰

Browning at least tried to break his habit, even if he always fell short of his goal. Ramsey, on the other hand, did not even make it to opening day in 1889 before deciding to skip practice and vanish. "He did not reappear for three days, and, although he put on a bold front at first, it was easily seen that he had been drinking."⁷¹ Finally, Louisville management tired of his continual lushing and traded him to the St. Louis Browns during the season for one of the

⁶⁹ "Louisville Laconics" JA, *The Sporting Life*, August 8, 1888, 5.

⁷⁰ "Outfielder Pete Browning" Colonel, *The Sporting News*, April 13, 1889, 1.

⁷¹ Ibid.

Browns' recalcitrant pitchers, Nat Hudson. As sad as Ramsey's saga is, however, it is worth noting that by 1889, even after several seasons of frequent binge drinking, he was still a mere twenty-four years old. Many people of his age struggle with alcohol abuse. When the alcoholic is a major league baseball player, however, the consequences are public, and the fall from grace harder, than for those operating outside the spotlight of professional sports.

Nonetheless, the story of Ramsey and Browning demonstrates beyond any doubt just how detrimental drinking was in this era. It did much to ruin Ramsey's career, as he was out of baseball by age twenty-six. Browning lasted longer, but missed so many games due to drinking and the resulting suspensions that despite a monstrous career batting mark of .341/.403/.467, he is not in the Hall of Fame simply because he did not play enough to accumulate sufficient statistics. The quality of his play is certainly high enough, as his batting average is the best ever for a player not in the Hall, but it is hard to make much of an argument on behalf of a player so completely unreliable. The fact that Louisville depended for success on two such unreliable players helps explain why the team was so streaky, and why it performed so poorly in 1888 and 1889. This, in turn, helps demonstrate why some baseball owners were so concerned about alcohol and why they took such stringent measures against it.

Ramsey and Browning also illustrate the fact that, because there are never enough talented players to go around, even men with a weakness for drink received a number of second chances. Sometimes teams saw no choice but to swallow hard, take the plunge, and hope things turned out for the best. Louisville did every year, and other clubs sometimes saw no choice but to do the same, especially when they were as poor as the 1886 Kansas City Cowboys and had little to lose. Wallowing with a record of 19 up and 52 down, on August 11, they brought Frank Ringo on board to catch. "It is to be hoped that he will brace up and play good ball, inasmuch as

this is his home; however, Mr. McKim informs me that they will stand no lushing whatever, and upon his first disregard of this strict rule he will be heavily fined.”⁷² As it turned out, Ringo was not the answer that the Cowboys hoped. Though he posted a tolerable OPS+ of 93 in limited action, and observers labeled him “a very active player, and the best throwing catcher we have,”⁷³ the team lost nine straight after his signing, and won just eleven more games the rest of the season.

The team let him go at the end of the 1886 campaign, “his greatest enemy being the sole reason. Frank had done excellently until he struck St. Louis, where he forgot his former resolutions, and began getting drunk which caused Manager Rowe’s prompt action.”⁷⁴ Like so many other men prone to strong drink, he spent the winter of 1886-1887 looking for a new club while claiming sobriety. It did not work, as he made no further appearances in major league baseball, and these circumstances forced him to spend the winter as a traveling cigar salesperson for West & Co., operating out of Kansas City.⁷⁵ He seems to have had reasonable success in this line of work, but apparently, it was not satisfactory to him. In April of 1889, “after eight months of total abstinence he began drinking about two weeks ago and has continued it ever since.” He even got married, but tragically, on April 12, 1889, Ringo killed himself.⁷⁶ “Frank M. Ringo, the well-known ball-player, who took forty grains of morphine yesterday morning with suicidal intent, died at 9 o’clock this morning.”⁷⁷

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⁷² “Kansas City News” LJK, *The Sporting Life*, August 18, 1886, 1.

⁷³ “From Cowboy Town” LJK, *The Sporting Life*, September 22, 1886, 1.

⁷⁴ “Kansas City News” LJK, *The Sporting Life*, October 13, 1886, 1.

⁷⁵ “Notes and Comments” NA, *The Sporting Life*, March 2, 1887, 3.

⁷⁶ “Kansas City Briefs” Freeman, *The Sporting Life*, April 17, 1889, 1.

⁷⁷ “Catcher Frank M. Ringo Dead” NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, April 13, 1889, 6.

When an interviewer asked Washington Nationals manager Mike Scanlon about his club's chances prior to the 1886 campaign, Scanlon wasted no time in pointing out that "some people don't understand players, but I will have one thing in favor of my team; they are all temperate men and do not need to be shadowed."⁷⁸ Scanlon would know; as the prosperous former owner of a pool hall, he had certainly seen what drinking could do to someone.⁷⁹ The Nationals did not win many games that year, but at least lost while putting their best foot forward. Things had changed by the following season, however. The club revamped its roster and brought in several new players for that year, and actually won eighteen more games (they started from such a low level, however, that even such tremendous improvement left them with a 46-76 record) than the year before, but at a price. "The list of absolutely sober players on the Washington team is said, by local papers, to be even smaller than *The Sporting Life* conjectured. Hines, Mack and Gilmore are the only ones who can honestly claim clean skirts this season." Seeing that *The Sporting Life* only believed the team had four teetotalers, however, the disagreement was not so very great.⁸⁰

The team's observers cringed, therefore, during the 1887-1888 off-season when it appeared the club continued moving in the wrong direction, sobriety-wise. The club signed Pat Deasley and Gid Gardner as utility players that winter, and both men arrived with a great deal of baggage.

Washingtonians who take an interest in base ball and keep posted regarding the playing abilities of the various members of the League, do not appear to appreciate the report that the home management has secured Tom Deasley and Gid Gardner. These two men are

⁷⁸ "From the Capital" WUD, *The Sporting Life*, March 17, 1886, 3.

⁷⁹ Nemeck, *The Beer and Whiskey League*, 79.

⁸⁰ "Notes and Comments" NA, *The Sporting Life*, October 5, 1887, 6; "From The Capital" WUD, *The Sporting Life*, October 5, 1887, 7.

said to be first-class ball players, when they are in condition, but unfortunately they have the reputation throughout the profession of being addicted to habits which even an oath before a magistrate could not, so it is said, control. Washington can not be made an inebriate asylum for players of that character, after the experiences of last season.⁸¹

The club did at least sign Deasley to a special contract in which Deasley agreed the team would withhold \$1,000 of the pay due him until the end of the season. Only if he walked the straight path would the club be obligated to pay him this reserved sum.⁸² In Gardner's case, the team hoped it could count on him because he had stayed clean for the past year, according to a Boston sportswriter who had observed Gardner's play. The writer believed, "Gardner is a splendid second baseman or outfielder. He is not the man that he was in Baltimore."⁸³ (In Baltimore, in 1885, he had put up an OPS+ mark of 79, low but not disastrously low, but nonetheless a letdown based on the public's expectations. He had been ever worse during his brief trial with Indianapolis in 1887, finishing with an OPS+ of only 56. As it turned out, Gardner played just three games in the major leagues in 1888, and those were his last three major league games.)

Similarly to Scanlon's Nationals of 1886, the 1887 New York Metropolitan were not a good team, but they did take strong preventative measures against boozing. "The Mets are a strictly temperance team . . . all the players must understand that the first offence will be punished by a heavy fine, and, if this has no effect the player or players will be blacklisted, although judging from the present make-up of the team no such harsh measures are anticipated, the discordant element having been eliminated long ago."⁸⁴

Going into detail on the morality issues with the Association's Philadelphia Athletics of 1885, *The Sporting Life's* Philadelphia correspondent discussed the impact of potential

⁸¹ "The Hines Deal" Bob Lerner, *The Sporting Life*, November 23, 1887, 1.

⁸² "Spalding On Pfeffer" SAM, *The Sporting News*, November 26, 1887, 5.

⁸³ "Chadwick's Chat" Henry Chadwick, *The Sporting Life*, December 21, 1887, 3.

⁸⁴ "New York Gossip" Regular, *The Sporting Life*, March 2, 1887, 4.

transactions by noting how the players the team might acquire would improve the overall sobriety level of the Athletics. “It may be that Louisville’s brilliant young short stop, [Tom] McLaughlin, may be released to the Athletics. This fine player would amply replace [Sadie] Houck, as he is a good short stop with none of Houck’s bad habits.” Similarly, “it is quite likely that a deal will be made with Providence for [Jack] Farrell, the crack second baseman, who would strengthen the club in a place where it has always been weak. This engagement would provide against the contingency of [Charlie] Bastian’s retirement.” Bastian was considering retirement because “the latter has gone into the liquor business down town with his brother-in-law and is doing such good business that he is reported as saying that he will not play ball next season. He doesn’t care much about playing second base anyhow, and feels disgruntled over a couple of fines which were imposed upon him last season and were deducted from his pay.”⁸⁵

This problem stalked the Athletics consistently, it seems. By 1888, their management had assembled a good team with many quality players, especially at the plate. Indeed, the players were good enough that baseball prognosticators constantly picked them to dethrone the St. Louis Browns as American Association champion. Between Henry Larkin at first base, Lou Bierbauer at second, Denny Lyons at third, and outfielders Harry Stovey and Curt Welch, the Athletics managed to lead the American Association in OPS, finishing ten points better than Association champion St. Louis and at least twenty-six points better than any other club. Stovey was one of baseball’s greatest players, as contemporaries lauded his hitting, baserunning, defense, and gentlemanly deportment. Yet, despite high expectations, the team finished in third place in 1888. Granted, the Browns put up an excellent record, but that was little consolation to

⁸⁵ “The Local Clubs” NA, *The Sporting Life*, December 2, 1885, 1.

the Athletic faithful. This finish was even more disappointing as news leaked out of the lushing tendencies of five Athletic players, catcher Kid Baldwin prime among them.

When the club visited Cincinnati that year, these five men, already with questionable reputations in Philadelphia itself, immediately made things worse. As one Cincinnati newspaper reported,

No man can drink whiskey and play base ball and make a success of both. . . . There is one team in the American Association that but for the bibulous inclination of its members would stand an elegant opportunity of winning the championship. This team is now well up in the race, but would be higher did the members not worship at the shrine of Bacchus. It is a grand aggregation of boozers, and, during their last visit to this city the members had on large-sized packages of Over-the-Rhine product most of the time. Several times one or two of the players came on the field 'feeling rather happy.' A player must be rather far gone when he can't wait until after the game to get a drink. This was the case with two of the members of the team in question. While a game was in progress these players marched boldly up to a bar in their uniforms and tossed off two and three bowls of the amber.⁸⁶

The team's manager in 1888, Billy Sharsig, apparently was aware of the problem, but for whatever reason, was loath to discipline his men. While the problems continued when the Athletics reached Louisville, an event at St. Louis was probably the low point of the season, in terms of sobriety. "Not satisfied with going around 'lushing' at night time, President Von der Ahe charges them with bringing a keg of beer to the grounds on July 4." Von der Ahe claimed, "I went up to where the Athletics were and saw that they had a keg of beer there. Seeing that none of my men were around I came back and told Sharsig of what I saw. Sharsig wanted me to have the keg removed. I told him it was none of my business what his players did and if he wanted the keg emptied he should empty it himself." It is a testament to the talent level of the Athletics that, even though several players became inebriated a little early in celebrating the nation's independence, Von der Ahe finished his story by remarking, "Well, my players saw

⁸⁶ "Philadelphia Pointers" NA, *The Sporting Life*, September 5, 1888, 6.

what was going on and they were happy, as they thought they were going to have an easy thing of it that afternoon. I was never so mad in my life as I was after that game. To think that we were beaten by a lot of drunken ball players riled me and I felt like selling out and quitting the business.”⁸⁷

The escapades of some players were enough to earn the ridicule of sportswriters. When the talented outfielder George Wood went from Detroit to the Philadelphia Quakers following the 1885 season, despite the fine .290/.315/.428 batting line he had just put together, there was little wailing or gnashing of teeth among the Wolverine faithful. “Wood is a spasmodic player. There is no doubt he can, when inclined, put as good an article of base ball on the market as one would care to see but while one day his record would glitter with great hits and fine plays, the next (owing to a surplus of conviviality the preceding evening) he would endeavor to bat five or six balls when only one left the pitchers hand.”⁸⁸ It appears Wood later braced up, however, as in 1888, Al Spalding invited Wood to travel on his Australian tour, and given Spalding’s fanaticism for sobriety, it is quite unlikely he would have invited Wood if Wood’s reputation had not risen a notch or two.

Sportswriters might even call out entire teams for their poor morals. Discussing a minor league club located in Duluth, Minnesota, in 1887, *The Sporting News* told its readers how, “the Duluth boys are such good beer drinkers that a wealthy brewer presented Manager Anderson of that club with a horse, buggy and set of harness for his untiring efforts in working up trade.”⁸⁹

The story of Charlie Sweeney is a vivid example of how drink could sabotage not only the career of highly promising player, his entire life as well. In 1883, the California team

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ “From the City of the Straits” MAT, *The Sporting Life*, December 16, 1885, 1.

⁸⁹ “Caught on the Fly” NA, *The Sporting News*, October 22, 1887, 4.

employing him expelled him from their club for “dishonorable conduct” in a May 13 game. However, his next team, Providence of the National League, claimed Sweeney’s dismissal from the California club was a frame job, so they could get around the blacklist and secure Sweeney’s considerable talents.⁹⁰ It did not take long for them to tire of Sweeney’s antics. By mid-1884, despite an impeccable pitching effort (an ERA+ of 183 for Providence) he was with St. Louis of the Union Association. When that team moved to the National League in 1885, Sweeney disgraced himself by sucker punching teammate Emmett Seery in the team’s clubhouse. This caused the St. Louis *Critic* to state, “It is very doubtful if Sweeney will ever play ball in St. Louis again. . . . Seery is a little gentleman, while Sweeney is a whiskey-guzzling, cowardly nincompoop. His cowardly treachery . . . brands Sweeney as a cur, and we sincerely trust that Mr. Lucas will give him his release.”⁹¹ (Seery, incidentally, burnished his standing as a gentleman by gaining a reputation as one of baseball’s premier chess players.⁹²) Lucas gave the pitcher one more chance in 1886, after Sweeney pledged to mend his ways. “Charley Sweeney is said to have reformed. He has not yet joined the Salvation Army, but is said to leave liquor severely alone, and is trying hard to get into good playing shape. If he succeeds he will again try his hand in St. Louis.”⁹³ Things did not work out, however, and Sweeney only pitched in eleven games.

Sweeney pitched just one more, highly ineffective, season in the majors. He threw his last pitch in major league baseball at age twenty-four. Released by the minor league Syracuse Stars late in 1886, Sweeney’s career bottomed out so quickly that *The Sporting Life* lamented his fall from glory. “Alas, what a drop for a pitcher who in ’84 was considered the finest of them

⁹⁰ “The League” NA, *The Sporting Life*, June 24, 1883, 2.

⁹¹ “The Sweeney-Seery Fight” NA, *The Sporting Life*, November 25, 1885, 3.

⁹² “Notes and Comments” NA, *The Sporting Life*, March 9, 1887, 3.

⁹³ “Notes and Comments” NA, *The Sporting Life*, February 24, 1886, 4.

all. On Tuesday last he pitched for the Constableville Club against the Lowvilles.”⁹⁴ *The Sporting News*, describing Sweeney’s Syracuse performance, concurred: “Charley Sweeney . . . was no stronger here and has been given his release. He pitched a slow, straight ball which the opposing clubs had no difficulty in hitting.”⁹⁵ He finished the season with the Sacramento Altas in his native California.

Although his time as a major league pitcher was essentially over after 1886, Sweeney was talented enough that the Cleveland Blues gave him a shot as a utility player for 1887, mainly manning first base and the outfield, but Sweeney never could shake his taste for liquor. Even his 1887 marriage to a Sacramento woman could not get him to settle down.⁹⁶ When a touring team of major league players visited California in December of 1887, he brandished a Colt revolver at New York Giant first baseman Roger Connor “with true Western enthusiasm, and though prevented from increasing the Coroner’s troubles kept up the feud and expressed a wild desire for blood.”⁹⁷ (While multiple sources mention this version of events, others claimed that Connor left to be with his ailing wife. Perhaps both are true,⁹⁸ but Connor himself denied the story, claiming he was merely homesick, so we should probably accept his version of the story as the most likely one.⁹⁹) At age thirty-two, Sweeney killed a man in a saloon, resulting in incarceration. He died shortly after his release, in California, at the age of thirty-eight.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁴ “Notes and Comments” NA, *The Sporting Life*, August 4, 1886, 5. Constableville and Lowville are actual towns in the Empire State, but their caliber of baseball was not what Sweeney’s previous baseball exploits seemed to warrant. He lost the game, 4-0.

⁹⁵ “Sweeney Again Fired” SUT, *The Sporting News*, August 2, 1886, 1.

⁹⁶ “From California” Wally Wallace, *The Sporting Life*, March 16, 1887, 3.

⁹⁷ “Ball-Tossers on the Slope” NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, December 20, 1887, 3.

⁹⁸ “California Players” One of the Giants. *The Sporting Life*, January 4, 1887, 4. The Giant who authored the piece is almost certainly John Ward.

⁹⁹ “Sweeney and His Pistol” NA, *The Sporting Life*, January 7, 1888, 1.

¹⁰⁰ Stevens, *Baseball’s Radical for All Seasons*, 37.

On other occasions, the consequences of drinking were almost as disastrous, as in the case of Frank Larkin (also known as Terry Larkin), a man who pitched with several teams between 1876 and 1880. Late in 1883, Larkin shot his wife, Catherine, at their home in Brooklyn while under the influence, because she got on his case for coming home drunk again. His wife's screams attracted the attention of a passing police officer, but when the officer investigated, Larkin shot at him as well. He then cut his own throat with a razor blade and lay down to die, but the policeman, reinforced by some fellow officers, forced his way into Larkin's home and saved both from death. After recovering at the hospital, and regretting what he had done to his wife, fearing that she would still die, he despaired and again unsuccessfully attempted suicide, this time by gashing his head against a steam register. Bystanders restrained him before he completed the act, despite his plea, "for God's sake hit me in the head and put an end to my suffering." Larkin, still battling to stay sober, played forty games as a second baseman for the Richmond Virginians, a team that played a partial season in the American Association, in 1884. Out of the game in 1885, however, he took a job that was probably a poor choice, given his history with booze: bartending in Brooklyn. Early in 1886, Larkin's employer discharged him, and in his anger, Larkin went home to arm himself, then stormed back into the saloon with two loaded pistols and challenge his boss, James McAnany, to a duel. Fortunately, however, as Larkin marched off the requisite paces, McAnany saw an opportunity and slipped out the back door and hailed a policeman, which resulted in Larkin's incarceration, awaiting trial as he sobered up.¹⁰¹

Following this sad episode, Larkin checked himself into the Inebriates Home at Fort Hamilton. It seems his love of baseball was almost as strong as his love of alcohol, leading one

¹⁰¹ "Larkin Again in Trouble" NA, *The Sporting Life*, January 20, 1886, 2; James, *The New Bill James Historical Baseball Abstract*, 51.

writer to report, “during the entire six months he hasn’t touched a drop of liquor, and it is thought that he has now entirely conquered his weakness. He has still many friends in Brooklyn who would like to see him get a position with a minor league club, in order that he may show the profession that he has redeemed himself.”¹⁰² Larkin even penned a short article that appeared in *The Sporting Life* in January of 1887 in an effort to repair some of the damage to his reputation. He claimed, “that I have reformed for good and all, no more to be the ‘most gorgeous drunk’ of the age,” and that his arm was right once again. He hoped for one more chance to play, but that chance was not forthcoming from any major league team.¹⁰³

A similarly frightening pair of alcohol-related stories took place nearly simultaneously in late December of 1887. In Mansfield, Massachusetts, right fielder Fred Grumbling “was assaulted with a knife by a man named Etwiler and received three cuts, one in the head, another below the left shoulder-blade, and a third, a frightful gash, in the right side, from which his intestines protruded. There is little hope of his recovery.” Meanwhile, that same week in Erie, Pennsylvania, “John Morrison, of last season’s Hamilton team, and brother of Mike Morrison, of the Clevelands, got into a row in a bar-room and was so badly beaten on the head with a beer glass by a Brooklyn printer, named Harry Potter, that his life is despaired of. Morrison was intoxicated at the time and provoked the quarrel. His assailant is in jail.”¹⁰⁴

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¹⁰² “News and Notes” NA, *The Sporting Life*, January 5, 1887, 3.

¹⁰³ “Larkin Speaks for Himself” Frank Larkin, *The Sporting Life*, January 26, 1887, 5.

¹⁰⁴ “Ball Players Fatally Injured” NA, *The Sporting Life*, January 4, 1888, 1.

Unlikely as it may seem, despite the frequent mentions in the press, it is possible that writers underestimated the influence of demon rum in the game, as it seems nearly every team suffered from players drinking excessively at one point or another. “Ball players snicker when the wonderful sobriety of the Chicago team last season is mentioned. More than one League player is willing to swear that the champions stood up to the rack well up to July, but that after that many were the rackets and benders indulged in.”¹⁰⁵ The actual record of the White Stockings, however, does not bear out this statement, as the club won 34 games against 11 defeats in August, September, and October that season, including three straight losses to end the season after they had already clinched the League championship, and this squares well with their 53 wins against only 14 losses to that point. So perhaps the accusations against them were spurious. (On the other hand, perhaps this charge is correct, but their opponents were equally inebriated, resulting in no net loss of performance on the part of the White Stockings.) Owner Spalding of the White Stockings, while not exactly a disinterested party, denied the report as well, stating, “They went through the season without indulging in any excess, and they deserve to receive credit for it. They seemed to take a great deal of pride in keeping themselves straight, and it would not have been good for some of the new members to have spoiled their record in this respect.”¹⁰⁶

The reader must wonder at the veracity of Spalding’s claims, however, realizing that he employed detectives to shadow those same players the subsequent season. Similarly, the critics, unconvinced by Spalding’s bravado, did not relent in their accusations. One offered that, regarding one of Chicago’s catchers, Frank “Silver” Flint, “we are sorry to make this heinous charge, for we knew Flint in days gone by as a high-minded gentleman . . . now, however, we are

¹⁰⁵ “Notes and Comments” NA, *The Sporting Life*, January 6, 1886, 3.

¹⁰⁶ “Notes and Comments” NA, *The Sporting Life*, January 20, 1886, 3.

informed that at Flint's gymnasium the growler is rushed early and often." The writer did point out that Flint's friends in St. Louis disputed these charges, but only because "they, too, knew him as a high-minded gentleman, and one who took his ale fresh from the keg rather than from the vulgar growler."¹⁰⁷ Even team captain Cap Anson weighed in on the matter, declaring his confidence in Flint's abilities to get back in shape following an off-season in which "every time he happened to run across him at a sporting match or in the hotel rotunda, he appeared to be enjoying himself."¹⁰⁸

The problem was widespread indeed, if we believe Pittsburgh Allegheny secretary A.K. Scandrett. He claimed to have signed many contracts offering players between \$200 and \$500 extra if they made it through the championship season without falling victim to demon rum. He also claimed he had never actually paid a single cent of this bonus money to any player, ever, because all had failed to make good on their end of the deal.¹⁰⁹ Likewise, when one Baltimore sportswriter put forth the idea of simply removing all drinking men from the game, in order to ensure quality play that would invite the public's confidence, he acknowledged the idea might be a tad extreme because "the result would be sure, but perhaps this would be too radical to be practical, and so many fearful examples would have to be made that the profession would dwindle to small numbers."¹¹⁰

Occasionally, team managers would attempt to revamp an entire roster to clean out the drunkards. In the 1885-1886 off-season, for instance, St. Louis Maroons manager Gus Schmelz

¹⁰⁷ "Notes and Comments" NA, *The Sporting Life*, March 3, 1886, 3. A growler is a container for beer bought by the measure.

¹⁰⁸ "The White Stockings" HEK, *The Sporting News*, March 17, 1886, 1.

¹⁰⁹ "Notes and Comments" NA, *The Sporting Life*, January 26, 1887, 3.

¹¹⁰ "From Baltimore" TTT, *The Sporting Life*, February 2, 1887, 4.

signed several new players to his club in an effort to shape up the morals of his nine. One St. Louis writer praised Schmelz's effort, remarking,

Manager Schmelz's regime is that the whiskey-heads and bums, who have brought such disgrace upon the club and upon the game in this city, are to be retired in favor of honest, hard-working, temperate and conscientious players, who will give St. Louis the best ball that is in them and behave themselves in a manner calculated to elevate themselves and their club in public estimation instead of bringing it into public disrepute, as was the case last season.¹¹¹

The New York Metropolitan considered taking a similar position before their 1887 season, as they almost decided to part ways with outfielder Chief Roseman. Their management wanted a temperate nine, and as Roseman owned a saloon, his association with alcohol worried the team.¹¹² They did end up keeping him, although given his poor performance (his OPS+ was a paltry 57) they probably should have kept to their original plan.

While New York tried to sober up collectively, Baltimore, on the other hand, could not boast of the same achievement. One of their writers, describing how much the club still had to improve to compete in 1886, mentioned, "it is hoped by the opening of the playing season some of the lushers can be wisely replaced by material that will invite the confidence of the public; or, if the worst comes to the worst, that the management will devise a system to keep them under control. It must be confessed, however, that the latter phase of the question is not at all

¹¹¹ "From the Mound City" NA, *The Sporting Life*, January 6, 1886, 2.

¹¹² "The Mets" Regular, *The Sporting Life*, February 2, 1887, 1. I have been unable to determine if Roseman was an American Indian, but it seems possible, given that "Chief" was a common nickname given to American Indians who played major league baseball in this era. Although Roseman was born in Brooklyn, and also died there, there is an interesting, if rather racist, statement about him in 1887, which reads, "It's dollars to cents that Jimmy Roseman will not lift his stentorian war whoop for the Mets next season. Alas, even like unto his brother, the noble red man of the boundless West, he and his confreres pass away." "Notes and Comments" NA, *The Sporting Life*, February 2, 1887, 3.

promising, if past experience is to be the guide.”¹¹³ It was not to be. Instead, the club signed shortstop Sadie Houck, hoping to keep him on the straight and narrow. “Houck may be found with the Baltimore Club next season. Barnie thinks he would fill the bill capably at short field, if he will keep straight and let up on his everlasting chinning, and that Barnie says he can make him do.”¹¹⁴ Since Houck’s other option was a yearlong suspension from his old club, the Athletics, for bad behavior, one might think he would embrace this opportunity wholeheartedly, and he had a past history of doing exactly that. “The latter always plays well and behaves himself in his first season in a new town . . . Houck now has one more opportunity to redeem himself, and we trust he will embrace it.”¹¹⁵ As things turned out, however, he did anything but. Houck performed miserably at the plate in his 61 games in Baltimore, preventing manager Barnie from making good on his claim. Houck compiled a .192/.216/.231 batting line for a puny OPS+ of 42, so it is unlikely that he kept straight, or even slightly crooked, for that matter, although to be fair, frequent minor injuries also took their toll. He disappeared from major league baseball following the next season after an abbreviated stint of ten exceptionally ineffective games with the New York Metropolitan, who gave him a chance after he started the season with the Lynn club in Massachusetts.¹¹⁶ After failing in New York, Houck decided to go west as “Sadie Houck has packed his gripsack and hied himself to Kansas City, and will henceforth yell with the Cowboys” who by this time were a member of the Western League after getting the boot from the National League over the winter of 1886.¹¹⁷

¹¹³ “From Baltimore” NA, *The Sporting Life*, January 6, 1886, 2.

¹¹⁴ “Notes and Comments” NA, *The Sporting Life*, January 6, 1886, 3.

¹¹⁵ “Barnie Gets Houck” NA, *The Sporting Life*, February 17, 1886, 1.

¹¹⁶ “Houck Catches On” NA, *The Sporting Life*, April 13, 1887, 1.

¹¹⁷ “The Washington Team” SAM, *The Sporting News*, August 13, 1887, 5.

No matter how many failures he had in his experiments with drinking men, the Bald Eagle of Baltimore, Billy Barnie, just could not resist giving second and third chances to some of the game's notorious drinkers. This drew constant laments from the team's correspondent for *The Sporting Life*, Albert Mott. After the disaster of 1886, "last season the team was, by comparison with former years, remarkably free from this, and the playing record was, as a consequence, much better." (The team improved from a dismal 48-83 mark to 77-58, a monstrous improvement, indeed.) Not that all was well, as "it is not intended to assert that there was no drinking at all, for there was really too much of it, but it was a vast improvement over the steady lushing of the teams of former years. There was not a downright lush on the team of eighty-seven." Because of this, Mott was all the more dismayed that, "there are fears now that just enough boozing element will be in the team of eighty-eight to eventually demoralize some of the youngsters. . . . Experience has shown that in the Baltimore Club, all the iron-clad and steel-riveted contracts in the world are as so much waste paper in restraining a player who has contracted the disease of boozing."¹¹⁸

His quote referred to manager Barnie's decision to sign Jack Farrell for the upcoming championship season. As noted earlier, the Moose had not demonstrated good behavior in his recent past, this being his fourth team in four years as a result. As usual, Barnie offered him incentives to stay sober, in the form of a \$300 salary deduction the first time he failed to toe the line, but Mott did not think this precaution was enough.¹¹⁹ The tragedy was that the club was beginning to regain the favor and confidence of the cranks of the Monumental City, and Mott feared all that would be lost if the team fell back into old habits on the field and off and resumed

¹¹⁸ "Baltimore Bulletin" TTT, *The Sporting Life*, February 8, 1888, 4.

¹¹⁹ "Caught On The Fly" NA, *The Sporting News*, February 11, 1888, 5.

its lackluster performances of recent campaigns.¹²⁰ (Sadly, it did, posting a 57-80 record in 1888.) The 1888 season was even more critical in Baltimore, because that was the year the American Association tried fifty-cent tickets. Mott, and many other Baltimoreans, believed that if the club played no better ball, and provided no improved accommodations for its patrons, it could not justify the hike in ticket prices, and fans would cease showing up at Oriole Park.¹²¹

It was not Farrell, however, who got in trouble first in 1888. That dubious distinction went to second baseman Billy Greenwood, who earned a suspension and heavy fine for excessive drinking in May. Never a premium performer to begin with, Barnie decided the team could do without Greenwood after his drinking costs them games in a series against Cleveland, writing, “both Mr. Vonderhorst and myself talked to him, and warned him of the consequences if he was caught drinking again. He paid no attention to us and when I discovered last night that he was spreeing, I put the fine on him and it will stick.” The team declared Greenwood could not resume playing with them until June 1.¹²² Greenwood’s turn to the dark side was very disappointing to all associated with Baltimore baseball, as the previous season he had finally managed to shed his drinking reputation and had played some of the best baseball of his life.

What should be clear by this point is that nearly every major league team, and those in the American Association above all, had problems virtually every year with some of their men drinking. No team was safe from danger unless it kept up ceaseless vigilance, and even fines, special contracts, and suspensions were not always enough to ensure sobriety. Players might lay off from booze and rehabilitate themselves for a year, only to fall back into old ways the next. At times, managers must have felt as if they were running in sand going uphill. This helps

¹²⁰ “Baltimore Bulletin” TTT, *The Sporting Life*, February 8, 1888, 4.

¹²¹ “Baltimore Bulletin” TTT, *The Sporting Life*, February 15, 1888, 2.

¹²² “The Latest News” NA, *The Sporting News*, May 26, 1888, 1.

explain why, eventually, they turned to the Brotherhood for help in corralling the drinking problem. (See chapter fourteen.)

* * * * *

Although Albert Mott heaped most of his scorn on the Baltimore players for their bad habits, and Baltimore's management for taking them on in the first place, he recognized additional factors in play. It seemed hypocritical to Mott to tell players they must refrain from alcohol when the team sold it during games and used it as part of its advertising to draw spectators in the first place. Yet, in the American Association, there was little chance of reversing this policy, considering that half the teams, St. Louis, Cincinnati, Baltimore, and (by 1888) Kansas City, were currently or formerly owned by men who operated breweries. "Now, of course, a beer man may own a club without any attempt to utilize his team as a sort of nickel-plated faucet to draw beer, but it is not apt to be the case." Besides the impact on players, Mott described how intoxicated fans hurt the game, by scaring away the sober patrons with their obscenities and boorish behavior. Furthermore, "the outrageous assault by a Baltimore crowd on Umpire Brennan was caused by the beer-befuddled brain of one man who rushed into the field and was followed by hundreds of others. The beer riots of Cincinnati at base ball games, where the umpire is made the target of the heavy and deadly beer glasses, is common knowledge throughout the country."¹²³

There seemed little chance of eliminating beer sales at games throughout the Association, but St. Louis actually did attempt to put a stop to the practice at Sportsman's Park in 1888.

¹²³ "Baltimore Bulletin" TTT, *The Sporting Life*, February 8, 1888, 4.

Owner Von der Ahe decided to eliminate beer sales in the grandstand that season, hoping to avoid the opprobrium associated with intoxicated and unruly fans. He also attempted to make his grandstand more attractive to women at the same time, by creating a special section for the ladies where no men could enter unless accompanied by a woman. He believed this combination would help bring out the “better class” of spectators for 1888.¹²⁴ He did not deny the pleasure of the amber beverage to the denizens of the bleaching boards, however, as beer sales continued in that section of Sportsman’s Park.¹²⁵

Considerations involving alcohol consumption consistently figured into calculations of how much a player was worth in comparison to other players. During the early months of 1887, for example, the New York Giants were in hot pursuit of third baseman Jerry Denny, an above average offensive player reputed to possess superior defensive skills. John Ward once said of Denny’s defense, “I say unreservedly and without hesitation that he is the greatest infielder living. He never had an equal, and I do not believe this country will ever produce another one like him.”¹²⁶ Denny was a member of the St. Louis Maroons, a team rumored on the verge of disbandment. The Giants’ management, including manager Jim Mutrie, hoped to avoid using their utility player, Danny Richardson, at the hot corner in 1887, as he was a little light with the bat. Not all observers believed the upgrade would truly be an upgrade, however. Graybeard baseball writer Henry Chadwick hoped the Giants would stick with Richardson because Denny “is not the equal of Richardson in qualifications which go to make up a reliable team player on the nine. . . . Dan is temperate, Denny is not: Dan has mental ability; ‘head work’ is not a

¹²⁴ “St. Louis Siftings” Joe Pritchard, *The Sporting Life*, March 7, 1888, 2.

¹²⁵ “Base-Ball Notes” NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, March 22, 1888, 6. The bleaching boards were the uncovered seats at the ballpark, so named, apparently, because during hot summer games the sun bleached the spectators there.

¹²⁶ “Ward’s Opinion of Denny” John Ward, *The Sporting Life*, March 7, 1888, 5.

characteristic of Denny.” He saw no reason to pursue Denny, given the cost that would entail, when the team already had a reliable player on hand.¹²⁷

Not all agreed, however, that players such as Denny were a liability simply because they liked to down a few cold ones. His teammate in St. Louis, outfielder John “Patsy” Cahill, stood up for Denny as the rumor treadmill whirred into motion surrounding his possible sale to the Giants. “Rumors are flying thick and fast in regard to Denny’s release to the New Yorks. It would be a foolish move to sell him. Where can the management find another man that will stop the hot shots that go down to third base? I’ll tell you, his place cannot be filled.”¹²⁸ Still, many had doubts about Denny’s overall value because of his bad habits. He spent the winter of 1886-1887 “in California in such a condition from continued lushing as to do himself no credit by performances in games out there.”¹²⁹ Realizing the importance of his good name, however, Denny penned his own response to these attacks, stating, “My winter in California has been spent in hard and earnest work. I have not lushed, but I am strictly temperate and shall remain so. From constant practice I have never before been in better condition, and if health favors me will play the ball of my life . . .” and furthermore quoted a California paper to back his claims.¹³⁰

As in the case of Denny described here, observers feared the abuse of alcohol not only for the problems it could cause on the field, but also because it ruined the physical condition of men who imbibed too frequently. The career of Charles “Fatty” Briody is a classic example of this. The journeyman (seven different teams in an eight year career) catcher, generously listed as five-foot, eight-inches and 190 pounds in official records, was so rotund that the sporting press simply called him Fatty, or sometimes “the Alderman” or “Falstaff” when it needed a synonym

¹²⁷ “Chadwick’s Chat” Henry Chadwick, *The Sporting Life*, January 26, 1887, 2.

¹²⁸ “From St. Louis” Pritchard, *The Sporting Life*, February 2, 1887, 4.

¹²⁹ “From New York” Looker On, *The Sporting Life*, February 9, 1887, 1.

¹³⁰ “A Missive From Denny” Jerry Denny, *The Sporting Life*, March 2, 1887, 1.

for fat. He was so ponderously slow, he failed to nab a single stolen base in 56 games in 1886, at a time when every player was expected to be a threat to steal bases. When Briody signed on to be the change catcher for Detroit in 1887, his modest contract called for him to receive an extra twenty-five dollars per month if he stayed pure and did not touch liquor. Up until August, “Briody promised to do this and for some time kept his word, but when the club was on their eastern trip he fell from grace, and the information reaching President Stearns’ ears resulted in the extra money being withheld.” Briody only saved his bacon, and avoided release by the club, by convincing them that while he had indeed imbibed, it was not in such quantity as to impair his play on the field.¹³¹

As Denny’s story also shows, player drinking was an especial concern outside of the championship season schedule, when the games meant less to the players but ownership still needed a way to draw fans in the hope of clearing expenses in exhibition games. In 1887, the New York Giants, with a few other players in tow such as Mike Kelly, visited New Orleans for some exhibition games in late October and early November. While most of the club, including men such as John Ward and Tim Keefe who were important members of the Brotherhood, walked the straight line during their stay in the Crescent City, not all of their teammates maintained an honorable record in this regard. On Monday, three players, supposedly Mike Kelly, Jerry Denny, and Buck Ewing, arrived at the grounds for the game in carriages accompanied by drunken inhabitants of the city. After these inebriated cranks called out a continual stream of obscenities, New Orleans’ Secretary Kaufmann summoned the police to remove the boors. In the words of New York pitcher Tim Keefe, “our last game was well attended by a lot of Basin Street hoodlums, and from the time the game started until its close it

¹³¹ “Affairs At Detroit” NA, *The Sporting News*, August 13, 1887, 2.

was a constant stream of profanity that came from their quarters and intended for the New York players.”¹³² When the authorities arrived, Mike Kelly entered the stands and tried to prevent the arrest, and then when the next inning began and New York was supposed to take the field, remained in the stands drinking beer rather than take his position. John Ward was so mortified he sent his new wife, Helen Dauvray Ward, back to the team hotel in a carriage. The officials of the New Orleans club were equally shocked, to the extent they informed Ward and the Giants that there would be no more exhibition games until Ward obtained an ironclad promise from his men to play the games in a sober condition.¹³³ Later accounts, while admitting that drunkenness was the problem, suggested that the scene was not quite so dire. Others blamed an unspecified “foreign element” for all the trouble.¹³⁴

The stories concerning Mike Kelly’s drinking exploits were legion. He was, in some ways, the quintessential working class boy who made good in baseball. Spectators from the working class adored him, because not only was he one of them, he did not change after achieving baseball stardom. He was fun, talented, generous, and charismatic, all of which helped make him the biggest drawing card in baseball. He also, however, had a weakness for alcohol and could be headstrong. According to some, he also tended to get depressed when his team was not winning. All these traits came together in July of 1888, when Boston dropped a couple games to the Philadelphia Quakers and Kelly decided to hit the town and “drowned his sorrows in something stronger than soda water.” He did not return to the team hotel that evening, and straggled in for the next game with the Quakers without his uniform. Kelly’s actions forced

¹³² “Baseball Notes” NA, *New York Times*, November 13, 1887, 16.

¹³³ “Disgraceful Scenes At The New Orleans Ball Grounds” NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, November 3, 1887, 6.

¹³⁴ “Trouble About Several Players” NA, *The Sporting Life*, November 9, 1887, 4; “New York Mention” George Stackhouse, *The Sporting Life*, November 9, 1887, 4.

Boston captain John Morrill to give him a public reprimand, then borrow an extra uniform from Quakers manager Harry Wright for the game that day.¹³⁵

True to his nature, Kelly was embarrassed enough by the incident he decided to take extreme steps. Even as manager Morrill despaired of ever getting Kelly to shape up, with reporters writing, “Manager Morrill has not fined him, but he frankly confesses he can do nothing with Kelly, who is so headstrong and willful, and has an idea he can do as he pleases. In fact, he has been doing as he pleased, and this is the reason of the trouble,” Kelly decided to swear off booze. “Kelly asserts that he is done with drinking, and means to play ball from here out.” The odds of his keeping his pledge were long, but this brought a bit of peace to the Beantown nine for the time being.¹³⁶ He also hinted, however, that strained relations with Boston were at the heart of his troubles, as he also said, “there are two things that I am certain of. I intend to take the pledge and not drink a drop of liquor for a year. I have an offer to go into business next year and I will accept. I have no desire to play under this management any longer.”¹³⁷

Cincinnati was yet another team that often made financial decisions with blood alcohol content levels in mind. Before the 1887 season, Clarence “Kid” Baldwin, a catcher and utility player for the Red Stockings, made a bet with team owner Aaron Stern to abstain for the entire season. Baldwin went before a notary and swore to lay off intoxicating liquors in exchange for a \$100 bonus to his salary if he succeeded. He would part with the same amount if he failed.¹³⁸ It was a good thing he did not take the same pledge prior to 1888, however, as by June he had

¹³⁵ “Manager Morrill Give the Boston Beauty a Severe Lecture” Plain Talk, *The Sporting News*, July 14, 1888, 1.

¹³⁶ “Kelly to Give Up Drinking” NA, *The Sporting News*, July 21, 1888, 1.

¹³⁷ “Mike Kelly’s Views” NA, *The Sporting News*, July 21, 1888, 1.

¹³⁸ “Caught on the Fly” NA, *The Sporting News*, December 11, 1886, 3.

binged in New York, earning a \$100 fine and indefinite suspension from Cincinnati manager Gus Schmelz.¹³⁹

Schmelz and his employer in the Queen City, Aaron Stern, decided to go a similar route with all of their men prior to the 1889 season. Stern inserted language into the contracts of his players stating that, should they falter and intoxicate themselves between the beginning of April and the end of October, they forfeited \$500 of their salary back to the team's management. They felt impelled to this extreme step because "this year of '88 the Cincinnati Club suffered through the intemperance—the notorious intemperance—of several members."¹⁴⁰

Such were the fears about players and drinking that eventually, the entire National League tried to insert "ironclad" contractual language prescribing heavy penalties towards men who drank while the season was in progress. Before the 1887 season opened, the League amended its constitution to read, "Any person under contract with a League club who shall be guilty of drunkenness, gambling in any form, or any dishonorable or disreputable conduct, may be fined, or may be suspended for the remainder of the season, or for the whole of the ensuing season."¹⁴¹ There was certainly risk in traveling this path, however. The arbitrariness of words like dishonorable and disreputable left a whole host of behaviors open to interpretation. Then there was the question of what to do with players, like Pete Browning, King Kelly, or Jim McCormick, who imbibed often but were excellent players at the same time. Might a team look the other way in their cases, but suspend a lesser player to "send a message" about drinking, thus risking accusations of inconsistency?

¹³⁹ "Notes And Comments" NA, *The Sporting Life*, June 13, 1888, 10.

¹⁴⁰ "Cincinnati Chips" Ren Mulford, Jr., *The Sporting Life*, November 7, 1888, 4.

¹⁴¹ "Chadwick's Chat" Henry Chadwick, *The Sporting Life*, January 26, 1887, 2.

In Boston, the Triumvirs decided not to take the chance on appearing inconsistent. During the 1887 season, they, like Spalding the year before, employed a detective to shadow their men, and the detective noted not one or two, but nine, men from the club frequenting grog shops in August. The team slapped each man, Sam Wise, Billy Nash, Charlie Radbourn, Con Daily, Dick Johnston, Bill Stemmyer, Tom O'Rourke, Kid Madden, and Bobby Wheelock, with twenty-five dollar fines for "frequenting disreputable places" and their "infringement of discipline by drinking." This certainly caused dissention in the ranks. Some of the men, such as veteran Sam Wise, admitted they deserved their penalties, but found it rather rough that team management came down so hard on youngsters like Billy Nash, who ended up paying \$6.25 in fines for each of his four beers.¹⁴² The fines, and the poor morale that resulted from them, may well have caused Boston to falter in the National League standings. The day after the fines came down, the team mauled Pittsburgh by the remarkable score of 28-14, giving it a record of 49-40 for the season. From that point forward, however, the Beaneaters won just twelve times against twenty defeats, turning a moderately promising season into an unremarkable fifth place showing in the National League.

It is a wonder the same detective did not report second baseman Jack Burdock among the delinquent nine, for "Black Jack" certainly could imbibe with the best. He had been in major league baseball since his 1872 campaign with the Brooklyn Atlantics, but by 1887, he was merely a part-time player on the Beantown nine. A man "not especially brilliant when he is sober," on New Year's Eve 1887, Burdock, who friends said, "has been drinking hard all winter," barged in to a stationary store in Brooklyn near the Washington Park baseball grounds where the Brooklyn club played. He tried to arrest "Tillie Brown, a pretty girl of 17," claiming

¹⁴² "From The Hub" Mugwump, *The Sporting Life*, September 7, 1887, 5; "Radbourne Suspended" NA, *The Sporting News*, September 10, 1887, 1.

that he had a warrant for her arrest, and that the young woman had to go with him to New York City. Brown, understandably alarmed and terrified, nonetheless kept her composure long enough to ask Burdock to show his warrant and badge, and when he could not do so, said she needed to find her hat and gloves before she could go, and asked Burdock to help her find them. As soon as his back was turned, Brown eluded abduction by sprinting out of the store and straight to her sister's house, and in short order the Brooklyn police issued a warrant for Burdock's arrest on two counts, impersonating an officer and assault.¹⁴³

Despite this, the Boston club signed him for another campaign in 1888 while waiting for the courts to hear the case, hoping to squeeze a bit more value out of the veteran infielder, although Burdock's contract was a modest one, offering \$1,000 up front and another \$1,000 at the season's end pending his good behavior over the summer.¹⁴⁴ Burdock did not come through, however, posting one of the most dismal seasons ever by a player who played semi-regularly or better. Between Boston and Brooklyn that year, he managed to bat .142 in 325 at-bats, for a rock-bottom OPS+ of 11. It was his last season in the major leagues, save for three games in 1891. About the only thing to go right for Black Jack that year was that a judge acquitted him of the charge of assaulting Miss Brown in September when Brown failed to appear in court. According to the *New York Times*, "the court advised Burdock to stop drinking and play ball."¹⁴⁵ He failed to do so, however. By June, he was absent without leave from the Beaneaters. "He says he went as Boston Club delegate to the Brotherhood meeting. President John Ward says he didn't, and the other Boston players know nothing about it. . . . He has not been in condition to

¹⁴³ "A Fall From Grace" George Stackhouse, *The Sporting Life*, January 4, 1888, 1.

¹⁴⁴ "Hub Happenings" Mugwump, *The Sporting Life*, March 14, 1888, 2.

¹⁴⁵ "The League" FOR, *The Sporting Life*, March 7, 1888, 1; "Short Stops" NA, *New York Times*, September 2, 1888, 3.

play ball, and now it is all over. . . . He may not be officially released this minute, but he will be free to go wherever he wishes within twenty-four hours.”¹⁴⁶

Strangely, Brooklyn picked him up soon afterwards and installed him as their regular second baseman. His offensive performance for the Bridegrooms was less than worthless, as his .122 batting average in 259 at-bats in the City of Churches contributed heavily to the dismal overall offensive performance just mentioned. The team would have been vastly better off by keeping Bill McClellan at second base. McClellan was by no means a strong player, but at least managed an OPS+ of 80. Brooklyn’s Charles Byrne decided to take a flyer on Burdock, however, reasoning that with a wife and five children in Brooklyn, Burdock would brace up and play decent ball, but it did not happen that way. At least it was a cheap flyer, as Burdock allowed Byrne to name the terms of the contract in return for one last opportunity.¹⁴⁷ On the field, the consequence was that Burdock’s WAR of -2.0 went almost half way to costing Brooklyn the pennant in ’88. Had the club strengthened itself at second base instead of weakening itself with Burdock, they would have taken the St. Louis Browns all the way to the season’s final days, rather than needing ten straight wins to close the year just to finish 6.5 games back. Burdock did avoid booze while in Brooklyn, to his credit, with manager Bill McGunnigle stating, “‘Burdie’ played poor ball at times, but he never drank a drop from the time he came to us until he was released,”¹⁴⁸ but his performance was so dismal the Bridegrooms let him go at the end of the campaign.¹⁴⁹

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¹⁴⁶ “Changes At Boston” Mugwump, *The Sporting Life*, June 27, 1888, 6.

¹⁴⁷ “Cincinnati Chips” Ren Mulford, Jr., *The Sporting Life*, July 11, 1888, 8.

¹⁴⁸ “Hub Happenings” Mugwump, *The Sporting Life*, November 7, 1888, 6.

¹⁴⁹ “Notes And Comments” NA, *The Sporting Life*, October 24, 1888, 2.

What to do about drinking, then, when players did it so often, but fines built up ill will and lengthy suspensions deprived the club of a useful player for an extended period? One Baltimore writer had an answer, even if his knowledge of the nature of human behavior was rather weak. “The best policy for managers to adopt to ‘compel players to abstain from the improper use of liquors’ is not to employ hard-drinking men. All other plans fail in the end, not only in base ball, but in everything else. Lushing is a disease from which few recover, even among the most intelligent classes.”¹⁵⁰

Another option was to locate your team in a town or state that was dry, although this was not under the control of any major league teams. Minor league clubs might use this to their advantage, however, as the Portland, Maine, club did when signing Lew “Buttercup” Dickerson for 1887. Dickerson was a decent enough major league player when sober (career OPS+ of 121), but was not sober nearly often enough. Portland, therefore, thought it might land a useful player by bringing Dickerson to a town where his vice was not available to him. “There is some chance of keeping Lew straight in the Maine prohibition city, as he can only work his liquor through prescriptions.”¹⁵¹ Their plan seems to have worked, as Dickerson rehabilitated himself in the eyes of some observers. “What’s the matter with Lew Dickerson being given another chance with some League or Association club next season? He has evidently remained perfectly straight all season and has played a splendid second base for Portland, and splendid second basemen are not to be found on every bush.”¹⁵² One Philadelphia writer agreed, stating, “Drink has always been his failing, but he is said not to have touched a drop for a year and a half and his

¹⁵⁰ “From Baltimore” TTT, *The Sporting Life*, January 26, 1887, 2.

¹⁵¹ “Notes and Comments” NA, *The Sporting Life*, April 20, 1887, 11.

¹⁵² “Caught on the Fly” NA, *The Sporting News*, October 22, 1887, 4.

reformation appears to be permanent. In view of the great scarcity of competent second basemen, the Phillies might go further and fair worse.”¹⁵³ Philadelphia did not bite, however, and Dickerson found no other takers, either, never again donning a major league uniform.

Despite his boosters, he signed with London, Ontario, of the International League for the 1888 season, playing shortstop there.¹⁵⁴ He even began the year as team captain, as a testament to his skills and the depth of his commitment to a healthier lifestyle. Sad to report, his old habits caught up with him while playing north of the border. In early June, he, along with former major leaguer Larry Corcoran and future major leaguer Tom Kinslow, went on a drinking spree at the Clarence House in London that was so extreme it left Corcoran temporarily paralyzed. Dickerson had to pay a fifty-dollar fine, London fined Corcoran and suspended him without pay, and the club threatened all the men with dismissal from the team and the blacklist should the event repeat itself.¹⁵⁵ By the winter of 1888-1889, all talk of him returning to major league baseball died down, one writer dismissing such a possibility by writing, “Lew Dickerson is in town. Dick isn’t in the condition he was last winter. He is pretty fat.”¹⁵⁶ Things got worse during the 1889 season, alcohol abuse again being the main reason. He spent some time in jail for abusing his wife while drunk, and when he got out, he skipped town and deserted the team, for which the London club suspended him indefinitely.¹⁵⁷

Another man who swore off intoxicating liquor for the sake of trying to save his career was William “Peak-A-Boo” Veach. His prodigious penchant for alcohol was so well known that once, when a story circulated that other members of his team had quaffed as many beers as he

¹⁵³ “Philadelphia Pointers” NA, *The Sporting Life*, November 16, 1887, 2.

¹⁵⁴ “Gossip From Cincinnati” NA, *The Sporting Life*, December 28, 1887, 1; “Notes And Comment” NA, *The Sporting Life*, December 28, 1887, 5.

¹⁵⁵ “The Latest News” NA, *The Sporting News*, June 9, 1888, 1.

¹⁵⁶ “Pittsburg Pencilings” Circle, *The Sporting Life*, January 16, 1889, 3.

¹⁵⁷ “Notes And Comments” NA, *The Sporting Life*, July 10, 1889, 4.

had, a writer refuted such nonsense by observing, “any one acquainted with Veach knows he can drink enough to drown himself in, and to say that others of the nine drank as much is folly. It has been the bane of his life.”¹⁵⁸ Although he played in just a handful of major league games in the 1880s, this man seemed on intimate terms with many of the leading drunkards previously introduced in this chapter. In an 1887 letter to *The Sporting News*, he described how he was a drinking pal of Billy Taylor, having last seen him in Savannah, and then detailed a bender with Lew Dickerson, Charley Sweeney, and Bill Harbridge in Syracuse back in 1886 in which “we drank so much beer in one saloon that the bar tender sat down and cried like a child.” By the end, Veach “kept the bell boy running for bromide of potassium for Harbridge” (medical knowledge of the time considered potassium bromide a useful sedative) while Sweeney “laid perfectly stiff and the only signs of life he gave was that every once in a while he would roll his eyes and say: ‘Dear mamma.’” By late 1887, however, Veach had sworn off liquor, which was such a radical departure from his previous habits that some suggested he change his nickname from “Peak-A-Boo” to “Prohibitionist.”¹⁵⁹ Still, when he moved from Des Moines, Iowa, and signed to play in St. Paul, Minnesota for the 1888 season, St. Paul management hedged their bets, offering him a \$600 bonus come October should he stay true to his pledge throughout the season.¹⁶⁰ Apparently unable to believe that a man could reform so thoroughly, stories circulated immediately that Veach had gone back on his pledge, so he once again denied them in print. In May he wrote, “I am sure it will be satisfaction to know that I have kept my word.”¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁸ “The Des Moines Poet” Prowler, *The Sporting News*, February 11, 1888, 3.

¹⁵⁹ “Peak-A-Boo Veach” Peak-A-Boo, the Prohibitionist, *The Sporting News*, December 31, 1887, 1.

¹⁶⁰ “How a Pitcher Signed” NA, *The Sporting Life*, January 11, 1888, 1.

¹⁶¹ “Peekaboo Veach” Peekaboo Veach, the Prohibitionist, *The Sporting News*, May 19, 1888, 1.

This story involving Veach is important because, in their effort to elevate the moral stature of the game and its players, team executives and the sporting press went out of their way to play up stories that suggested moral reform. They were only too happy to print statements such as those offered by men like Veach and Lefty Marr, a utility player who became a regular performer with the Columbus Solons in 1889. “When I first started out as a professional ball player, I thought I could not play ball without I had two or three big drinks of booze. I used to think it gave me courage. I have only found out lately that it was a great detriment. I did not drink a drop all of last season, and I hit the ball better than I ever did.”¹⁶² Part of the problem for baseball, however, was that stories of successful reform were rare, while stories of lushing inebriates were common.

While the media did all in its power to play up stories of moral reform, hoping to raise the stature of baseball in the eyes of the public, unfortunately, sometimes their shining heroes of one day became the goats of the next. Veach, for instance, did not keep his word permanently. Playing in California in 1889, “When the Sacramentos lose he drowns his sorrow in the flowing bowl. When they win, he celebrates the victory by getting hilariously full. He did the later last night, and that is why it reads on the record book this morning: ‘Veach—drunk—fined \$20 and suspended without pay.’”¹⁶³

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This foray into the drinking habits of 1880s baseball players does show that, without doubt, team management had reason to worry about the morals and behavior of their players.

¹⁶² “Notes And Comments” NA, *The Sporting Life*, November 21, 1888, 6.

¹⁶³ “Veach Again Suspended” NA, *The Sporting News*, July 27, 1889, 1.

The financial stakes for the teams were high. Especially in the National League, where the minimum ticket price was fifty cents, teams hoped to attract wealthier and supposedly respectable patrons to their grounds as the core of their fan base. Such people, however, were not likely to come in the first place, and certainly not likely to return, if they saw a group of drunken men staggering around the diamond. If teams wanted to encourage these types of people to patronize their games, they had to have men who met the expectations for comportment of middle class Americans.

Part of the problem, however, was that it was difficult to differentiate fines and disciplinary measures that players truly deserved from those simply meant to keep players fearful for their position and drain their wages. Because everything was arbitrary, with few appeals other than the legal system, where the yawning chasm between the player's resources and ownership's resources led to the same disadvantages as in the business world generally, efforts at player discipline often resulted in increasing bitterness between players and management. The constitution of the American Association did state that "under no circumstances shall the board of directors of the Association remit any fine thus imposed, unless said fine is in excess of \$10," a clause meant to control unruly players but to discourage excessive fines.¹⁶⁴ However, given that the board of directors consisted of team owners, this was hardly a failsafe protection from the players' point of view. The result of this was, frequently, an adversarial relationship between management and labor, which made contract features such as the reserve clause even more galling, because players had no way out of this bad situation save pleading for release in the hope that another club might prove willing to offer them the chance to play.

¹⁶⁴ "The Association" O.P. Caylor, *The Sporting Life*, March 10, 1886, 2.

Still, it is difficult not to feel some sympathy for team management on this issue. A player such as Mike Kelly might drink constantly, but if that player was talented enough to help the team win despite the drinking, what could a team do? The choice was sell or release the player, or put up with the drinking and take the bad along with the good. In baseball, where the demand for top talent always exceeds the supply, it was exceptionally risky to let a good ballplayer go, unless the team had a sure thing as a replacement, and rarely was that the case at a time when teams considered fourteen men a full roster.

As a result, teams continued to cast about for solutions. One solution that the National League attempted was to use the Brotherhood to help enforce temperance. That choice did not turn out badly. The League also tried the Brush Classification Plan, however, which graded players while considering personal habits as part of the rating system. This choice did not turn out well, as we will see in chapter sixteen.

Chapter 7

Physical Fitness and Training

In addition to alcohol, physical training and the condition of the players throughout the season was also crucial to success in Gilded Age baseball. As with alcohol, the reason for this was primarily financial. The prevailing belief among almost all observers of the game was that fans came to the grounds to see action. They wanted to see batters hit the ball, the fielders chase it, and baserunners on the move. Fans disliked games with long waits for batters to swing, little action for the fielders, timid baserunning, or lackadaisical effort by the men in the field. This is not to say that all games had to be high scoring in order to please the cranks. On the contrary, newspapers often reported low scoring games as among the best of the year. Although fans wanted their team to win of course, the level of scoring was not the critical consideration—the amount of action that fans witnessed was what people cared about most. When commentators stated that fans wanted “heavy batting,” they did not necessarily mean fans wanted a continual parade of long hits; instead, they meant that fans wanted to see lots of contact with the ball and movement on the field.

As a result, whenever the legislators of the game tinkered with the rules, they did so hoping to create more action. Strikeouts, although considered among the most important stats for a pitcher to accumulate today, were not very popular to fans or managers in the 1880s. This was partly because commentators favored “headwork” from pitchers with a scientific approach

to their craft, but also because when the batter struck out, nothing happened in the field. The same was true of baserunners who were not a threat to do anything after reaching base. They put no pressure on the defense, and thus created no excitement for spectators.

The result of all this was that teams put a high value on men who could create excitement in the field. That is what fans paid to see, and so that is what teams tried to give them. Players with great speed were always in demand; in fact, sometimes, wealthy supporters of the teams offered prizes to the men who stole the most bases during a season. The same was true of those with great defensive range who could track down balls in the field and prevent hits. When newspapers described the attributes of a player, they generally discussed the man's batting skill, defensive ability, and baserunning reputation, without indicating that they regarded any of these categories as more important than the others. Not just for men who played the field, either. Observers even rated pitchers in these areas of skill. Sometimes, managers declared their intent to have a "baserunning team," indicating that many believed emphasizing swift men on the base paths was a legitimate strategy to achieve victory.

Because of these beliefs, the level of physical fitness of the nine was always an important consideration for managers and owners. Players must stay in good shape, or be "in the pink of condition," in order to perform up to the expectations of the spectators. Men who were "ice wagons" might cost their clubs money if the cranks believed they were paying for inferior baseball played by out of shape athletes. As a result, teams did many things to encourage their men to be in top condition, because ticket receipts depended on it. As with alcohol, a well-conditioned nine would win more games, and that helped draw fans, but the real fear was that fans would refuse to come to the park to see players that could not keep up with the opposition athletically.

As a result, even before opening day, teams took action and expended money to get their nine ready to play ball. Players did a variety of things in the off-season, some more conducive to successful ball playing than others. Most returned to their home cities for the winter. Others would participate in exhibition tours through the southern states, California, or even more exotic locales such as Cuba, where warmer winter weather allowed them to continue playing and stay in shape for the next season. Come March, some teams would embark for southerly climes as a group, such as the Chicago White Stockings, who made an annual pilgrimage to Hot Springs, Arkansas in the late 1880s to work into shape.

When March came around each year, and it was time for players to gather for training purposes, sportswriters followed the preparatory habits of their home club as best they could. As *Chicago Daily Tribune* and *The Sporting Life* reporter Harry Palmer stated about the 1886 White Stockings, “Several of them, notably [Silver] Flint, [Ned] Williamson, [Tom] Burns, and [Abner] Dalrymple will have to drop a few pounds before they can get around the bases in their old-time form, but the majority are all solid bone and muscle and ready to play the best ball of their lives.” Palmer went on to supply his readers with a before-and-after table of player weights. Displaying progress that would make good TV advertising for a modern diet plan, Ned Williamson, Jim McCormick, and Cap Anson dropped an average of eight pounds in just two weeks of training, while George Gore and King Kelly sloughed off five each. However, Palmer did not stop there. His readers also learned the exact physical measurements of each White Stocking. Captain Anson, for instance, sported a 41.75-inch chest, 14.75-inch biceps, 14.75-inch forearms, 26-inch thighs, 16.75-inch calves, and stood six-foot-two. Ace pitcher John Clarkson, in comparison, measured a scrawny 37.25, 13, 12.75, 23, 14.25, and five-foot-nine, respectively.¹

¹ “Remlap’s Letter” Remlap, *The Sporting Life*, April 14, 1886, 5.

Regarding the health and conditioning of the White Stockings, shortstop Ned Williamson reported that the players ran between three and eight miles daily, with the result that “all of the big fellows are rapidly reducing, and the ‘lightweights’ are gaining in flesh.” Demonstrating the marginal knowledge of most people regarding medicine in the 1880s, Williamson also praised the waters at nearby Sulphur Springs. “The curative properties of the waters here are really wonderful, as demonstrated in several cases of rheumatism. Last Wednesday a big fellow weighing close upon 200 pounds arrived here, and was apparently so lame that he could hardly walk with the aid of crutches, and Saturday he won a hundred-yard race from Anson.”²

Also reflecting marginal medical knowledge, patent medicines, unfortunately, figured in the training regimens of some players. Ed Swartwood, primarily an outfielder who played in the American Association in the 1880s, praised the benefits of *cascara sagrada* (a laxative obtained from tree bark) as an all-purpose weight loss drug. “This remedy is easy and sure, and if Bill Taylor and Hardie Henderson took a dose every day for three weeks then they could truthfully say to all the world: ‘I’m in great favor.’ It beats walking all hollow, for all you have to do is to take a few doses daily and sit down and watch the fat evaporate.”³ Nor was this dependence on quack medicine new to baseball in the 1880s. When umpire “Honest” John Kelly was still a player, with the Manchester, New Hampshire club in 1878, towards the end of the season he suffered from “malaria of a malignant type” and so after the season he departed for a health resort in the South. His admirers in the Granite State saw him off with a fur-lined overcoat and seven bottles of Swift’s Secondary Syrup on his way to a hot springs.⁴

² “The Sporting World” NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, March 27, 1886, 9.

³ “Pittsburg Pencillings” Circle, *The Sporting Life*, March 27, 1889, 5.

⁴ “Another Famous Speech” Charles Foley, *The Sporting Life*, February 16, 1887, 1.

Williamson certainly numbered among the “big fellows” attempting to reduce his store of reserve adipose at Hot Springs in 1886. In earlier years, his athletic abilities had been first-class. In 1882, when the White Stockings held contests for the top baserunning speed and distance throwing among their players, Williamson won both, circling the bases in 14.75 seconds and heaving the ball 396 feet.⁵ Things had changed a bit by 1886, however. Having a less-than-svelte official playing height and weight of 5’11”, 215 pounds, by the end of the 1886 season Williamson tipped the scale at a rotund 227. For 1887, then, he tried a preemptive approach to getting in shape. Stopping in at White Stockings headquarters before embarking for the Natural State, he astounded all present with his chiseled physique. As Harry Palmer, with liberal use of stereotyping, put it, “when he left here last fall he was almost Falstaffian in appearance, with a paunch like an alderman, a face like a Dutch brewer, and a heavy, swinging gait like any other than that of an athlete.” By early March, however, Williamson was eager to show off his makeover. After he “swelled his biceps and stuck out one iron-muscle leg for examination,” Palmer pronounced the new, 197-pound shortstop “one of the biggest, squarest, whitest men that ever picked a ball off the diamond.”⁶

The extra physical preparation certainly helped Williamson. His slash line improved from .216/.339/.335 to .267/.377/.437, his OPS+ rose from 95 to 114, and he hit more doubles, triples, and home runs than he had in 1886 despite a similar number of at bats. Most tellingly, perhaps, his total of stolen bases rose from 13 to 45. Besides his new training regimen, observers also credited his refusal of strong drink for the improvement. “Ned Williamson hasn’t touched a

⁵ “Chadwick’s Chat” Henry Chadwick, *The Sporting Life*, February 6, 1889, 3.

⁶ “From Chicago” Harry Palmer, *The Sporting Life*, March 9, 1887, 4. Palmer, as did several other writers of the time, turned the word “white” into an adjective to describe a person’s honesty. This is a not-too-subtle reminder of the power and pervasiveness of racism in Gilded Age baseball.

drop all this season and has become an enthusiastic advocate and supporter of Spalding's temperance theory. . . . Ned has also made many new and firm friends of a better class than he ever had in the old days, when he thought of nothing but having a good time."⁷

With Williamson now in prime condition, someone else training at Hot Springs (joining the White Stockings were a handful of players employed by other clubs) had to take the ribbing for his resemblance to a Chaucerian friar. That man turned out to be Bill Phillips, Brooklyn's first baseman. "The proud title of alderman should be transferred from him [Williamson] to Old Bill Phillips. Bill's companions have nick-named him Budweiser, which is not exactly to his liking."⁸

Not to be outdone, the Boston Beaneaters followed the same procedure of letting their fans know the size and conditioning of various members of their nine in 1886. "[Jack] Burdock is the most evenly and best developed man of the team . . . [Bill] Stemmyer is the tallest man . . . and the heaviest . . . he has also the greatest lung capacity, 340 cubic inches, and the largest hip. [Sam] Wise has the largest calf . . . the youngest player is [Billy] Nash, and the lightest is [Tom] Poorman, 135 pounds."⁹ They could not compare physically to the club the Detroit Wolverines fielded that year, however. "The Detroits are the biggest set of men ever gathered into one team, Manning being the only medium-sized man in the team. In Brouthers, White, Thompson and Twitchell the team has giants, while Rowe, Richardson, Hanlon, and Bennett are very large, heavy men. . . . Wherever they go the Detroits evoke praise for their fine physical appearance."¹⁰

To provide perspective on what constituted a large man in the Gilded Age, according to their officially listed playing heights and weights, Dan Brouthers stood 6' 2", 207 pounds, and

⁷ "Notes and Comments" NA, *The Sporting Life*, September 7, 1887, 3.

⁸ "The Chicago Players" Eli, *The Sporting News*, March 26, 1887, 5.

⁹ "Notes and Comments" NA, *The Sporting Life*, April 14, 1886, 5.

¹⁰ "Notes and Comments" NA, *The Sporting Life*, April 21, 1886, 5.

Sam Thompson the same. Deacon White was 5'11", 175, although being 38 years old by this time, he may well have been heavier than the official tally, one writer stating about him, "Jim White may be getting old, but if he is as frisky on the ball field, as he is at the table he improves with age,"¹¹ and Twitchell measured 6', 185. Jack Rowe was 5'8", 170 pounds, Hardy Richardson 5'9", 170, equal to Ned Hanlon, and Charlie Bennett was 5'11", 180. Jim Manning, the "medium" man, stood 5'7" and weighed 157 pounds. For comparison, the tallest player in the American Association was "Long" John Reilly who, like Brouthers and Thompson, stood 6'2".

Going a step further, and possibly a step too far, Detroit's cranks even knew the hat and waist sizes of their nine for 1887. For example, catcher Charlie Bennett wore a 7.125-inch cap, with a waist of thirty-five inches. True to his nickname, "Big" Sam Thompson required a 7.25-inch hat and a 36.5-inch belt; not to be outdone, "Big" Dan Brouthers needed a 7.25-inch cap and sported a waistline of thirty-eight inches, the greatest girth on the team. In comparison, twenty-year-old pitcher Pete Conway was a mere twig, featuring a 32.75-inch waist.¹²

When the Baltimore Orioles reported for training in 1887, they looked to take after their National League brethren from the City of the Straits and find large, strapping men of impressive physical stature. Success crowned their efforts, as "all the members of the Baltimore team are remarkably-built men, and not a man measures less than thirty-seven inches across the chest." The measurements of Baltimore's nine went from young Phenomenal Smith's thirty-eight inches to the Redwood-like 42.75-inch trunk of the aptly named James "Jumbo" Davis.¹³ Davis had a reported playing height and weight of 5'11", 195 pounds, which made him a large man indeed in

¹¹ "Dunlap At Atlanta" Atlanta, *The Sporting News*, April 23, 1887, 4.

¹² "Detroit Dotlets" MAT, *The Sporting Life*, February 16, 1887, 5.

¹³ "Notes and Comments" NA, *The Sporting Life*, April 6, 1887, 5.

1887. Jumbo, “our friend of the large pedal extremities,” also earned a reputation for a reluctance to slide into bases, and during practice for the 1887 season he belly-flopped into one slide such that he “drove the canvas so far into the soil that you couldn’t see it with a telescope.”¹⁴

That same year, the Cleveland *Plain Dealer* gave its nine the rather lukewarm endorsement that the Blues had more uniformity in size than any other team in the American Association. However, it did remember to give a little praise to the players’ conditioning, saying that they were “a pretty stalwart and muscular lot of men” who were, as every team that has ever existed has been in April, about to play some of the best ball of their lives.¹⁵ For 1888, the team showed improvement in this regard, as some of its new blood were large players. “Nine of them . . . are above the ordinary size, and . . . four are giants.” The men who opened the season with the team averaged 67 inches in height and weighed an average of 171 pounds.¹⁶

Similarly, Louisville looked to beef up its nine for 1887 and find men in the prime of their careers to do battle with the American Association that year. Of the sixteen men in the organization in mid-April, none were older than twenty-nine, and all but four were twenty-six or younger. While they boasted no 200-pounders such as Dan Brouthers or Sam Thompson, the club did have an average weight of 167 pounds, earning the remark that, “this is not a Jumbo team, but it is by no means a lightweight aggregation of players.”¹⁷

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¹⁴ “From Baltimore” TTT, *The Sporting Life*, April 6, 1887, 6.

¹⁵ “Notes and Comments” NA, *The Sporting Life*, April 6, 1887, 5.

¹⁶ “Brunell’s Budget” F.H. Brunell, *The Sporting Life*, April 11, 1888, 4.

¹⁷ “From The Falls City” XXX, *The Sporting Life*, April 13, 1887, 7.

It was important to differentiate, however, between mere size or weight, on the one hand, as compared to finding men in the pink of condition, as sportswriters phrased it in the Gilded Age. As the stories regarding Williamson, Davis, and others show, being big was only useful if it produced on-field benefits and corresponded to performance. Mere fat, on the other hand, drew scorn from commentators. Things got so bad for the Brooklyn Grays in September of 1887, the players took heat for carrying too much reserve adipose tissue and the sporting press began referring to them as “ice wagons.” “The prodigal son has returned to Brooklyn, but he will not chew juicy steaks cut from the traditional fatted calf. In fact the Brooklyn Club is not killing fatted calves for its players at present. It will plane down some of the extra and flabby tissue on its players first. People around Gotham think that the Brooklyn Club would play better ball if the men were not so fat.”¹⁸

This focus on overweight players and conditioning was especially important to observers, given the value that 1880s baseball’s conventional wisdom placed on speed, fielding range, and baserunning skill. The New York sportswriter describing the Brooklyn players’ lack of fitness spoke for many, therefore, when he wrote, “it seems a pity that such a ball town as Brooklyn undisputedly is should have such a slow-moving team. Moly Hoses, how slow they are.”¹⁹ A prime offender was reserve outfielder Ernie Burch. Described as “one of the largest men in the profession,” one teammate in Brooklyn described the flabby left fielder by saying, “see that man sitting over there watching the clock? Well, that man is none other than Burch, our left fielder. He will sit in that chair until dinner-time and he will keep one eye on the clock the whole time.

¹⁸ “New York Mention” George Stackhouse, *The Sporting Life*, September 21, 1887, 1.

¹⁹ Ibid.

He may get up and move around a little, but the chances are that he will not. He is lazy and the biggest feeder on the team.”²⁰

While Burch stood, officially, five-foot ten and weighed 190 pounds, larger still was an outfielder who played in New York named Mike Slattery. Truly a large man during the late nineteenth century, his official playing measurements were six-foot two and 210 pounds. Like Burch, however, New York sportswriters were not convinced his eating habits always served him well. “I hear that since Esterbrook ceased to be a Giant Slattery has taken his place as the champion feeder of the team. The New York players have frequently remarked that Slattery is nearly always left at the plate when the rest of the team leave the dining room. In this city where Slattery is well known his entrance into a restaurant generally creates a stampede among the waiters.”²¹

Players who were not just thin, but truly skinny, also earned notice for this fact, although without the excessively negative connotations that went with being overweight. Dave Foutz, nicknamed “Scissors,” was one such player. The nickname itself referenced his appearance when pitching the ball, and one writer referred to him as “his slivership,” but despite his scrawny appearance, he was successful as both a hitter and a pitcher up until age started to take its toll in his mid-thirties.²²

The fascination with player fitness and size helped contribute to one of the early spoofs in baseball history. Early in the 1887 season, Al Spalding’s Chicago club struggled to field a healthy pitching staff outside of leading hurler John Clarkson, who pitched over 46% of the teams’ innings that season. On May 15, the Milwaukee *Sentinel* ran a special dispatch

²⁰ “St. Louis Siftings” Joe Pritchard, *The Sporting Life*, February 29, 1888, 4.

²¹ “New York News” George Stackhouse, *The Sporting Life*, July 18, 1888, 1.

²² “Baltimore Bulletin” TTT, *The Sporting Life*, March 7, 1888, 4.

describing Chicago's acquisition of a new pitcher from China who stood six-foot-seven-inches. "This collection of bones, muscle, and gristle was none other than Tsang Wong Foo, an athletic coolie from the village of Kwachu, in the province of Kiangtsu, and he is now a skilled baseball pitcher." The dispatch described how Tsang Wong Foo became a baseball prodigy:

A Chinese professor, after some research, discovered that the art of curving a ball in the air was known during the time of Confucius, and that it was merely a primitive form of the art which had been causing tops to travel up hill in China for the last 1,600 years. Aided by these discoveries the professor at once put twenty men into practice at curving the ball according to the regulations of the National Baseball League. The men soon attained wonderful proficiency. After three months of steady practice Tsang Wong Foo was picked out as the best of the lot and at once placed on the market and shipped to Chicago.²³

Not only could Tsang Wong Foo curve a ball around posts to strike a nail into an oak plank, he could do so almost as effectively with his left arm as with his right. Furthermore, he once pitched fourteen consecutive hours without resting. In the States, Tsang Wong Foo would pitch under the name Mike Murphy, according to the article. Unsurprisingly, no one named Mike Murphy, or Tsang Wong Foo, for that matter, appeared on a major league diamond in 1887, but this faked account does demonstrate the connection many baseball observers made between physical stature, proper training, and athletic prowess.²⁴

Spoofs aside, in the 1880s teams and players tried to find ways to prepare physically for the coming season. Some traveled to the South, to Cuba, or to California to work their way into form. Others participated in private workout sessions in their home cities. They called their training haunts gymnasiums, most of which were indoor, an obvious advantage for players wintering in cities such as Chicago or Boston. The practice of renting a gymnasium for practice was already an old one by the mid-1880s. According to a memorandum in the possession of

²³ "A Baseball Giant" NA, *Milwaukee Sentinel*, May 16, 1887, 2.

²⁴ Ibid. The author admits this story might be tangential to the main themes of this chapter, but with a story this goofy, decided that it must go somewhere.

Harry Wright, a member of the legendary Cincinnati Red Stockings team of 1869 (not a direct predecessor of the Cincinnati team of the same name in the American Association, however) but field manager of the Philadelphia Phillies by the mid-1880s, the '69 Red Stockings spent \$71.73 on gymnasium training.²⁵

It was never too early to start training, either. Half a dozen of the Pittsburgh Alleghenys, namely Pud Galvin, Sam Barkley, George “Doggie” Miller, Charles “Pop” Smith, Bill Bishop, and Bill Kuehne, entered the gymnasium to begin training for 1887 in early January.²⁶

(Incidentally, this shows that some players, between training and exhibition tours, really did make a year-round profession out of baseball, contradicting those who wanted to slash their salaries because they only “worked” six or seven months of the year.) Many players considered some gymnasium practice especially important in preparation for the 1887 season. That was the year that baseball’s rules makers finally did away with the rule allowing the batter to call for a high or low pitch from the pitcher. Now, the pitcher could deliver the ball for a strike anywhere between the knees and armpits of the batter. Some hitters, used to calling for either a high or low pitch, spent hours in practice to make sure they could adapt to the change in regulations.

Similar to the way that all major league baseball teams hold spring training today, in the 1880s entire clubs would enter the gymnasium together to get their work in before the season began. In 1887, St. Louis Browns players had to arrive in town by March 10 so the players could trim down to their fighting weight, although some, such as outfielder Curt Welch, were early birds. He had been playing hand ball at Sportsman’s Park since January.²⁷ Likewise, the Washington Nationals got their marching orders to arrive during the first two weeks of March

²⁵ “The Quaker City” NA, *The Sporting News*, February 19, 1887, 1.

²⁶ “From the Smoky City” CMB, *The Sporting Life*, January 12, 1887, 1.

²⁷ “From St. Louis” Pritchard, *The Sporting Life*, January 12, 1887, 2.

1887, where the entire club took part in daily exercise.²⁸ Brooklyn owner Charles Byrnes wanted his men in training by mid-March in 1887, stating that they would do their work under the careful eye of an experienced training specialist, Jack McMasters.²⁹

This idea of hiring experts to train the nine seems a popular one. Pittsburgh, in their 1887 gymnasium work, considered engaging a well-known local sprinter named George Smith to work with its players on their baserunning form.³⁰ Likewise, when the Cleveland Blues entered their gymnasium preparatory to the 1887 season, “the men will all be here by March 20, and will at once be put into the Cleveland Athletic Club gymnasium on Frankfort street. There under the eye of [manager] James A. himself, and the hand of Dick Collier and Bob Bell, the gymnasium instructors, the men will go through a daily course of work suited to their positions, baths, and rubbing.”³¹

Baseball’s premier player-mascot(see chapter eighteen), Hugh Nicol, who “although small in stature, is a veritable Hercules in strength,” was devoted to conditioning himself and others. Once, he supposedly threw a 315-pound man in a wrestling match in late 1886 (he reported a playing weight of all of 145 pounds, so the reader can believe the tale or not) while serving as a “professor” at a gymnasium in Rockford, Illinois. He accepted a challenge from Cincinnati’s “Kid” Baldwin for a wrestling match that same off season (a good match, as Baldwin had a reported playing weight of 147 pounds), and went into training with a noted wrestler known as “Strangler” Lewis in order to prepare himself properly.³² “I am in first-class health, and feel like a race horse; I tip the beam at exactly 155 pounds, and am as stout as a bull .

²⁸ “The Capital City Team” NA, *The Sporting News*, January 15, 1887, 5.

²⁹ “The Brooklyn Team” NA, *The Sporting News*, February 12, 1887, 1.

³⁰ “From the Smoky City” CMB, *The Sporting Life*, February 16, 1887, 1.

³¹ “From Cleveland” F.H. Brunell, *The Sporting Life*, February 16, 1887, 2.

³² “Base Ball Wrestlers” NA, *The Sporting Life*, January 5, 1887, 1.

..”³³ The much-anticipated bout never took place, however. It seems Baldwin backed out at the last moment, although he did spend time training with a pair of African Americans noted for their grappling prowess. Sadly, however, when *The Sporting Life* gave its report of their training methods, the paper chose to depict the speech of the black men involved with the broken English typical in portrayals of black people at the time. This was a noted contrast to its renditions of the speech of white immigrants, whose words, however accented in fact, normally appeared in perfect English in the paper’s columns.³⁴ (Baldwin was another great character of 1880s baseball, as was often true of players who earned the sobriquet “Kid.” The police arrested him once, along with fellow ballplayer Buck Ewing and 103 other spectators, for attending an illegal cockfight. His indiscretion cost him a \$27 fine.³⁵ There was also the episode in November of 1887 where, after some excess tipping in a Cincinnati saloon on Vine Street, he sustained a bloody nose when punched in the face by a fighter from that city. Baldwin invited the boxer “to the outside” where they duked it out in the streets. Baldwin got the best of the man, according to reports.³⁶)

Shortstop Bill Gleason, who played in St. Louis, Philadelphia, and Louisville in the second half of the 1880s, was another devotee to fitness and the gymnasium. So much so, that he constructed his own workout room at his home in St. Louis. “He walks and runs about fifteen miles every day, and he puts in the rest of his spare time handling Indian clubs, dumb-bells and other gymnasium apparatus. Bill has a little gymnasium of his own.”³⁷

³³ “From St. Louis” Pritchard, *The Sporting Life*, January 12, 1887, 2.

³⁴ “From Cincinnati” O.P. Caylor, *The Sporting Life*, January 19, 1887, 4.

³⁵ “From Cincinnati” Ren Mulford, Jr., *The Sporting Life*, February 16, 1887, 4.

³⁶ “The Kid and Jem Smith” NA, *The Sporting News*, November 26, 1887, 1.

³⁷ “St. Louis Siftings” Joe Pritchard, *The Sporting Life*, February 29, 1888, 4.

Similar to gymnasium training was engaging in hand ball. By 1888, many baseball observers started to believe this was the very best way to prepare during the off-season. Cap Anson in Chicago played frequently. Brooklyn's management was so convinced of hand ball's virtues that during March and April of 1888, they engaged the court at the Brooklyn Hand Ball Club in the mornings to limber up their nine. Not only that, they also paid for "the services of champion Phil Casey to train the players in hand ball each morning while field practice is not available and on rainy days in the early spring months. [Pitcher Adonis] Terry has been training this way for some weeks already, and he has gained the greatest advantage in it."³⁸

Another option, besides entering a gymnasium in the northern states to prepare for the season at had, was a tour of the South, playing exhibition matches in that region. The White Stockings, as already noted, liked Hot Springs, Arkansas, as their training ground. The Detroit Wolverines went further south in 1887, staying at the Hotel Lanier in Macon, Georgia, starting on March 8. The plan was to train there on the local grounds for ten days, play some practice games with the Macon semi-pro team, then play exhibition games at Mobile, New Orleans, Savannah, Charleston, Birmingham, Decatur, Alabama, Memphis, Nashville, and Louisville, ending the tour in the Falls City on April 15. From there, manager Watkins first considered taking his men further west, to Topeka and St. Josephs, before returning home to begin their championship schedule in the National League, but instead decided more games against northern competition would be a better idea. Therefore, he scheduled some additional games with La Crosse to open their new grounds, Wisconsin, Minneapolis and St. Paul, and finally Milwaukee, a trip of nearly two months covering about 4,000 miles.³⁹ When the tour got underway, the

³⁸ "Chadwick's Chat" Henry Chadwick, *The Sporting Life*, March 7, 1888, 3.

³⁹ "Detroit's Programme" MAT, *The Sporting Life*, January 19, 1887, 1; "Detroit Dotlets" MAT, *The Sporting Life*, February 16, 1887, 4.

Wolverines pummeled most of their opponents from the Sun Belt. For one game with Savannah, no one bothered to keep a box score, as everyone considered the outcome a foregone conclusion before play even began. The Wolverines played twenty-three games on the tour and won all of them, most of them easily, although the Memphis club lost by a single tally on two occasions.⁴⁰

Not all clubs thought this a good idea, however. That same spring, Pittsburgh eschewed a Southern tour because “there is no money in it,” instead deciding to tough out the colder April weather in the Smoky City and play a series of games against Syracuse, Buffalo, Toronto, and Utica, with Binghamton possibly replacing Utica should that be necessary. Pittsburgh manager Horace Phillips believed fourteen games against these clubs would give his nine plenty of time to shake off whatever rust had accumulated over the winter.⁴¹ Pittsburgh’s ownership, recognizing the need for something to help its team in the early months of the year, however, considered the idea of constructing a state of the art gymnasium on its grounds at Recreation Park. “A handsome building will be erected at Recreation Park, in which there will be a complete gymnasium outfit, together with bowling alleys, tennis courts, etc. A cinder path for spring runners and cyclists will be provided.”⁴²

Some could not decide if touring the southland was the right decision or not, as they recognized both the value and drawbacks of preseason travel. Jack Kerins of Louisville, when asked in 1888 if a southern trip worked to the team’s advantage, confessed that he was not sure. “We never make any money by them. In fact we usually lose a little, but I suppose they serve a good purpose in taking the kinks out of the boys’ muscles, and forcing them to overcome the stiffness of their winter rest. But still this exercise is sometimes injurious, as it may be too early

⁴⁰ “The Southern Trip Over” MAT, *The Sporting Life*, April 20, 1887, 5.

⁴¹ “From the Smoky City” CMB, *The Sporting Life*, January 19, 1887, 1.

⁴² “Notes and Comments” NA, *The Sporting Life*, January 26, 1887, 3.

and too severe. There have been many cases in which a man has been injured for an entire season by it.”⁴³

Even if taking an exhibition tour did not pay, however, financially speaking it was better than traveling to some Southern locale to work into shape. In 1887, the Chicago White Stockings debated whether they should repeat their 1886 trip to Hot Springs, Arkansas. The team’s captain, Cap Anson, preferred the idea. Based on prior experience, Anson believed that playing a heavy slate of exhibition games ran the risk of getting players banged up and injured before the championship season even began, thus handicapping the White Stockings unnecessarily. Team owner Spalding, on the other hand, tended to favor a tour of games. The team might not profit from these games financially, but the players got live practice and the club made some money for its time and effort. A trip to Hot Springs or some other training ground offered no remuneration to the club at all, and Spalding figured that losing a little money was better than losing a lot of money.⁴⁴ In 1887, at least, Anson’s views prevailed, and the White Stockings traveled south to Hot Springs just as they had the previous year.

As Anson correctly realized, besides the monetary considerations, playing too many exhibition games risked injury to important members of his nine before the season even began. John Morrill, player and captain for the Boston Beaneaters, had exactly this in mind when he decided against a tour of the Sun Belt in 1887. When the team returned from their 1886 series of exhibitions, second baseman Jack Burdock had a bad leg, third baseman Billy Nash a sprained ankle, utility player Sam Wise an injured arm, pitcher Charlie Buffinton a bad arm, and utility player Ezra Sutton contracted malaria. Morrill also said that in future travels, he would lean more on the new players and give the older, more established players more time off. His

⁴³ “Louisville Laconics” JA, *The Sporting Life*, December 26, 1888, 5.

⁴⁴ “What Shall the Harvest Be” NA, *The Sporting Life*, February 16, 1887, 4.

preferred method of preparation was the gymnasium, and he blamed the injuries of '86 on too little time working out before taking the field.⁴⁵ The Philadelphia Athletics of the American Association felt the same way. They, too, entered the gymnasium known as the Elite Rink in March of 1887 in order that they would have “no lame arms, sore shoulders or other defects in the players.”⁴⁶

* * * * *

Although probably a good practice, all things considered, not all players liked gymnasium work, and this could lead to discord in the ranks, or further rancor between players and management, even before the championship season began. When discussing the prospects of entering the gymnasium for training in mid-March for 1887, John Morrill noted that workhorse pitcher Charlie Radbourn wanted nothing to do with such things as preparatory training. “He don’t think much of it, and don’t care to begin work until he can get out on the diamond.” Morrill was not overly distressed in Radbourn’s case, however, noting, “He looks as though he could step in to-morrow and pitch through a game without the slightest inconvenience. Fishing, hunting and quiet living have done good work for the great twirler this winter.”⁴⁷ Similarly indisposed towards gymnasium practice was the “Gladiator,” Pete Browning. “Old Pete’s no sucker; he wasn’t raised in Morehead, and he hain’t goin’ up against any of them dodgasted pulleys or put on any of them damn sweaters until he’s got to. When the sun shines on

⁴⁵ “From the Hub” Mugwump, *The Sporting Life*, January 26, 1887, 2.

⁴⁶ “The Philadelphia Players” NA, *The Sporting News*, March 5, 1887, 1.

⁴⁷ “From the Hub” Mugwump, *The Sporting Life*, January 26, 1887, 2.

both sides of the fence Pete, old boy, will be there, teaching all the guys how to line ‘em out.”⁴⁸

In order to help reduce player hostility towards a training regimen, Manager Gus Schmelz, in Cincinnati’s employ by 1887, tried to set a personal example of proper training for his men in order to reduce the animosity of reporting for duty in mid-March. “This will mean real gymnasium work for them, as their manager is ‘stuck’ on that sort of preparatory training, and works as hard himself as if he were preparing for the diamond himself instead of merely coaching.”⁴⁹

For every Radbourn, however, there was a player like Ed Morris. Morris, in fact, went to extreme lengths to ready himself for the 1888 season. After a disappointing 1887 campaign, in which his performance dropped off considerably as rule changes regarding the delivery of pitches, plus sore arm troubles, hurt his work in the box, he vowed to get in shape to redeem himself. In a move about as extreme as a ballplayer could undertake in the Gilded Age, he swore off spirituous liquors and joined the local Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA). “He has not, however, become religious, his object in joining the association being to get the use of its gymnasium.”⁵⁰ While “the rumor that Ed has joined the temperance army is a little premature” Morris said “he will take the pledge on New Year’s Day, however, and he means to keep it.”⁵¹ Morris, true to his word, did so.⁵² He also commenced an outdoor fitness program. “Morris is taking long walks daily to reduce his weight, with great success. His clothes are already too big for him. He has dropped 14 pounds since he started.”⁵³

⁴⁸ “Notes and Comments” NA, *The Sporting Life*, February 27, 1889, 4.

⁴⁹ “Notes and Comments” NA, *The Sporting Life*, January 26, 1887, 3.

⁵⁰ “Among the Ball Tossers” NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, December 18, 1887, 27.

⁵¹ “Pittsburg Pencilings” Circle, *The Sporting Life*, December 28, 1887, 4.

⁵² “Pittsburg Pencilings” Circle, *The Sporting Life*, January 11, 1888, 2.

⁵³ “Pittsburg Pencilings” Circle, *The Sporting Life*, January 18, 1888, 6.

A few rebel managers disdained the gymnasium, however. Philadelphia Quakers leader Harry Wright was one. He preferred a tour of exhibition games, and had little interest in the gymnasium except as a last resort. “It is not the present intention to put the Phillies to gymnasium practice. ‘Give me ten day’s practice in the field,’ says Mr. Wright, ‘and the other teams can have their month’s practice in a gymnasium. In my opinion one day on the field is nearly as good as one week in a gymnasium.’”⁵⁴ He got his way in 1887, as his club embarked on a southern trip, beginning in Charleston on March 26.⁵⁵ Wright’s top player, Harry Stovey, agreed with his manager. “A couple of days in the field will do more for a player than a month in a gymnasium or rink.”⁵⁶

A team had to be careful on the schedule and timing of its southern tour, however, according to Wright. He declined to head to the Sun Belt before the 1888 season because while “he has not lost faith in the beneficial effect of the Southern climate and knows of no better means of getting into condition,” he feared to return to Philadelphia too early and leave too many days between his time spent in the South and the opening of the season. This was because “the transition from the warm South to the North at a time when the latter has not yet entirely shaken off its winter garb, is hazardous and calculated not only to immediately undo all the work accomplished by again stiffening up the men, but it is apt to render them more than ordinarily liable to colds and inflammations.”⁵⁷

Perhaps, as northerners moving into the southern climate, they were more vulnerable to malaria as well. The Mason-Dixon Line is the approximate boundary north of which mosquitoes carrying the *Plasmodium vivax* form of malaria cannot survive due to insufficient temperatures.

⁵⁴ “The Quaker City” NA, *The Sporting News*, February 19, 1887, 1.

⁵⁵ “Local News” NA, *The Sporting Life*, February 23, 1887, 5.

⁵⁶ “Philadelphia News” NA, *The Sporting Life*, April 13, 1887, 4.

⁵⁷ “Philadelphia Pointers” NA, *The Sporting Life*, February 22, 1888, 2.

While doctors knew what malaria was, and how to treat it (quinine from the bark of the cinchona tree) by this time, they did not learn that mosquitoes were the infection vector until somewhat later.⁵⁸ One baseball veteran observed that “there is a good deal more danger of sickness coming upon a player who has been South and returned than there is to the one who remains North and goes into such preliminary practice in his native climate.”⁵⁹ For 1888, then, Wright and his men instead headed for Cape May, New Jersey, where “he routs every man of them out at six o’clock, and they give each other salt water baths with water just brought in from the cold surf. Vigorous rubbing with rough towels follows and at half-past six the squads start off for a thirty minute brisk walk over the beach to the Government life station.”⁶⁰ They did all this work under the watchful eye of Trainer Taylor, with the result that “the men are gradually reducing” their winter stores of flesh.⁶¹

Yet another option was to play exhibition games with other major league baseball teams, especially if they were located nearby. Each year, the Philadelphia Quakers squared off with the Philadelphia Athletics for local supremacy. The two St. Louis teams, the Browns and Maroons, did the same as long as the Maroons lasted. New York City featured both the Giants and Metropolitans until 1887, plus Brooklyn just a short distance away, giving several possibilities for preseason tune ups.

Physical training of some kind was especially important for older players hoping to hold time at bay for one more year and stay in the game. Ezra Sutton was one such player. Born in Seneca Falls, New York, just one year after the famed Seneca Falls Convention for women’s

⁵⁸ Charles Mann, *1493: Uncovering the New World Columbus Created*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2011). See chapter three for more details about malaria and the United States.

⁵⁹ “Caylor’s Comment” O.P. Caylor, *The Sporting Life*, February 29, 1888, 3.

⁶⁰ “The Philadelphia Team at Work” NA, *The Sporting News*, March 31, 1888, 1.

⁶¹ “The Quaker City” Quaker, *The Sporting News*, March 31, 1888, 1.

rights in 1848, by 1887 Sutton was a grizzled veteran looking to convince onlookers he still belonged on the diamond. His hitting talent was still clear, but during the 1886 season, his defensive range came under fire from newspaper observers in Boston. (He might have countered that the club tried to play him in the outfield part of the time, where he had played all of eight games in his career up to that point.) He tried to reassure the doubters in the winter of 1886-1887 by sending frequent letters to friends in the Boston press describing his advanced state of fitness achieved through working at his sawmill in Palmyrs, New York.⁶² Tim Murnane reported that, when the Boston club went into gymnasium, Sutton was the hardest worker present, and that “he looks just as young today” as when he first broke into baseball with the Cleveland and Middletown, Connecticut clubs in the early 1870s.⁶³ Murnane would know, as he was also a member of the Middletown Mansfields, posting a .360 batting average as the team’s first baseman in 1872.

Any kind of training might help. Many types are familiar to readers today. Walking, lifting dumbbells, playing hand ball, and other gymnasium exercises were nothing special to players in 1880s baseball. Physical labor for wages worked, too, as Ezra Sutton demonstrated. There were novel approaches, however, that would probably not pass muster in modern baseball training circles. Washington Nationals pitcher Frank “Shadow” Gilmore took things to an extreme in his efforts to enhance his physique and improving his hitting for the 1888 season. In his attempt to bulk up, “he realizes that he can strengthen and harden those muscles brought into play while batting by the judicious use of Indian war clubs for a brief period daily, without reducing or impairing his ability as a pitcher.”⁶⁴ (Essentially, an Indian war club was a club with

⁶² “A Rattling Program” NA, *The Sporting News*, January 22, 1887, 3.

⁶³ “Tim Murnane’s Chaff” Tim Murnane, *The Sporting News*, April 2, 1887, 1.

⁶⁴ “Washington Whispers” Bob Lerner, *The Sporting Life*, January 18, 1888, 6.

a ball-shaped end to add weight, similar to swinging a bat but with the weight of the object distributed more unevenly.) Perhaps he figured that, with a career batting average of .049 entering 1888, things could only get better, but incredibly, his club-swinging routine actually hurt his performance at bat, as he got just one hit in forty-one tries in 1888, for a .024 batting mark. He left major league baseball after that season, boasting a career batting average of .043 in 163 trips to the plate.

Rather than swinging Indian war clubs, some baseball observers tried to apply science, or what passed for science in the 1880s, to training techniques. The premier manual of training and injury treatment in 1880s baseball was by Dr. Alexander Leuf, titled *Hygiene for Base Ball Players: Being a Brief Consideration of the Body as a Mechanism; the Art and Science of Curve Pitching; a Discussion of the Causes and Treatment of the Disabilities of Players; With a Few Practical Hints to Club Managers*. This book, published in 1888, contained descriptions and diagrams of all manner of motions and training techniques associated with the game. The author was no quack. Leuf was an M.D., was the director of physical education at the University of Pennsylvania and Swarthmore College at the time he published his book, was an honorary member and the ex-secretary of the Brooklyn Pathological Society, and had worked at St. Mary's hospital in Brooklyn. In addition, some sporting papers quoted him and his research in their columns, so people in baseball recognized his name and put stock in his views on training.

Leuf advised treating the arms of pitchers in various ways. Liniments were inappropriate for treating sore muscles because "In the first place, they are utterly useless, as any number of impartial and disgusted sufferers can testify." Likewise, players should avoid rubbings, massages, or any other passive motion activity to treat soreness, because these served no beneficial purpose, either. Leuf advised elevating the arm, believing that the excess blood

producing the pressure on the muscle would recede due to gravity, thus relieving the soreness. The player might alternate this with immersion in hot water.⁶⁵

More severe pains called for more severe measures. “In severer cases, where there is an excess of inflammatory products, the best remedy is mild galvanism.” This meant treatment with electricity. “Mild galvanism is very gratifying and should be done in the evening, so that the nutritive changes induced by the passage of the current shall act undisturbed till the next morning.” It was important that only experts performed this procedure, however. “It is well, however, to bear in mind that very great harm can be done with electricity if not judiciously employed. This can only be done by skilled physicians. No ball player or advertising ‘electrician’ can do any good for they can never be certain as to the kind of electricity to be used, its quantity and intensity, as well as the duration of its application.” This last warning was necessary because, apparently, some players actually did carry their own batteries with them for treatment while traveling to road games.⁶⁶

For general muscle injuries, hot water was, by far, the best treatment in Leuf’s eyes. A player might combine hot water with plaster bandages and continue to play. Again, mild galvanism could help as well. Leuf recognized the ballplayers tended to heal from soreness and mild injuries more quickly than the population at large, and credited this to better nutrition, which may well have been true. These treatments only worked for muscles, of course. Broken bones and issues that were more serious could only heal with time.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Alexander Leuf, *Hygiene for Base Ball Players: Being a Brief Consideration of the Body as a Mechanism; the Art and Science of Curve Pitching; a Discussion of the Causes and Treatment of the Disabilities of Players; With a Few Practical Hints to Club Managers*, (Philadelphia: A.J. Reach & Company, 1888), 57.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 58-59.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 60.

Leuf's book also offered advice on how to train and avoid injury in the first place. He advised constant muscular exercise throughout the playing season, the equivalent of what we would call weightlifting. Doctor Leuf also realized that not all baseball activities used the same muscle groups, and so recommended different training regimens depending on the position played. He put great stock in exercise machinery, especially one manufactured by the company of the same man who owned the Philadelphia Quakers, Al Reach. This machine, featuring weights manipulated via pulleys and a handle for the player to grip, was a simplified version of today's Universal Gym or Bowflex type of apparatus. Reach's machine cost ten dollars and came with an illustrated pamphlet demonstrating thirty-one different exercises. Leuf's book illustrated the various exercise movements as well, and mentioned what muscles each helped to exercise, sometimes including how performing a certain exercise would aid the ballplayer. There was even an attachment for the machine where the player could hook up a bat and practice swinging against mild resistance.⁶⁸

In addition to the Reach exercise machine, Leuf advocated a few more activities. He favored flexibility and endurance over power, cautioning readers that exercise should be slow, and that it was best to stop before great fatigue set in. He approved of training with Indian war clubs but cautioned that they should be light and swung slowly. Work with dumbbells was acceptable, but again, Doctor Leuf advised light weights for exercises where the elbow remained stiff. Besides weights, Leuf agreed with those who preached hand ball as the premier form of exercise. "This will reduce the amount of fat to a minimum within two or three weeks, besides hardening the muscles and getting one fully past the period of soreness and stiffness."⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Ibid., 63-95.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 95.

The book closed with general advice on other aspects of staying in top form during the season, some quite sensible, others more dubious. When addressing the question of whether the gymnasium or outside practice was preferable, Leuf wrote, “Gymnasium work in the winter has its use, but proper base ball practice is far better and makes the former not only unnecessary but undesirable.” He also advised, for example, practicing twice a day even on game days, although only for thirty minutes for pitchers and catchers, while eating at precisely 7 AM for breakfast and 12 noon for lunch. The book discouraged play in cool temperatures, due to the greater risk of injury. It concluded with sections on how to achieve proper digestion (players should not eat before active work, must chew food carefully, and should not eat fried or greasy foods), get adequate amounts of sleep, and the importance of abstaining from alcohol and smoking.⁷⁰

* * * * *

While physical training was a popular preparation for the season, there were other, less scientific, things that players did to try to stay in condition. The players most likely to sustain serious injury in 1880s baseball were the pitchers and catchers, which is part of the reason why they often received higher pay than other players, due to the greater risks associated with their positions. Throwing a baseball at high velocity is a very stressful thing for the arm’s muscles. The history of the game in the 1880s and beyond is strewn with pitchers who performed admirably for a few seasons, but then suffered serious arm injuries of one kind or another and had to leave major league baseball due to those injuries reducing their effectiveness. This was especially true in the late 1880s, when a typical team featured three main pitchers, with maybe a

⁷⁰ Ibid., 95-121.

fourth or fifth man on the team that pitched once in a while (they were usually referred to as “change pitchers”), and pitchers generally pitched the entire game, no matter how many innings it might last or pitches they might throw. Pitchers who developed sore arms tried any number of things to cure their ailments and get back into condition to enter the pitcher’s box.

One of the most popular “cures” for a sore pitching arm was a brief shock of electricity. Several pitchers employed this tactic. As Pittsburgh pitcher Ed Morris said in 1887, “my arm is in good shape again . . . I think electricity did it much good. The doctor gave me a dose that knocked me off a chair. He said a woman could stand two cells and he gave me forty-two.”⁷¹ In 1887, former pitcher Fred Goldsmith tried a much more extreme remedy to get his arm back in condition. Having last pitched in the majors in 1884, out of desperation he submitted to the Moxa treatment, which meant, “He has had the muscles of his arm blistered with a hot iron, similar to the treatment used on the strained tendons of race-horses.”⁷² It did not work, at least not to the point where any major league teams were willing to sign him. Still not willing to face the inevitable, by 1888 Goldsmith was in Hot Springs, Arkansas, hoping the supposed curative properties of the local waters would do the trick for him. As the Chicago White Stockings also trained at the springs, he hoped to impress Chicago’s Captain Anson and get a shot at a contract that way, however unlikely that seemed on a White Stockings club that had already signed about twenty men that winter. The waters did not help, sadly, any more than the hot iron did, and he never again pitched in major league baseball.⁷³ He stayed in the game, however, serving as a

⁷¹ “Pittsburg Pointers” Circle, *The Sporting Life*, September 21, 1887, 4.

⁷² “Notes and Comments” NA, *The Sporting Life*, April 27, 1887, 11.

⁷³ “Notes And Comments” NA, *The Sporting Life*, February 22, 1888, 5; “Detroit Dotlets” MAT, *The Sporting Life*, March 14, 1888, 2.

substitute umpire in the American Association in 1888 and a regular umpire the next year until losing his position for his role in the Brooklyn-St. Louis fiasco described in chapter seventeen.⁷⁴

Louisville thought it had a better answer for sore arms than electricity or hot irons. In 1887, the club employed Professor William Patterson, noted for his knowledge of magnetic healing. “He has treated the arms of Hecker, Chamberlain and Ramsey with great success, and restored each to good condition when the aspects were very discouraging.” He had so much luck (one hesitates to use words such as skill or success) treating the Louisville pitching staff that the team considered employing him on a full time basis to keep its nine in good condition for 1888.⁷⁵

With all these risks to pitchers, it made sense that those hurlers with a reputation for durability were in high demand. In November of 1887, the Cleveland Blues signed a new pitcher, Edward “Jersey” Bakley, away from the Rochester club. *The Sporting News* described the transaction by noting that Bakley “has plenty of speed and skill, and never has a sore arm.”⁷⁶ The description was apt, at least for 1888, as Bakley started 61 games for the Blues that season and logged 532 innings in the pitcher’s box.

Catchers were also at great risk in 1880s baseball. The practice of wearing a glove to catch pitches caught on slowly throughout the decade, but even with a glove, the catcher’s hands were only a stray pitch or foul tip away from jammed or broken fingers. Without much other protective gear, foul balls often hit various parts of the catcher’s body, as well, with all the bumps, bruises, and broken bones one would expect on seeing the human body struck by a solid object traveling eighty or more miles per hour. Catchers, like umpires, were starting to wear masks for their protection, but these were rather primitive in design and only partially fulfilled

⁷⁴ “Goldsmith a Substitute Umpire” NA, *The Sporting News*, July 28, 1888, 1.

⁷⁵ “From The Falls City” XX, *The Sporting Life*, September 7, 1887, 4.

⁷⁶ “Cleveland Signs Bakley” NA, *The Sporting News*, November 19, 1887, 1.

their purpose of protecting the face. To cite just a few of many examples regarding the marginal effectiveness of these devices, in 1887 a foul tip struck Louisville catcher Lave Cross and “glanced his mask and peeled off a portion of the scalp. The wound bled freely, but Cross pluckily finished the game.” Part of the reason Cross was in the game in the first place is that Louisville manager John Kelly had another of the club’s backstops, John Kerins, guarding first base because the team needed his bat but Kerins’s hand was too tender to catch pitches.⁷⁷ Similarly, that same year the New York Metropolitan struggled to keep a full compliment of catchers healthy. “Catchers [Bill] Holbert and [Andy] Sommers are disabled, and [Jim] Donahue is the only catcher left. Either Rooney Sweeney or Tom Deasley will be pressed into service.”⁷⁸ This shows that having three catchers on hand was an absolute minimum, with four preferred. Like New York, in 1889 the Kansas City Cowboys found themselves in similar straits. “Jimmy Donohue is all out of shape just now, and is unable to catch. Reynolds’ hands, too, are sore, and Gunson is not in the best of trim. Consequently Hoover is compelled to do most of the back stopping.”⁷⁹

Like pitchers, some catchers earned a reputation for durability, and along with a catcher’s ability to handle pitchers, durability, even more than hitting talent, tended to make or break the catcher’s reputation with the press. Take Doc Bushong, for instance. He had a reputation for catching regularly and being especially durable. In 1888, he played in just 69 of Brooklyn’s 140 games, but that was still good enough to place second in the American Association for games caught that season. In 1885 and 1886, he led the Association in games caught both seasons,

⁷⁷ “From The Falls City” XX, *The Sporting Life*, September 7, 1887, 4.

⁷⁸ “The New York Clubs” NA, *The Sporting Life*, September 14, 1887, 1.

⁷⁹ “Less Exultant” Freeman, *The Sporting Life*, May 22, 1889, 1.

catching in 191 of St. Louis's 251 games in those two years. In fact, in 1886 Bushong became the first catcher to catch 100 games in a championship season, going behind the bat 106 times.

Because of these risks, men who could take the abuse were always in demand. Hoping to find a dependable man to spell Charlie Bennett as catcher in 1888, the Detroit Wolverines signed Cal Broughton, in large part because of his constitution. "He is just the man that is wanted to catch Conway, who is the hardest of all the Detroit pitchers to handle. Broughton is a man that can stand any amount of punishment, and the chances are that he will have an opportunity to make a martyr of himself."⁸⁰ This is why newspapers often made a big deal of things when a catcher caught several games in a row, while they rarely did so for other players. It was hard to stay healthy for long when going behind the bat, and so any streak that exceeded ten games or so merited mention for being exceptional.

Other things could ruin a player's physical condition, besides injuries sustained on the field. Off-field incidents occurred with distressing frequency, as well. Fights brought on by excessive alcohol consumption were foremost among these, as already noted. Accidents happened, too, such as when one player had his hand pecked while preening one of his trained fighting birds. One other issue, barely hinted at in the press, given the straight-laced public morals of the Gilded Age, was the visitation of prostitutes and the resultant risk of venereal disease. Baseball players were, as a group, certainly in the high-risk category for this behavior. Although no one mentioned this vice by name in baseball chronicles, professional ballplayers were in the prime of life, sometimes married but often not, frequently on the road for long stretches away from their families or friends, often intoxicated, and almost completely immersed

⁸⁰ "The World's Champions" Dan, *The Sporting News*, December 10, 1887, 5.

in an environment valuing “manly” traits such as physical and sexual prowess, with the resultant peer pressure to conform to group expectations.

Once again, we must thank sportswriter O.P. Caylor for having the nerve to bring up this topic in print. While never quite using words such as prostitute explicitly, and certainly not naming any specific players guilty of this behavior, he did discuss the issue in an 1887 column for *The Sporting Life*. He wrote, “It is an evil which cannot be discussed in public prints as it deserves. I refer to disease which players so often contract and which, if it does not wholly destroy them as ball players, unfits them in their profession for months.” He continued, “Many notable cases of this kind could be cited; and dozens of cases of ‘malaria,’ ‘sprains’ and ‘Charley-horses’ so-called have been nothing else but a shrewd invention or pretension to hide from the management the diseased condition of the player who has found himself in a physical form which wholly unfits him for doing his duty to the club and earning his salary.” It was Caylor’s belief that, “This evil is a more general one than is commonly imagined, and though it has broken up some of the best and most important players in the various clubs, it is confined almost entirely to the lower strata of the profession” who “seek the dangerous society of the class of people from whom these evils are contracted, and who are found after night on the prominent streets of large cities looking for victims among such men whose desires it does not take much in the way of physical temptation to excite.” He ended with the apologetically worded statement, “It is the most destructive form of intemperance with which the profession has to deal, and I may therefore be excused if my pen has dealt with it too plainly” but also suggested that each club “have at its call the services of a reputable physician to whom every member of the team shall be sent for examination. So soon as any of these cases of malaria, sprains or Charley-horse begin to

develop; and from the day that such player becomes unfit to fully do his professional duty by reason of the disease named he should have his salary shut off.”⁸¹

The Methuselah of baseball writers, Henry Chadwick, sustained Caylor on this matter. He stated, in regards to players maintaining their condition over the course of a season, “over-eating is bad, excessive drinking is worse, but the worst of all is the dissipation of the habitués of brothels. Many of the serious sicknesses of players last season was due to this latter cause. Caylor has done a good thing in calling attention to it. As manager of two teams he knows whereof he speaks.”⁸² Later, Chadwick repeated this belief, although regrettably, he did not provide many precise details. “The saloon and the brothel are the evils of the base ball world at the present day; and we see it practically exemplified in the failure of noted players to play up to the standard they are capable of were they to avoid these gross evils.”⁸³ As Chadwick also edited Al Spalding’s yearly baseball guides, it was no surprise when the 1889 guide stated, “The two great obstacles in the way of the success of the majority of professional ball players are wine and women. The saloon and the brothel are the evils of the baseball world at the present day.”⁸⁴

A few other stories corroborate Caylor and Chadwick. For example, just prior to the 1888 season, one of the Cincinnati Red Stockings, catcher John O’Connor, got himself into trouble on this score. “John O’Connor, one of Cincinnati’s catchers, was arrested the other day and fined \$15 and costs for drunkenness. A disreputable woman caused his arrest.”⁸⁵ Likewise, when the Philadelphia Athletics saw several members of their nine drinking heavily in 1888,

⁸¹ “Caylor’s Comment” O.P. Caylor, *The Sporting Life*, November 9, 1887, 5.

⁸² “Chadwick’s Chat” Henry Chadwick, *The Sporting Life*, December 7, 1887, 5.

⁸³ “Chadwick’s Chat” Henry Chadwick, *The Sporting Life*, November 14, 1888, 3.

⁸⁴ NA, *Spalding’s Official 1889 Base Ball Guide*, 58.

⁸⁵ “Notes And Comments” NA, *The Sporting Life*, February 22, 1888, 5.

some of the men “kept late hours and still others consorted with women to such an extent that they became too enervated to even stop a thrown ball on the bound.”⁸⁶

Pittsburgh manager Horace Phillips explained part of the reason why so few of such cases came to light in the sporting press. Team managers often shielded their players from the unwanted attention, because if word got out regarding the company some players kept, the damaged to the team’s, and baseball’s, reputation would be immense. The “respectable” fans each club wanted to court would hardly attend games if they thought the men they were watching play were all drunkards, gamblers, and associates of loose women. The only reason Phillips revealed even this much was he was angry with one player he had shielded from such unwanted attention in the past when that player ungratefully pressed Phillips for more money in salary negotiations. “There is one man whom I have protected in many a scrape and kept it away from the newspapers, and in reward he abuses me. Why, I found him in the grand stand in New York with a well-known woman whom he had represented to be his sister, and the boys know there are dozens of other scrapes in which matters have been kept quiet through my efforts.”⁸⁷

Usually, teams succeeded in keeping the sexual habits of their players out of the news for the reasons described by Phillips, but not always. Just before the 1889 season opened, two Columbus players, pitcher “Wild” Bill Widner and outfielder Ed Daily, decided to examine the nightlife in Baltimore. “Columbus is already on another voyage of discovery. Widner and Daily made a scientific investigation that occupied all of Tuesday night. In the morning, at the urgent request of Manager Buckenberger, they contributed fifty dollars each to the club coffers.” At first, observers surmised that the men must have been guilty of a drinking spree, as Buckenberger had promulgated a strict code of conduct for his team that called for a fifty-dollar

⁸⁶ “Philadelphia Pointers” NA, *The Sporting Life*, September 5, 1888, 6.

⁸⁷ “Pittsburg Pencilings” Circle, *The Sporting Life*, November 21, 1888, 3.

fine for the first drinking infraction. Buckenberger decided to clear his players on the drinking charge, but in the process, had to own up to what the men had actually done. “Buck says but for this one indiscretion the boys are all behaving themselves as well as he could desire, and he wants it distinctly understood that Daily and Widner are not drinking, but in this case were a little too susceptible to female charms, and he thought it prudent to check it for once and all time.”⁸⁸

Buckenberger soon had his hands full with drinking players as well, with pitcher John Weyhing earning a suspension for lushing during the first week of the season. According to one of the sportswriters following the team, he should have known better than to attempt to hide his infraction. “Columbus has had so many drinking bum ball players on her salary list in the past years it is too late in the base ball day for any player to think now that we don’t know a lush when we see one.”⁸⁹

* * * * *

Baseball teams of the Gilded Age were surprisingly modern in that they placed great value on physical training and athleticism. The techniques used in achieving this status might not be what a twenty-first century athletic trainer would choose, but the goal was the same. Teams wanted men at a high level of physical ability and preparedness before beginning each season, and took significant measures to help their players reach this goal.

⁸⁸ “Baltimore Bulletin” TTT, *The Sporting Life*, April 24, 1889, 5. I was unable to discover whether Widner’s nickname comes from his behavior off the field or his control of the ball while pitching, but given that his career walk rate was a rather reasonable 2.4 per nine innings, I am tempted to conclude that the former is the truth.

⁸⁹ “Columbus Chatter” F.W. Arnold, *The Sporting Life*, May 1, 1889, 5.

The key difference, as we have seen, is in the thinking of why this was necessary. In the present day, where many players train year round, have nutritionists, lift weights consistently, take steroids and other drugs, and so forth, the goal is to keep these finely tuned athletes on the field. A team needs its star players on the field in order to win, and teams that win draw fans. Muscular players with home run power are also good drawing cards, and baseball's powers that be tend to adjust rules to keep the home runs flying and the scoreboards lit up, as anyone who watched the game in the 1990s and 2000s remembers well. If all this fails, they simply instruct the companies that manufacture their baseballs to wind the ball tighter so it will fly further, or move the fences of their ballparks a few feet closer to home plate. The game today is not a game of motion. Pitchers and their pitching coaches now prize the ability to strike out batters, while the better hitting coaches laud their players for their patience in taking pitches and working the pitcher for walks if they can. Batters put the ball in play for the fielders to handle less frequently in the 2010s than they ever have before. Some, Adam Dunn for instance, do so only about half the time they come to bat.

Neither of these things, either pitchers attempting to pile up strikeouts or batters trying to draw walks by waiting out the pitcher, were popular in 1880s baseball. Writers often referred to batters who did take a lot of pitches as waiters. Observers did not exactly look down on the strategy, but for most players, taking pitches was more a means to an end, that of getting a good pitch the player thought he could hit hard. In the same vein, when the owners discussed rule changes each year, the goal was to see more hitting and more action. This required athletic men who both hit the ball hard when at bat and could chase and field it proficiently when on defense, and hopefully run the bases with vigor as well. Fans wanted to see action, and action helped draw the fans to the park. In order for a team to draw well, having players meeting all these

specifications was almost a requirement. Thus, teams spent much money and energy looking for the best ways to keep their players in prime condition throughout the year, and did so in order to keep their finances in prime condition throughout the year.

Chapter 8

Umpires and Gilded Age Baseball

One thing has never changed in baseball and probably never will: the running battle between players and umpires over calls made on the field. In 1886, one of the National League's new teams, the Kansas City Cowboys, reportedly posted a sign at their home park reading, "Please do not shoot the umpire. He's doing the best he can."¹ Second baseman Johnny Evers, of the famed Tinker to Evers to Chance trio, once said, "my favorite umpire is a dead one."² Players of the 1880s frequently behaved as if they agreed. Prior to the 1877 season, the leagues did not hire their own umpires; the home team provided them, with the provision that the visitors agreed with the choice. Unsurprisingly, the visitors and the public alike tended to lack faith in the integrity of this arrangement. Beginning in 1877, therefore, leagues began to hire their own men for the job.³

Because each league supplied its umpires and paid their salaries, they sought to economize whenever possible. As a result, there was only one umpire on the field at the time,

¹ "Threetees' Meditations" TTT, *The Sporting Life*, August 11, 1886, 1; "Caught on the Fly" NA, *The Sporting News*, August 23, 1886, 5. This appears to be a play on the sign "Please don't shoot the piano player, he's doing the best he can" reported by Oscar Wilde on a tour of the West.

² Quote taken from <http://research.sabr.org/journals/johnny-evers>, accessed May 20, 2014. Evers, known as "the Crab," was infamous for his combative personality. Former umpire Bill Klem described him by saying "His tongue knew neither fear nor control when he was crossed, and he thought everybody within eye or ear range was crossing him." Klem's quote from same website.

³ Thorn, *Baseball in the Garden of Eden*, 165.

rather than the four typical of major league baseball today. The Players League in 1890 was the first league employing two umpires for the same game on a regular basis, although the 1887 World Series between the Detroit Wolverines and St. Louis Browns also tried the two-umpire experiment. Even though most observers considered the innovation a successful one, neither the National League nor the American Association followed up and employed two men for their regular season contests as late as 1889. Regardless of who appointed the umpire, however, players' opinions of umpires did not improve markedly. They simply shifted the justifications for their anger from the umpire's favoring the home team to his disliking their own club.

The decision to use just one umpire also meant that umpire had a devilishly hard time seeing everything happening on the field all at once. Calling balls and strikes, rushing to bases to make calls on tag plays, and trying to judge if outfielders had caught the ball on the fly or on one bounce were all challenging when just one person had to make every call. Those are just the obvious problems. In addition, in the 1880s umpires had to watch baserunners and make sure they actually touched bases rather than cutting the corner. They had to watch the fielders, too, to make sure the same ball hit into the outfield was the one the fielder threw back to the infielders during the play, rather than one the fielder had hidden somewhere convenient. Umpires also had to keep the game moving, never an easy job when players spent so much time arguing and questioning even routine calls. This was especially problematic when it was late in the day, one team was ahead, and that team initiated stalling tactics so the umpire would call the game because of darkness and award them a victory. With so many potential things to keep track of, being an umpire was extraordinarily difficult.

While it is true that players and umpires have always had their disagreements, it seems these disagreements were more heated, violent, and disruptive to the game in the 1880s than they

have been at nearly any time since then. Both major leagues, not to mention the sportswriters who wrote about the games in the newspapers, considered the umpire issue one of the most important albatrosses cursing baseball. Writers constantly mentioned the performance of the umpire, occasionally complimentary but usually derogatorily, in recent games their team had played. The primary reason for this concern about umpiring was not what the reader might think, however. It is true that observers wanted officials who were as accurate as possible, to make sure the players decided each game rather than the umpire, but that was not the main reason the issue was so important. Instead, it was about bringing in more money. With good reason, team executives believed that poor umpiring led to raucous, obnoxious, and occasionally violent crowds. Spectator violence, in turn, turned off the middle class patrons with money that teams wanted to attract to their grounds on a consistent basis. Therefore, the game required quality umpires who would “give satisfaction” and keep the game under control, so the crowd stayed under control and the “better class” of spectators attended with greater frequency.

Rather than being unusual, rows with umpires, or potential rows, happened several times each season in major league games and numberless times in minor league ones. Every team wanted to avoid situations such as that in Cleveland in mid-August 1889. When umpire Phil Powers made a controversial call regarding a Cleveland baserunner not touching a base, the home crowd exploded in anger. “A dozen jumped into the field and started in the direction of Powers. Three policemen with drawn clubs and all the members of the Cleveland ball team hastened forward and by sharp talk and some force drove the indignant spectators back.” While they accomplished this, however, “the field in the meantime was filling up, and 500 men were yelling their opinion of the umpire in chorus, and a hundred of them were shaking their fists and brandishing their canes at him. For ten minutes it seemed that a riot was certain, but Powers

finally called the game and returned to a room under the grand stand.”⁴ Furthermore, the members of the crowd thirsting for Powers’ blood were not simply drunken hoodlums.

“Prominent among them were several leading businessmen, whose gray hairs and gentlemanly appearance were strangely out of place in such surroundings.”⁵

With such incidents occurring with frightening regularity, one Columbus writer described the important role of a good umpire by writing, “This fact does more to advance the game and bring out the best class of patrons than good ball playing does, for there is a large class of people who will not go to a ball game in this city, and I presume it is so in other places, simply because the howling hoodlum element is so disgustingly offensive when an objectionable umpire is in charge.”⁶ A Cleveland scribe echoed this opinion after the above-mentioned incident with Powers, writing, “Patrons of the better class are becoming disgusted and will not go to a game on account of the uniform discrimination against the home team. The wretched work of the present League staff has cost the Cleveland Club hundreds if not thousands of dollars in the past month or six weeks.”⁷

Nearly every week, it seems, a major or minor league umpire was either in a fracas or narrowly avoiding one. The problem was, most likely, far worse than it appears, because there were sundry leagues around the country, and the sporting press could not cover all of them, but just between the major and leading minor leagues, it seems as if umpires were not safe anywhere. During an 1886 game in the International League, for instance,

⁴ “The Latest News” NA, *The Sporting News*, August 17, 1889, 1.

⁵ “Cleveland Cullings” Commodore, *The Sporting Life*, August 21, 1889, 5. F.H. Brunell, the former Cleveland correspondent for *The Sporting Life*, had recently moved to Chicago to be head editor of the sports department there.

⁶ “Cheerful Columbus” F.W. Arnold, *The Sporting Life*, August 14, 1889, 5.

⁷ “Cleveland Cullings” Commodore, *The Sporting Life*, August 21, 1889, 5.

Tuesday last, Umpire West displayed such bad judgment that not only the Rochester nine, but over 2,000 people kicked badly. About every person one would meet would say 'West is drunk' or "West is crooked.' Horner, pitcher of the Rochesters, lost his head, as West was bound to give him the worst of it, and after the game struck West, but did not get a chance to follow it up . . . West . . . was told he could never umpire again in this city. He certainly deserved all he received from Horner, but the latter should have selected a more secluded spot to have punished him.⁸

This shows that the press often helped incite rage against baseball's officials. Nor did the conditions under which the game took place always make much difference. Another incident from 1886 is a case in point. That year, St. Louis Maroons manager Gus Schmelz opined, "we have been outbatting and outplaying the Browns, but have lost the majority of the games for the reason that they have been given nearly all the close decisions and had all the best of the umpiring." The games that drew Schmelz's public ire were not even regular contests, but exhibition ones.⁹ Teams amplified their disgust when championship season games were on the line. In 1886, in the midst of a heated pennant race between themselves, Chicago, and New York, a Detroit Wolverines sportswriter blamed a mediocre eastern road trip on poor officiating. "The narrow margin by which most of the games were lost shows that the Detroits were playing ball, and doubtless but for cross-eyed umpiring the results would have been reversed."¹⁰

Players disputed umpires' decisions verbally, of course, but also physically at times. Baiting umpires, known as "kicking" or "bulldozing," knew few limits. The fact that, sometimes, team owners would pay fines on behalf of their abusive players surely encouraged the practice.

In the St. Louis–Louisville game of April 21 [St. Louis captain Charlie] Comiskey tried his usual bull-doing tactics on the new umpire, Ben Young. He opened with a tirade of abuse and was promptly fined \$25. That wasn't enough for Comiskey, and he kept the thing up until his fines amounted to \$75, which either he or Von der Ahe will have to

⁸ "Bancroft's Club" Genesse, *The Sporting Life*, August 18, 1886, 3.

⁹ "Notes and Comment" NA, *The Sporting Life*, April 21, 1886, 5.

¹⁰ "Wolverines Not Dismayed" MAT, *The Sporting Life*, August 18, 1886, 1.

pay, as Umpire Young is determined to enforce payment owing to Comiskey's inexpressible blackguardism and insolence.¹¹

Apparently, Von der Ahe did sometimes pay fines for his men. "Mr. Von der Ahe informs us that he only paid those fines imposed by the American Association under protest, and it is so recorded. He proposes at the close of the season to test the matter in court."¹² This same St. Louis team also refused to continue a game on July 31, 1886, in protest of an umpire. To a man, they sat on the bench and refused to play. Only the intervention of Von der Ahe got them back into position in time to avoid a forfeit.¹³

Players in Wilkesbarre, Pennsylvania, were similarly indisposed to take part in a game in August of 1886, this time because they could not agree on who would officiate. The visitors from Williamsport wanted one man, while the hosts from Wilkesbarre insisted on another. Rather than play the game, players on both sides decided to go home, rather than submit to the choice of the opposition. The Wilkesbarre club was so hot, it considered withdrawing from its league over the fiasco, though in time cooler heads prevailed, the teams worked out their differences, and took the field the next day.¹⁴

The various leagues tried to uphold the authority of their umpires at times. The Southern League, coming off an 1885 season in which umpire abuse was constant and vicious, gave their officials greater authority to deal with troublemakers in 1886. "Umpires have been so far much better treated by Southern League audiences than was the case last season. . . . They have most rigid orders as to kicking, and as there is a proper way to settle differences of opinion they are

¹¹ "News Notes" NA, *The Sporting Life*, April 28, 1886, 4.

¹² "Notes and Comment" NA, *The Sporting Life*, August 18, 1886, 5.

¹³ "Caught on the Fly" NA, *The Sporting News*, August 9, 1886, 5.

¹⁴ "Notes and Comments NA, *The Sporting Life*, August 18, 1886, 5; "Harmony Once More" NA, *The Sporting Life*, August 18, 1886, 1.

instructed to fine, and fine heavily, every kicker.”¹⁵ One Southern League umpire not getting better treatment was the seemingly misnamed Umpire Merrett, who continued to “give the most genuine and merited dissatisfaction. He is the most densely ignorant and pitiable weak umpire that has ever visited Nashville. He does not give either club the best or worst of his decisions, but makes both alike, and the audience as well, very tired. Whenever he makes a decision, the players feel like sitting down for a while, just because they are so faint.”¹⁶

* * * * *

Although most press coverage of umpires was negative, observers showed a measure of sympathy towards some men who had earned an upright and honorable reputation. They might occasionally even sympathize with a man who normally performed well but made the occasional, unavoidable mistake. In an 1886 game, umpire Charles “Chick” Fulmer called out Charlie Bastian on a pitch that appeared wide of the plate.

Bastian deliberately leaned over, drew a line a foot wide of the plate, measured the distance on his bat and then walked to the players bench, showing the rest of the team how far in his opinion the third strike had been wide of the plate. From the reporters’ stand the third strike did look rather dizzy, but Fulmer’s judgment on balls and strikes is so superior to the work of other umpires seen there this season that his few mistakes should be overlooked.¹⁷

Those umps who were confident enough to take the constant abuse, and even give some back, might earn the grudging admiration of the press, at least temporarily. “Umpire [Ben] Young has impressed me very favorably. One of his highest recommendations is that he sits

¹⁵ “Notes and Comments” NA, *The Sporting Life*, April 28, 1886, 5.

¹⁶ “Caught on the Fly” NA, *The Sporting News*, August 8, 1886, 5.

¹⁷ Ibid.

very promptly on the kickers.”¹⁸ One St. Louis correspondent described umpire John McQuade’s work in early 1887 by writing, “McQuade shows no improvement in his umpiring over last year, as that would be an impossibility. Mac is a good one, and he has a large number of admirers in St. Louis.” Others disagreed, of course. After McQuade had a tough game in Brooklyn early in 1887, a New York sportswriter stated that “some of his decisions were awful” and that “I wish the rotund gentleman [Pritchard] from Missouri could have been present, he might have changed his mind.” A few days later, the writer’s view of McQuade sank further, as he wrote, “McQuade again distinguished himself by his ridiculous decisions. I can’t understand how people can call him a good umpire. He is not considered so here.”¹⁹ Later that year in Cincinnati, McQuade gave a decision contrary to the wishes of the Cincinnati crowd by calling Hugh Nicol out on an attempted steal of home plate. The crowd threw beer glasses at him and McQuade eventually required the protection of the Porkopolis police force. Among the consequences of this fiasco was that Cincinnati made the humane, although less lucrative, decision not to sell beer at their grounds for a while.²⁰

Like Pritchard, Henry Chadwick allowed the occasional bit of praise to grace his writing, as he enjoyed the work of former pitcher Lon Knight when Knight worked a game in Brooklyn in 1887, saying, “the best umpiring I have seen for sometime past has been that of Lon Knight at the games at Washington Park. More impartial decisions I have never seen rendered.” This was high praise indeed, considering Chadwick had seen umpires at work going all the way back to

¹⁸ “Caylor’s Letter” O.P. Caylor, *The Sporting Life*, April 28, 1886, 1.

¹⁹ “From St. Louis” Joe Pritchard, *The Sporting Life*, April 20, 1887, 4; “From New York” Regular, *The Sporting Life*, April 27, 1887, 6.

²⁰ “Little Nick’s Great Slide” NA, *The Sporting News*, August 27, 1887, 1; “From Cincinnati” Ren Mulford, Jr., *The Sporting Life*, August 31, 1887, 3.

the Knickerbocker club's games in 1845.²¹ Chadwick, to his credit, was one of the baseball commentators who rarely criticized the work of baseball's officials, often admonishing his contemporaries when they tried to blame umpiring for poor play by their hometown team.

A select few even garnered near-universal admiration for their abilities, such as Bob Ferguson. A player in the 1870s and 1880s, Ferguson could boast of many baseball innovations. He may have been the game's first switch-hitter, although it seems he did not switch sides of the plate depending on the pitcher, but based on how he felt or what the situation dictated. A manager as well as a player, Ferguson pioneered a defensive strategy increasingly in vogue among modern major league teams—that of shifting his infield and outfield to counter hitters with a tendency to pull the ball. Because of his defensive prowess as a player, Ferguson also owns one of baseball's greatest nicknames: “Death to Flying Things.” He had been around the game for so long that by the 1880s, one paper referred to him as “the Methuselah of the diamond field.”²²

Interestingly, Ferguson's career as an umpire almost ended before it began, due to his combination of honesty and an exceptional temper. In 1873, while playing for the Brooklyn Atlantics, he also served as a substitute umpire. During one game, he accused an opposing player of dishonest play, believing the player, Civil War veteran Nat Hicks, was conspiring with gamblers to throw the game. Gambling was an all too frequent plague on baseball in the 1870s, and Hicks' team, the New York Mutuals, was notorious for crooked play even given the standards of those years. When Hicks called Ferguson a liar, Ferguson snatched up a bat and

²¹ “Chadwick's Chat” Henry Chadwick, *The Sporting Life*, April 20, 1887, 5.

²² Information and quotes regarding Ferguson are from his SABR biography page, <http://sabr.org/bioproj/person/df8e7d29>, accessed May 20, 2014, except the quote calling him Methuselah, which comes from “Arranging the League Games” NA, *New York Times*, March 8, 1885, 2. Methuselah was a biblical figure who lived to 969 years of age.

broke Hick's arm. As fans stormed the field to take revenge, police escorted Ferguson away from the mob. He apologized afterwards, and said he was through with umpiring.²³

In later years he later reconsidered, however, umpired all of the 1885 season, and became one of the game's best. "Umpire Ferguson had a number of close calls to make in yesterday's game. Some of them were unfavorable to the home team, but nevertheless they were just."²⁴ Likewise, by 1886, the Louisville *Courier-Journal* referred to him by writing, "perhaps the greatest and most successful umpire that ever regularly serves was Ferguson . . . he is a man of iron nerve, strictly honest, and cold and unsociable as an iceberg. He avoided players, who always held him in fear."²⁵ *The Sporting Life* reported that, upon making his 1886 debut as umpire for the Brooklyn-New York match up on April 24, "the new Association umpire, Mr. Ferguson, made his first appearance, which, to all, was a genuine surprise, not a soul having been informed of the quick work done by Wyckoff and Byrne in securing his services. He was cheered when he appeared, and gave excellent satisfaction."²⁶ Even Chris Von der Ahe in St. Louis, a man always on the lookout for, and in his own mind often finding, conspiracies against his beloved Browns, once said of Ferguson, "Ferguson gave us a square deal all around. He appears to want to do the square thing always regardless of the opinion of the home crowd."²⁷

Ferguson did not stay on the field all season in 1886, however, only a brief part of it. The New York Mets tabbed "Death to Flying Things" as their new field manager after they relieved Jim Gifford of his duties a mere seventeen games into the 1886 season, and Ferguson stayed at

²³ Ferguson's SABR biography. Nat Hicks later opened a "sporting house" in Hoboken, New Jersey, featuring "six billiard tables, four bowling alleys, a first-class racquet court, with rotary fans, electric lights, and all the other modern improvements." "Notes and Comments" NA, *The Sporting Life*, August 25, 1886, 5.

²⁴ "Notes of the Game" NA, *New York Times*, August 29, 1885, 3.

²⁵ Ferguson's SABR biography, accessed May 20, 2014.

²⁶ "The Brooklyn Beat the Mets" NA, *The Sporting Life*, April 28, 1886, 1.

²⁷ "The Boss President" NA, *The Sporting News*, June 9, 1888, 1.

this post until he was relieved in turn when the Metropolitan's stumbled to just six wins in their first thirty games in 1887. While largely unsuccessful as a manager, he did not lose his touch for umpiring in the interim, as one Baltimore writer wrote in 1887, "although it is almost impossible to make a comparison in percentage of correct decisions in umpiring, yet certainly Bob Ferguson appears to reach the highest limit."²⁸

He was a man of extreme honesty and bravery, which no doubt served him well in 1880s baseball. Another story relates how Ferguson once single-handedly prevented gamblers from stealing a game. According to O.P. Caylor, "It was a game he was anxious to win, and the team had the game well in hand, when some of the players began to dump, with the evident intention of losing the game. Ferguson saw it and knew what was coming." Grabbing a bat and striding over to the box where the gamblers sat betting he said "Say, you blankety sons of Adam, you're the fellows who have bought up my men and have paid them to rob people for you. I want to say right here that I can whip the entire gang of you if you'll come down here one or two at a time, and I'd be very much obliged if you'd give me a chance at the lot of you." Finding no takers, "in a minute or two Bob bowed low to them, and, turning around, had his nine resume the game. . . . the players who had begun the dump had been intense auditors of what their captain said to the 'Gold Board,' and the consequence was the dumping stopped and Ferguson won the game."²⁹

For those lacking Ferguson's stature, however, violence against umpires, or the threat of it, regrettably was quite common. The first week of the 1886 season was not even finished before *The Sporting Life* reported, "Already there is trouble about umpiring. [Billy] Carlin came near being mobbed in Baltimore; Ben Young had a little trouble in St. Louis; Denny Mack has not given satisfaction and the Athletic and Metropolitan clubs have sent a protest against him to

²⁸ "From Baltimore" TTT, *The Sporting Life*, September 21, 1887, 4.

²⁹ "Caylor's Comment" O.P. Caylor, *The Sporting Life*, May 30, 1888, 4.

Secretary [Wheeler] Wikoff.” Young’s trouble was not just with St. Louis, either. On the season’s opening day, the Cincinnati club played a game that Young umpired under protest because of his decisions regarding when to use a new ball for play.³⁰ Carlin, meanwhile, rather than continue to risk the wrath of the mob, left baseball for a career in local politics, a career “more congenial and remunerative than umpiring,” although by 1887 he had only advanced as far as night superintendent of the city delivery division of the Philadelphia post office.³¹ In May 1886, cranks in Washington threatened the umpire, named Wilson, in their game with a mobbing because of his uncharitable decisions. The local writer for *The Sporting Life* bemoaned the conduct of the home crowd for both moral and financial reasons. “It does not become a public who lay claim to peace and decency to behave in such a manner and it has a tendency to keep the better element away from the games.”³²

Later that year, in the Northwest League, a burly lumberjack felled an ump named Timlin with a blow to the head after a game. “The cowardly brute then seized a bat and would have struck Timlin with it but for the timely interference of the crowd. When arrested he excused himself by saying that one of Timlin’s rulings during the game was unfair.”³³ Things were even dicier in Charleston in August. There, the cranks threatened to kill umpire Edward Hengle after

³⁰ “Notes and Comments” NA, *The Sporting Life*, April 28, 1886, 5. As to the story over Young’s reluctance to use a new ball for play, this is not as trivial a matter as it may seem. Standard practice was to use two balls in a game. If one became unusable then umpires substituted another ball, but not before. As a result, the two balls in play quickly became dirty from rolling through dirt and grass after players struck them, or stained by tobacco or licorice juice that players spat on the ball, and rendered very difficult to see for the hitters in myriad other ways. Therefore, Young’s failure to introduce a new ball that was still white and easy to see worked to the detriment of the hitting team, which in this case was Cincinnati. There were a few situations where an umpire was supposed to remove a ball from play, such as if it became misshapen.

³¹ “Notes and Comments” NA, *The Sporting Life*, September 14, 1887, 6; “Philadelphia News” NA, *The Sporting Life*, October 12, 1887, 2.

³² “From the Capital” WUD, *The Sporting Life*, May 18, 1886, 3.

³³ “Notes and Comments” NA, *The Sporting Life*, August 4, 1886, 5.

a controversial decision at the end of the game resulted in the defeat of the home nine. Only the pleading of Charleston's president saved Hengle from a grisly fate.³⁴ Showing, perhaps, better instinct for self-preservation than for calling balls and strikes, Hengle said he would resign and go home immediately afterwards. He did leave the Southern League, but before the year was out, he resurfaced in the International League, where it seems people were more appreciative of his efforts.³⁵ In fact, prior to the 1887 season, he had offers to officiate for the Western League, the Northwestern League, and the International League, to go along with his application for work in the National League. He ended up on the staff of the Western League.³⁶ Whether or not his work at the Birthplace of Secession was as bad as the incident at Charleston might indicate, however, Hengle was not the worst that Southern League spectators witnessed in 1886. That title belonged to the aforementioned Merritt (spellings of his last name varied), and observers feared for his safety should he end up working games between the two of the league's top contenders, Savannah and Atlanta. "Merritt, now at Memphis, is conspicuous for incompetency, though probably meaning well. One of those brick-proof refuges for umpires will be needed in Atlanta if that official fails to play into Atlanta's hands during the Savannah series."³⁷

Umpires in Atlanta that year never knew what to expect, although expecting the worst was probably the best bet. On August 21, yet another umpire, named McQuaid, had issues there. McQuaid was supposed to work the game between Atlanta and Savannah, but did not appear on the grounds as scheduled. "He claimed that a lot of toughs and hoodlums had called on him at his hotel and threatened to kill him if he officiated. Not caring to be killed he wisely remained

³⁴ "Caught on the Fly" NA, *The Sporting News*, August 16, 1886, 5.

³⁵ "George Washington Bradley" PDQ, *The Sporting News*, September 6, 1886, 1.

³⁶ "Notes and Comments" NA, *The Sporting Life*, February 2, 1886, 3; "Umpires Appointed" E.E. Murphy, *The Sporting Life*, March 2, 1887, 1.

³⁷ "Southern Irregularities" Arm, *The Sporting Life*, August 18, 1886, 1.

away from the grounds.” Was the threat real? Some evidence suggests not, as observers noted that McQuaid stayed at the same hotel, the Kimball House, as the Savannah club, causing speculation that Savannah had asked McQuaid to lay low for the afternoon, hoping to have one of their own men installed as a substitute against the stronger Atlanta nine.³⁸ The Southern League’s ex-secretary believed the charges might have validity, however, pointing out that many teams complained about their treatment in Atlanta.³⁹ The larger point is, however, that things for umpires were bad enough that such a claim on McQuaid’s part carried weight and people took it seriously.

Indeed, in the entire troubled history of the Southern League in the 1880s, there was but a single umpire in whom the entire league had confidence. That man was Tim Hurst, who matriculated below the Mason-Dixon Line in 1889 and, somehow, managed to please everyone despite his Yankee pedigree. “He came unheralded from Pennsylvania, and gave such satisfaction that every city in the League clamored for his services whenever it was possible to obtain them. This is an unusual state of affairs. It is the first time we have ever known an umpire to give entire satisfaction.” This led one paper to remark, “Mr. Hurst must be a wonder to evoke such commendation. Indeed, the man that could give universal satisfaction in the South is a phenomenon. His work in the West will be closely watched, and if he sustains his Southern reputation he will sooner or later be called to a higher field.”⁴⁰

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³⁸ “Gay Times in Atlanta” NA, *The Sporting News*, August 30, 1886.

³⁹ “The Southern League” NA *The Sporting News*, September 20, 1886, 1.

⁴⁰ “A Wonder” NA, *The Sporting Life*, July 24, 1889, 1. Hurst was moving to the Western Association because the Southern League had just disbanded for the remainder of 1889.

While major league baseball might have been a man's game, occasionally female cranks could get just as worked up over umpiring as anyone else. "A lady in the grand stand at Recreation Park last Tuesday was so carried away by Umpire Skinner's poor work, which bore rather heavily against the home club, that she expressed a desire to scratch the hapless Skinner's eyes out. Happily for Skinner she was not in a position to carry out her wish, which was evidently sincere."⁴¹

This woman's reaction seems unusual, however, as most female attendees had a pacifying influence on other cranks. Although "it generally takes a woman some time to master the mysteries of the sport," Brooklyn owner Charles Byrne decided to admit ladies to the ballpark at no cost starting in 1885. "The good effects of the move were at once noticed, and he has been wise enough to keep up the practice ever since. The spectators are now more respectful and careful about the style of language they use in addressing the players and umpire." Although some of the rougher cranks might not like seeing more women at the ballpark, "if other managers would but follow in Brooklyn's footsteps and admit the fairer sex to their grounds, it would not only have a good effect on the game generally, but it would increase the attendance and enlarge the dividends of the club at the end of the season."⁴²

Byrne did decide to start charging admission for women in 1888, after the American Association decided on its hybrid plan whereby the home team had to split some of its gate revenue with the visiting nine. He ended up charging half price to female spectators, but believed this reduced price was well worth it, because "the patronage of ladies invariably increases the attendance of men. 'Stag' gatherings, at ball matches or elsewhere, are miserably dull affairs in comparison to assemblages graced by the presence of the fair sex; and it is in every

⁴¹ "The Local Season" NA, *The Sporting Life*, August 18, 1886, 4.

⁴² "Jim Mutrie Laughs" NA, *The Sporting News*, December 11, 1886, 1.

way to the interest of the professional organizations to do all in their power to have crowds of ladies at the ball matches.”⁴³ Louisville decided it must do the same as Brooklyn and begin charging women for admission, and for the same reasons, although it made cranks in the Falls City unhappy. ‘This announcement has caused much dissatisfaction here. The presence of the ladies has always done a great deal for the game, and it is doubtful whether the new rule will be of financial benefit to the game.’⁴⁴

The Cleveland Blues, once admitted to the American Association in 1887, also tried to lure women to their grounds in an effort to boost their reputation and bottom line. Unlike Byrne, however, they did not admit women for free, but rather charged them the general admission price for a seat in the grandstand, thus allowing the women of the Forest City to enjoy games at a discount.⁴⁵ Chris Von der Ahe’s St. Louis team declared every Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday to be “Ladies Day” for 1887, and like Brooklyn and Cleveland, one reason was to improve baseball’s name among the “better class” in the Mound City. For the first such day of the year, the Boss President gave out souvenirs to all women in attendance, a satin embroidered portrait of the team tied to a terra-cotta folder by a silk cord.⁴⁶

Indianapolis also tried the reduced ticket price approach for 1888, as team president John Brush offered season tickets at a cost of twenty-five dollars for men but just sixteen dollars for women. As in Brooklyn and St. Louis, Brush hoped that more women spectators would both improve the game’s image and his bottom line. “President Brush is in favor of doing everything possible to increase the attendance of the ladies, and feels that while the ticket is very cheap it

⁴³ “Chadwick’s Chat” Henry Chadwick, *The Sporting Life*, March 7, 1888, 3.

⁴⁴ “Louisville Laconics” JA, *The Sporting Life*, April 4, 1888, 3.

⁴⁵ “From Cleveland” F.H. Brunell, *The Sporting Life*, March 3, 1887, 2.

⁴⁶ “Sunday Question” Joe Pritchard, *The Sporting Life*, April 6, 1887, 2; “From St. Louis” Joe Pritchard, *The Sporting Life*, April 27, 1887, 10.

will pay in the end. It is the better class of people who support base ball in Indianapolis, and the long-headed president seems to think that where the ladies go the men will be sure to follow.”⁴⁷ In addition, “to the presence of the ladies can be attributed the excellent behavior of the audience in attendance at all games here. The ladies of Indianapolis recognize in the National game an amusement that furnishes an opportunity to get the benefit of the fresh air and is at the same time highly entertaining.”⁴⁸ Brush’s stratagem did produce some results, as the team sold more than 300 season tickets with this approach.⁴⁹

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Based on some of the stories of how spectators and players treated umpires, it is a small wonder anyone ever took the job in the first place. Consider the case of a former major league player named Joe Ellick, who worked the game between the Philadelphia Quakers and Detroit Wolverines on July 31, 1886. The previous day, when overseeing the Washington-Detroit game, fans of the Nationals nearly mobbed Ellick for supposedly favoring the Wolverines in his decisions. Cranks in Washington brought bells with them to the ballpark, and rang them whenever umpires ruled against them or the visitors began kicking, and July 30 was a loud day at Washington’s Swampoodle Grounds.⁵⁰ He must have been leery of working another game featuring Detroit the next day in the first place, and cannot have been reassured when several thousand cranks arrived at the Philadelphia grounds at Recreation Park out for blood. The game “ended in the most disgraceful scene that has ever happened in this city.” The cranks verbally

⁴⁷ “Indianapolis News” A.G. Ovens, *The Sporting Life*, February 29, 1888, 2.

⁴⁸ “The Hoosier Team” Lew Rup, *The Sporting News*, March 3, 1888, 1.

⁴⁹ “Base-Ball Notes” NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, March 7, 1888, 3.

⁵⁰ “Frightened to Death” SAM, *The Sporting News*, August 9, 1886, 1.

abused Ellick from the first pitch onward, constantly reminding him of his performance the prior day. “The open seat crowd got at him early, and this seemed to rattle him, which only increased the wrath of the spectators, and also affected the players of both sides, who began kicking at his decisions.” As the game drew towards its close, trouble loomed. “Just before the last man of the Phillies had gone out the crowd at left field closed suddenly in on the players and when the side was retired and the game closed a rush was made for the umpire.” Although possibly exaggerated, the Philadelphia correspondent claimed that three or four thousand people stormed the field while just three policemen tried to defend Ellick. “The three officers and several employees of the grounds did the very best they could to protect Ellick; the officers presenting their pistols and using their clubs in the liveliest manner . . . the officers had their helmets mashed, players were hit, but Ellick was finally gotten into the coach without a scratch.”⁵¹ The man could not catch a break wherever he went, as fans in Boston treated him roughly in August after a loss to Kansas City. “They had an able ally in Umpire Ellick.” When New York lost a game against Kansas City, they likewise laid the blame at Ellick’s door.⁵²

What is especially ironic about Joe Ellick’s Washington experience is that the National League hired him for its umpiring staff just the week before. He was one of a trio of men (Charles “Chick” Fulmer and W.S. Wyckoff being the others) appointed by league president Nick Young to replace umpires John Connelly, Wesley Curry, and John Egan (sometimes referred to as Eagan) for their lackluster performance to that point in the season. The League announced its dismissal of Connelly for neglecting his duties and attempting to umpire while

⁵¹ “On Saturday” NA, *The Sporting Life*, August 4, 1886, 1. The Philadelphia team’s official name was the Quakers, but some observers referred to them as the Phillies after their home city. Within a few years everyone called them by this new name.

⁵² “From the Hub” Mugwump, *The Sporting Life*, August 18, 1886, 3.

inebriated, Egan for general incompetence, and Foley had already submitted a resignation, which President Young now accepted.

The change has not, however, brought about cessation from trouble, as Fulmer alone has escaped condemnation. Ellick has had considerable trouble and narrowly escaped mobbing in Washington, which, along with Kansas City, is becoming the worst city in the country for umpires; attributable, no doubt, to the managerial indifference or incapacity to maintain order during the game, and to the fact that open betting is allowed in the ground, a matter to which the attention of the League will be called.⁵³

Fulmer arrived ready for action, literally. “Umpire Fulmer carries a revolver concealed upon his person when umpiring a contest. In every city he obtains a permit to carry the same for self protection, from the proper authorities. So the hoodlums that infest the different grounds should give the constable plenty of room.”⁵⁴ Nor was Fulmer the only umpire to arm himself for protection. In 1889, during a Tri-State League game in Wheeling, West Virginia, an umpire named Bartlett feared a mobbing after working a game in a way unsatisfactory to the crowd. In self-defense, he drew a billy club he had concealed for just this occasion. Ironically, after drawing his weapon, he was the one arrested, on the technicality that no one had actually threatened him yet.⁵⁵

Besides packing a weapon, umpires who were good with their fists might also gain a bit of extra respect from potential kickers and bulldozers, as Bob Ferguson proved. Jack Kerins was another such umpire. A former catcher with Louisville, by 1889 Kerins had retired from play and become an umpire. One paper wrote about him, “Umpire Jack Kerins is the possessor of

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ “Caught on the Fly” NA, *The Sporting News*, August 16, 1886, 5.

⁵⁵ “Something New” Pickwick, *The Sporting Life*, July 10, 1889, 5.

considerable pugilistic ability and, like Ex-Umpire Billy McLean, isn't troubled with 'very hard' protests from kicking players."⁵⁶

Ellick, meanwhile, soon realized that umpiring was not his true calling. "Joe Ellick says he is satisfied he was not cut out for an umpire, and will resign as soon as he returns to the west. Good for Joe."⁵⁷ Another former player, Grace Pearce, took Ellick's place on the umpiring carousel. The result was that in his first week, "It is said that Chicago and Kansas City have already protested against the new umpire, Grace Pearce."⁵⁸ Ellick accepted the offer to manage Kansas City's entry in the Western League for 1887, considerably lengthening his life expectancy thereby. His reputation stayed with him, however, as the announcement of his new position included a reminder that in his days as an umpire, "his satisfaction rendered was not of a universal nature." Still, the Cowboy City's sportswriters believed he would do much better running a team than running a game, stating "a better man could not have been secured" and "it is expected his services will meet with approval in his new undertaking."⁵⁹ Interestingly, when his Kansas City Western League team disbanded after the 1888 season, Ellick caught the fever again and returned to umpiring. Commentators did not approve, however, one writing after an exhibition series, "Joe Ellick umpired the games, and rubbed it in on the home boys. Ellick is an awful nice fellow, but he is too much afraid of favoring the home team."⁶⁰ Regardless, the American Association made Ellick its substitute umpire for games in Kansas City in 1889.⁶¹

⁵⁶ "Notes And Comments" NA, *The Sporting Life*, August 28, 1889, 4.

⁵⁷ "Caught on the Fly" NA, *The Sporting News*, August 23, 1886, 5.

⁵⁸ "Notes and Comments" NA, *The Sporting Life*, August 25, 1886, 5.

⁵⁹ "Kansas City's New Club" NA, *The Sporting News*, April 2, 1887, 1; "The New Kansas City Club" LJK, *The Sporting Life*, April 13, 1887, 1.

⁶⁰ "Kansas City Briefs" Freeman, *The Sporting Life*, April 10, 1889, 3.

⁶¹ "Association Matters" NA, *The Sporting Life*, April 10, 1889, 3.

As for Grace Pearce, his problems in Kansas City stemmed from bad blood left over from a previous encounter with Cowboys manager Dave Rowe. Once, Pearce worked an exhibition game in New Orleans in which, according to Rowe at least, he had conspicuously refused to call any strikes in the final inning of the game, allowing Rowe's opponents to win by virtue of scoring runs via the base on balls. Rowe, who both played and managed, wasted no time in reminding Pearce about New Orleans in his first time at bat, and unpleasant words followed.⁶² Surprisingly, Pearce ended up umpiring the deciding game of the 1886 World Series between the St. Louis Browns and Chicago White Stockings, although, being a League umpire, working a game in an Association city proved very risky for him. A fellow umpire who was present at the game, John McQuaid of the American Association, remarked,

Grace Pierce, who umpired the last Chicago game, was pulling hard for the White Stockings to win, but he wouldn't have dared to make any rank decisions against the Browns, though. He discovered that fact when he made a bluff as if to give the game to the Chicagos . . . the big crowd that circled around him nearly scared the life out of him. He thought they were going to mob him sure. He walked over to where I was sitting on the bench beside Mr. Von der Ahe, and I noticed that he was trembling like a leaf. As quickly as possible after he saw the crowd coming down on him he disposed of his white cap and snatched my hat from off my head, and then tried to lose himself in the crowd. They all had him spotted, though, and, I really believe, had he given the game to the Chicagos he would never have gotten out of the grounds alive.⁶³

Wyckoff did not end up on the NL's staff of arbiters after all, allowing Egan to continue for one more week, until replaced by former catcher Phillip "Grandmother" Powers. (Players earned a nickname such as "grandmother" if they gained too strong a reputation for refusing strong drink and counseling others to do the same.) Wyckoff continued his work in the Eastern

⁶² "Dave Rowe on Pierce" NA, *The Sporting News*, August 30, 1886, 1.

⁶³ "How Pearce Weakened" John McQuaid, *The Sporting Life*, November 10, 1886, 3.
McQuaid's given name was John, but his nickname was Jack.

League for the time being, but engaged to work for the League in 1887.⁶⁴ He never did appear on the field that year, however, as he understandably left umpiring for, presumably, a safer position as a traveling agent for a dry goods business in New York City.⁶⁵ Egan's dismissal was not lamented by observers. A Boston writer described how Egan called a game between Boston and St. Louis a tie, despite the fact it was early in the evening with many hours of daylight remaining, just because the Maroons manager, Gus Schmelz, managed to convince him his club would miss their train should the game continue. "When you find a man who either don't know the rules, or else has not the backbone to enforce them, he has missed his calling if he attempts to umpire ball games. Now that is just the case with our friend. . . . There was never a more honest umpire than John Egan, but honesty is not everything in umpiring a ball game."⁶⁶

It appears Powers was an upgrade. Even in Kansas City, known as the worst city in the National League for riding umpires in 1886, he received favorable comment from the press. "Phil Powers commands more respect from the players than any umpire who has visited this city. His decisions are not questioned by either audience or players. It was amusing to watch Dunlap yesterday. When he had a kick to make he would tell Captain Hanlon." When a player as notorious for his kicking as Fred Dunlap refused to fight the Powers, it was a sure sign of an umpire in charge of the game.⁶⁷

These efforts earned the Grandmother another appointment to the NL's umpiring staff for 1887, although with the caveat that he would not work any games in Detroit due to complaints

⁶⁴ "The First League Umpire for 1887 Appointed" Nick Young, *The Sporting Life*, December 1, 1886.

⁶⁵ "Notes and Comments" NA, *The Sporting Life*, January 26, 1889, 3; "Notes and Comments" NA, *The Sporting Life*, February 2, 1887, 3.

⁶⁶ "From the Hub" Mupwump, *The Sporting Life*, August 11, 1886, 3; "Presto, Change" NA, *The Sporting Life*, August 11, 1886, 1.

⁶⁷ "From Cowboy Town" LJK, *The Sporting Life*, September 22, 1886, 1.

from that quarter. Upon learning of his appointment, cranks in the Wolverine City “were cast down with woe . . . it would be some relief if he does not officiate at the Detroit grounds.”⁶⁸

Powers appears to have given satisfaction at least most of the time in 1887, as he earned a rare compliment for his work in a key Detroit-Chicago series in the Windy City during August.

“Neither side kicked and that was the best criterion of his skill.”⁶⁹ Players in the Smoky City of Pittsburgh disagreed, however. After his work in a home series with the White Stockings, players of the Pittsburgh nine accosted Powers in the dressing room after the game (umpires typically changed back into their street clothes in the clubhouse of the home team), Sam Barkley stating, “Powers, I had thought that you were an honest man and a gentleman, but I regret to say I have been mistaken. You are a ----- thief and rascal. You know that you have robbed us of today’s game, and you ----- villain that you are, you made us win Friday’s game twice before you would let us have it.” While the players at least allowed Powers a chance to respond and state his case, they were not pleased with his remarks. Team captain Abner Dalrymple even stopped by the home office of *The Sporting News* to remark, “Powers has roasted us so palpably during the last three games, that no other team but ourselves would have stood it. I am not kicking as a means of excuse for our defeat. Our play on Saturday speaks for itself. All I complain of is that Powers is biased in favor of Chicago, because he wants to see that team defeat Detroit.”⁷⁰

Small wonder, then, that after the 1887 season ended, Powers resigned from the National League’s staff and decided to accept a safer and less stressful engagement as the manager of the

⁶⁸ “Phil Powers a League Umpire” NA, *The Sporting Life*, February 16, 1887, 1; “From Detroit” MAT, *The Sporting Life*, February 23, 1887, 4.

⁶⁹ “Detroit And Chicago” NA, *The Sporting News*, August 20, 1887, 1.

⁷⁰ “Jumping On Powers” Two Thirty, *The Sporting News*, September 3, 1887, 5.

London, Ontario club in the International Association.⁷¹ Even though National League president Nick Young tried to tempt Powers back onto the League's staff with a healthy raise, Powers declined, citing that London was his wife's home, that she was often ill, and that he had barely seen her during the summer months for the past decade. He also, it appears, harbored thoughts of getting back into the game as a player, having last played in 1885. While it was true that he was thirty-three years old at the time, making such a plan seem feasible, given that his career OPS+ was a dreadful 38, this seems rather unlikely, but hope sprang eternal in Powers' mind nonetheless. He stated he intended to catch for the London team he was going to manage, telling an interviewer, "Well, I guess I shall be one of the team's regular catchers. I'll jump in there and make a record for myself. Who knows but that I may be catching for a League club the following year?"⁷²

Even the fourth member of the NL's umpiring staff, John Gaffney, got into trouble in New York when Giants captain John Ward accused him of leaning to Detroit's side. "For a time it looked as if the umpire would be roughly handled, but better judgment prevailed and Mr. Gaffney left the field unmolested." Gaffney demanded an apology from Ward, did not receive one, and then refused to officiate the following day, necessitating a substitute.⁷³ "Umpire Gaffney officiated here yesterday and we have no reason to rejoice at his presence in the Metropolis. . . . Gaffney declined to act this afternoon, he complaining of the comments of the

⁷¹ "Washington News" Bob Lerner, *The Sporting Life*, December 7, 1887, 1.

⁷² "Hub Happenings" Mugwump, *The Sporting Life*, December 21, 1887, 4.

⁷³ "Umpire Troubles" NA, *The Sporting Life*, August 4, 1886, 1; "Bad Work Of An Umpire" NA, *New York Times*, July 30, 1886, 3.

press and certain remarks from an outsider, but we fail to see in this any valid excuse for his failure to respect his contract with the League.”⁷⁴

While Ward, and Cap Anson, too, heaped scorn on Gaffney’s work, other sources were more charitable, and in time, observers generally concluded Gaffney the best umpire in baseball, even the superior of Bob Ferguson. In 1886, *The Sporting Life*’s Philadelphia correspondent praised Gaffney by writing, “Gaffney’s umpiring here last week was the finest seen at Recreation Park this season. His judgment of balls and strikes is almost infallible, and leaves no room for questioning. If he umpired anything like as well elsewhere as he did here we cannot for the life of us see what Anson and Ward found to kick about.”⁷⁵ The writer surely knew the answer to his own question, however, as Anson kicked about anything and everything, and the whole baseball world knew it. (This helped earn him one of his less flattering nicknames, “the Baby.”) Speaking of Anson, one reporter wrote, “This man is a terror to umpires; continually finding fault, and rattling a referee if possible. . . . Anson is the cause of the dismissal of more umpires than any other person in baseball.”⁷⁶ Another writer described his bulldozing talents, stating that Anson was “of beefy proportions, red-faced, a high-pitched, harsh, grating voice and the bearing of a slave-driver, if anyone could terrorize an umpire he is the man. . . . Unlike the kicker, he does not growl at a decision and then subside, but sets his teeth and hangs on until the umpire yells enough and then lets go.”⁷⁷

For many observers, however, Gaffney remained among baseball’s best. One secret to his success was his tremendous energy. “His base decisions were splendid and the games that he

⁷⁴ “New York Comment” Layman, *The Sporting Life*, August 4, 1886, 1; “A Game Of Ten Innings” NA, *New York Times*, July 31, 1886, 3.

⁷⁵ “The Local Season” NA, *The Sporting Life*, August 11, 1886, 5.

⁷⁶ “League First Basemen” GNB, *The Sporting Life*, December 29, 1886, 4.

⁷⁷ “Detroit Dotlets” MAT, *The Sporting Life*, August 1, 1888, 5.

had to umpire were nearly all hard ones. He takes more interest in a game than any man that ever umpired, and he covers more ground than any man in the country. After a game is finished, Gaffney is the weariest man on the field, for the reason that he has done the hardest work.”⁷⁸

Given the fact that Gaffney was one of the National League’s few arbiters to hold some measure of the public’s confidence, league officials must have been dismayed when he stepped down from his position in late August to assume the job of managing the Washington Nationals after Mike Scanlon’s resignation. Whatever his reasons, it seems safe to say that his stress level declined drastically, even when one observer quipped, “Gaffney will manage the Washington Club from this date on. If he could umpire the club’s contests he would have a winning team sure.”⁷⁹

Unlike today, having men switch from umpire to employee of a ball club was not unusual in 1886. In October of 1886, it happened again when “Honest” John Kelly, a former journeyman player, moved from American Association umpire to manager of the Louisville Colonels, taking the place of Jim Hart in the Falls City.⁸⁰ Hart did not hold a grudge against Kelly, and in fact, hoped the club would prosper under his guidance. He warned Kelly that, if not, the job of Louisville manager would be like “umpiring an endless game, which would decide the championship of the world, with two teams composed wholly of Ansons and Comiskey, with the score tied and the mob howling for his blood, as this is the hardest losing city in the Association circuit.”⁸¹

⁷⁸ “St. Louis Siftings” Joe Pritchard, *The Sporting Life*, July 11, 1888, 3.

⁷⁹ “Barnie After Barr” NA, *The Sporting Life*, August 25, 1886, 1; “Notes and Comments” NA, *The Sporting Life*, August 25, 1886, 5.

⁸⁰ “Signed with Louisville” NA, *The Sporting News*, October 11, 1886, 1.

⁸¹ “Hart Heard From” Jim Hart, *The Sporting Life*, November 3, 1886, 1.

Despite all these difficulties for his fellow arbiters and himself, John Connelly tried to come back for more after his dismissal in 1886. Although the NL had discharged him for questionable judgment linked to excessive tippling, he tried for reappointment in 1887, claiming to be in excellent condition, dry as a bone, and that he would “do his level best to deserve confidence.”⁸² The National League did not approve his application, but to its misfortune, the Central League did in 1888, at least for a time. “Grace Pearce manages to catch on each year. He has been appointed a Central League umpire. Umpire Connelly has been suspended.”⁸³

The American Association had trouble with its umpires as well. In August of 1886, Brooklyn owner Byrne had to call for extra protection for umpire George “Foghorn” Bradley after a game, believing the crowd intended violence.⁸⁴ Bradley’s fellow Association official, Mike Walsh, even drew ire from the press for being too deliberate with his calls. “The games Mike Walsh umpires are generally longer than those presided over by other Association umpires, because he is a trifle slow and allows too much kicking and bulldozing which consumes time.”⁸⁵ Furthermore, “Mike Walsh’s lazy call of ‘low ball’ or ‘strike one’ can hardly be heard in the reporters’ stand, while his decisions on plays at first and second are far from being correct.”⁸⁶

Part of the Association’s problem, at least according to one of its umpires, Lon Knight, was that the Association did not stand by its men, which is why he had quit by mid-1887.

When you try to do right in the League they stand by you, but the harder you try to be square in the Association the worse they treat you. Why it’s terrible. That man Von der Ahe is a terror. He wants you to give his team everything, and then if you don’t, off goes your head. You can’t do anything with his players. He tells them to do certain things

⁸² “Notes and Comment” NA, *The Sporting Life*, January 26, 1887, 3.

⁸³ “Notes And Comments” NA, *The Sporting Life*, June 27, 1888, 7.

⁸⁴ “Games Played Monday, Aug. 16” NA, *The Sporting Life*, August 25, 1886, 2. Bradley earned his nickname for his tremendous volume while singing, always important when appearing in front of crowds in the days before microphones and other types of electric amplification.

⁸⁵ “Notes and Comments” NA, *The Sporting Life*, August 25, 1886, 5.

⁸⁶ “Caught on the Fly” NA, *The Sporting News*, August 30, 1886, 5.

which he knows are not right. You fine his men for doing them and what good does it do? He pays the fines and has you discharged besides. . . . An umpire cannot command the respect of the players in the Association. If he tries to keep the players within decent bounds by fining them they run to their manager. He decides the umpire is rotten and goes to work to have him removed.⁸⁷

Clearly, 1886 was a very tough year for umpires. For 1887, therefore, both leagues decided to ease the burden on their officials. Both the League and the Association agreed that no one could question an umpire's decision save the captain of each team, and that no one could leave their proper position on the field to address the umpire unless he requested them to do so. Each violation of the new rules equaled a prompt ten dollar fine. Even as *The Sporting Life* reported this hopeful item, however, the paper was not sure the plan would work. It ended the essay describing the new regulations with the statement, "snatch it while you may, boys, as in time you will all undoubtedly strike up against new and unforeseen snags."⁸⁸

Also describing the treatment of officials in 1886, Cleveland writer F.H. Brunell was probably near the mark when he wrote, "If the treatment of the umpires of 1886 is to be repeated the National game will be in danger. And every newspaper writer who does not aid in stemming such a tide will be a sorry knave."⁸⁹ The other voice crying out in the wilderness on this issue was fatherly Henry Chadwick, who seconded Brunell in print, writing, "now if the base ball reporters will only stop the press abuse of umpires, we shall see the best umpiring done this season ever witnessed on the diamond field. . . . What more disgraceful sight can be seen on a sporting field than that of witnessing an umpire escorted off the field under the guard of a posse of police to protect one man against the assault of a crowd of cowardly bullies?"⁹⁰

⁸⁷ "From The Hub" Mugwump, *The Sporting Life*, September 7, 1887, 5.

⁸⁸ "Why Umpires Ought to Be Happy" NA, *The Sporting Life*, March 30, 1887, 3.

⁸⁹ "From Cleveland" F.H. Brunell, *The Sporting Life*, March 30, 1887, 4.

⁹⁰ "Chadwick's Chat" Henry Chadwick, *The Sporting Life*, April 6, 1887, 2.

Alas, like so many New Year's resolutions, this movement by a few sportswriters to ease the kicking against umpires did not catch on for the press in general. Regardless of how players behaved on the field, umpires could not fine sportswriters for penning unkind words, and the torrent of abuse from writers did not abate noticeably. This affected the game on the field, as it simply encouraged more whining, complaining, and arguing. This, in turn, made teams fearful that well situated patrons would stop coming to games.

Despite the attempt at reform, the vitriol hurled at umpires on the field did not improve as much as league officials hoped in 1887. Consider the case of Herm Doescher. A former player, Doescher found himself on the blacklist and out of major league baseball following the 1882 season. He was no longer playing by 1887, but by then had managed to return to the game and make a fair name for himself as an umpire. The National League brought him onto its umpiring staff in 1887, after all the problems it experienced in 1886, hoping that it had secured a good man. Doescher did not last even one season. In August he retired from umpiring, justifying his decision with words that were all too familiar. "I'm sick and disgusted with the whole business, and the more I see of it the more I hate it. Everywhere I go there's an eternal kick, kick, kick. I can't stand it much longer and I won't. . . . There isn't a man living who can umpire a game without being hooted and hissed. That is going to drive decent men out of the business."⁹¹ (Doescher reconsidered his decision to quit, however, and umpired in the American Association in 1888, as we will see.)

Writer O.P. Caylor, in New York by 1887 in the Metropolitans organization, lamented that despite the best intentions of baseball's rule makers the preceding winter, things were no better in 1887. "Something must be done. The recent joint committee on rules hugged

⁹¹ "Doescher Quits" MAT, *The Sporting Life*, August 17, 1887, 1. Some spelled Doescher's name with an "e" as the third letter, others did not.

themselves with the idea that they had delivered the suffering umpire from his thralldom, even as the Children of Israel were delivered from some place by somebody.” Rather than liberating umpires, however, things were as unsafe and violent as ever, partly because no rules could control fan or newspaper behavior. When the Metropolitans played a game in Baltimore where umpire Ted Sullivan did not give satisfaction as far as the men from the Monumental City were concerned, “the Baltimore papers took up the war-whoop, and one of them in an inflammatory editorial indirectly tried to incite the spectators to riot.” Consequently, “Sullivan appeared on the grounds Wednesday thoroughly scared and asked me to excuse him. What else could I do? I knew it was almost his life if he went out and gave any Metropolitan player a base on balls or a close decision. The Baltimore team and the Baltimore crowd had it in for him.”⁹² The same week, some in the Detroit press questioned Sullivan as well, saying he had stolen a game from their Wolverines and awarded it to Boston with his poor decisions.⁹³ Following those difficulties, the New York press got on his case, too, claiming that his miserable work cost the home nine a game against Boston on August 16, and as the paper claimed Sullivan’s performance was “again disgraceful” we may conclude this was not the first time Gothamites questioned his capacity.⁹⁴

Caylor continued to make his case for better treatment of umpires throughout 1887, advocating a raise in pay. He later wrote, “A poor umpire can drive more money away from a club’s treasury than three poor players. But because a good umpire wants \$2,000 to risk his life and expose himself to ribald abuse for six months he is passed by and some miserable excuse is paid \$1,200 to break up teams and incite riot every time he tries to sort out the balls and strikes.”

⁹² “The Umpire Question” O.P. Caylor, *The Sporting Life*, August 17, 1887, 4.

⁹³ “From Detroit” MAT, *The Sporting Life*, August 17, 1887, 4.

⁹⁴ “More Than Two To One” NA, *New York Times*, August 17, 1887, 2.

As an example of this, he advised baseball's leaders to "pay umpires a living salary and get men who know how to do it. If John Kelly had been financially encouraged he would have been umpiring this season instead of chasing Ramsey and Browning away from the dangerous localities of red lights."⁹⁵

Another umpire-related mistake that the American Association made, in retrospect, was that in 1887 it paid each umpire a different salary, thus causing some jealousy between the men involved but more anger towards the Association for playing favorites when everyone potentially risked life and limb each day on the job. "This season there has been a lot of quiet kicking over the inequality of salaries. Bauer and Curry only get the limit, \$1,000, while Ferguson gets \$1,200 and McQuade \$1,400."⁹⁶

Lon Knight was not the only person to see his work and efforts to control the game undermined. Players sometimes got rough with umpires, as an umpire named Lynch discovered while working an 1887 game in the New England League, but if the home fans supported the player, it was very difficult for the umpire to maintain control of events. In Lynch's case, while working the Manchester-Lowell game on September 7, Manchester captain John Troy disputed one of Lynch's decisions and cursed him, drawing a ten-dollar fine. Troy then threatened to apply his fist to Lynch's nose, and the umpire mulcted the player ten dollars more. Not one for idle threats, apparently, "Troy advanced and hit the umpire in the face under the left eye, hard enough to raise a bruise." Lynch responded by upping the fine twenty-five dollars further before leaving the grounds and refusing to continue. Troy emerged from the incident financially unscathed, however, as "what the Manchester public thought of Troy's act was shown when the hat was passed around and enough money chipped in to pay Troy's fine." Furthermore, "his club

⁹⁵ "Caylor's Comment" O.P. Caylor, *The Sporting Life*, October 12, 1887, 5.

⁹⁶ "A Little More Trouble" NA, *The Sporting Life*, September 21, 1887, 1.

failed to take any notice whatever of his disgraceful act.” Following this incident, Lynch declared he had had enough and quit. “In Mr. Lynch the League not only loses its best umpire, but one of the best in the country. Outrageous conduct towards umpires has been frequent enough in that League, but this is the first time that an umpire has been struck.”⁹⁷ (Amazingly, Lynch declined to press any charges against Troy, claiming he did not want to take away Troy’s means of earning a living, even while Troy’s actions persuaded him to give up his own.⁹⁸)

A similar incident took place during the 1888 exhibition season in New Orleans. There, Kid Baldwin of Cincinnati Red Stockings decided the rulings of umpire Tony Suck were not as impartial as the Red Stockings deserved, and so the catcher struck Suck in the face.⁹⁹ (It would be easy to poke fun at the aptness of the umpire’s name in this case, but Suck’s surname does describe his playing career well enough. It lasted two major league seasons, with all but seven of his career at bats coming in Union Association, which was not really a major league anyway, and even competing against such diminished competition, he chalked up a career OPS+ of 24.) Baldwin’s actions also drew a rebuke from Henry Chadwick, who lamented that up until that point, the Cincinnati players had been exemplars of gentlemanly conduct in Chadwick’s eyes.¹⁰⁰

There were a few times when baseball’s officials fought back against all the kicking and other shenanigans. “E.F. Youngs, of Genesee, N.Y., has been sued for \$5,000. He struck a spectator for making disparaging remarks about his umpiring.”¹⁰¹ While striking cranks might not have been wise, using the law on your behalf might work. It is a wonder that more umpires did not imitate one man, named Ullery, who had Sandusky, Ohio, centerfielder Strothers

⁹⁷ “An Assault Upon an Umpire on the Field by Johnny Troy” NA, *The Sporting Life*, September 14, 1887, 4.

⁹⁸ “Notes and Comments” NA, *The Sporting Life*, September 21, 1887, 5.

⁹⁹ “Caylor’s Comment” O.P. Caylor, *The Sporting Life*, March 14, 1888, 3.

¹⁰⁰ “Chadwick’s Chat” Henry Chadwick, *The Sporting Life*, March 28, 1888, 4.

¹⁰¹ “Notes and Comments” NA, *The Sporting Life*, August 18, 1886, 5.

incarcerated after Strothers struck him in the face during an August 30, 1887 game. After Ullery fined him five dollars, Strothers became enraged and smacked Ullery, for which he saw his fine quintupled to twenty-five dollars, plus the inside of a jail cell for assault and battery.¹⁰² One of the best stories about protecting umpires comes to us from Red Bank, New Jersey, where umpire Thomas Arrowsmith apparently was not giving satisfaction to the home nine on September 19, 1887. When the crowd “tried to put him off the field,” Arrowsmith’s father, who was at the grounds, sprang into action to protect his son. “Arrowsmith’s father, fearing violence, drew a pistol and threatened to shoot anyone who attempted to harm his son. The crowd quickly dispersed when Mr. Arrowsmith drew his pistol, and the game was declared off.”¹⁰³

* * * * *

One of the most interesting things about all the controversies with umpires is that because the sporting papers made so many of them public, and those around the game discussed these issues openly, the public knew on whom to focus their ire. Any literate person could find out which arbiters were in public disgrace just from reading a sports newspaper. *The Sporting Life* frequently printed which umps were hired, and which fired, on a weekly basis. In its August 18, 1886 edition, for example, it announced that the Pennsylvania State Association appointed H.M. McClure, of Sunbury, Pennsylvania, E.E. Wolfe, of Lewisburg, Pennsylvania, and H.H. Hess of Lock Haven, Pennsylvania, while severing ties with W.S. Dean of Lancaster. Meanwhile, the International League suspended W.L. Crofut and appointed C.H. Cushman in his stead.

¹⁰² “Notes and Comments” NA, *The Sporting Life*, September 7, 1887, 3.

¹⁰³ “Notes and Comments” NA, *The Sporting Life*, September 28, 1887, 6; “Caught On The Fly” NA, *The Sporting News*, October 1, 1887, 4.

Furthermore, these announcements were front-page news, not buried on page six amidst the Binghamton-Utica box scores and news concerning cycling, cricket, and billiards.¹⁰⁴ Likewise, before the season opened in 1889, the paper even published the schedules of when each umpire would be in which city all season long, just as it published schedules for each team, so every reader of the paper knew when each man would appear in their city.¹⁰⁵

Certain teams, players, and cities gained a reputation for exceptionally abusive treatment. For the National League's 1886 season, observers generally agreed that cranks in Kansas City went beyond the call of duty in their obnoxious and vile behavior. National League president Nick Young said, "I sent an umpire to Kansas City, which is the worst city in the country for ill-treating umpires. He umpired a game, and the people received him so that he telegraphed me his resignation that night."¹⁰⁶ To illustrate how bad things were, consider a story told by New York Giants manager Jim Mutrie about one game his nine played in that town. In a tie game, a Kansas City batter, second baseman Al "Cod" Myers, launched a deep drive down the right field line. Mutrie, standing on the foul line at the time, saw the ball go clearly foul, at least ten feet, in his estimation. The umpire agreed, but the Kansas City cranks did not. Mutrie tried to talk to a trio of men declaring the ball fair, and when he pointed out that it was not, one man "made a dextrous movement with his hand to his hip pocket and drew forth a regular 'bulldog,' laid it across his knee with the muzzle pointing directly at me and with a stentorian voice asked, 'What was it?' I looked at him for about one second and answered with all the affability at my command, 'I guess I was mistaken, that surely was a fair ball.'" Mutrie then went even further to smooth things over with the angry, pistol-packing crank by continuing, "I can't understand why

¹⁰⁴ "The Pennsylvania State Association" NA, *The Sporting Life*, August 18, 1886, 1; "The International League" NA, *The Sporting Life*, August 18, 1886, 1.

¹⁰⁵ "Umpire Dates" George Stackhouse, *The Sporting Life*, March 20, 1889, 1.

¹⁰⁶ "Diamond Dust" NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, August 4, 1886, 3.

the League doesn't engage competent umpires so that every club gets its just dues." Only a hearty handshake from the crank allowed the manager to breathe a sigh of relief.¹⁰⁷ The Kansas City press, of course, denied that any such event occurred, but the fact that the city's reputation made such a tale believable enough to print in the first place is a good indication of how tough a place it was to umpire.¹⁰⁸

Observers and sportswriters certainly discussed how baseball should protect their arbiters from the excessive abuse and violence. Some thought better pay, which would secure higher quality men for the position, was the answer. Each umpire earned \$1,000 for his work in 1886, and in 1887, the National League paid the same amount. This money was on top of traveling expenses, of course, which the League also paid. For 1888, the League did up the pay level to \$1,500 in an effort to find "a superior class of men" who could "command the respect of players and public." Considering that even a minor league circuit such as the Western League was paying its men \$1,000 per season by 1888, it was probably time to improve the remuneration.¹⁰⁹ One Baltimorean wrote, "The best of umpires will receive some abuse, and in consideration of this, as well as to induce the best service and place it above temptation, liberal salaries should be paid. These salaries have been altogether too small and entirely out of proportion to the services rendered. It should be great enough to hold to the service such men as Kelly and Ferguson." The same writer went on, "the service is considered by base ball men one of the most important to the game . . . and yet the poorest old stick of an ignorant outfielder outranks in salary this important officer. Is it a wonder his authority is so often questioned by his ignorant, lushing subordinate? Good umpires will pay for themselves at the gate, forty times over." Finally,

¹⁰⁷ "Mutrie's Kansas City Adventure" Are Jay Ess, *The Sporting Life*, February 2, 1887, 5.

¹⁰⁸ "Base Ball" NA, *The Sporting News*, February 12, 1887, 5.

¹⁰⁹ "The League Umpires" NA, *The Sporting Life*, August 10, 1887, 1; "Omaha And Oshkosh" NA, *The Sporting News*, November 19, 1887, 2.

“make the salary for good, temperate, intelligent umpires, at least \$2,000 and don’t have any other at any price.”¹¹⁰ One Detroit writer took his Baltimore associate a step further, writing of the National League, “If it expects to secure the services of such men as Gaffney, Daniels, Ferguson and others, it should make the salary \$2,500. Get four of the best men in the country, pay them enough to make them perfectly independent and let them take hold of their work without fear or favor, and with the understanding that they are not to be removed except for drunkenness or crookedness.”¹¹¹

One major league did indeed do so for 1888, but it was the American Association, as that body swooped in to net prized umpires Herm Doeshler and Gaffney at a cost of \$2,500 each.¹¹² Not only did the Association offer these prime umpires generous salaries, it also agreed that it would only remove the men for certain causes, which had to be stated in writing, and that the men had the opportunity to testify in their own defense should such an event occur. The purpose here, clearly, was to prevent certain team officials and managers from criticizing an umpire and demanding his release out of sheer spite for a few unpopular decisions.¹¹³

Interestingly, when the Association corralled the best umpire talent for 1888, this put pressure on the League. Not only did the public believe that the League’s staff of umpires was inferior, but prospective League umpires were no longer willing to work for the relative peanuts that the NL had offered its men in the past. Feeling themselves on a par, status-wise, with the Association’s staff of umpires, \$1,500 did not look as enticing to possible National League arbiters as it had in the past.¹¹⁴ Two men that the NL targeted for its staff, Billy Furlong and

¹¹⁰ “From Baltimore” TTT, *The Sporting Life*, February 16, 1887, 4.

¹¹¹ “From Detroit” MAT, *The Sporting Life*, September 21, 1887, 3.

¹¹² “Doeshler And Gaffney” NA, *The Sporting Life*, November 23, 1887, 1.

¹¹³ “The Association Staff Of Umpire” NA, *The Sporting Life*, November 30, 1887, 5.

¹¹⁴ “Nic Young At Work” Sam, *The Sporting News*, December 24, 1887, 1.

Wesley Curry, declined the League's offer of \$1,500 plus expenses. Curry made a counteroffer back to Nick Young, but Young declined, fearing the increased expense.¹¹⁵

It did not take long for the National League to begin feeling the heat. By the end of the first week of the season, observers challenged its men for perceived incompetence.

The League staff is composed of some very poor material, and it becomes more apparent every day that League patrons are going to have a monkey and parrot time this season. At Indianapolis fisticuffs are indulged in, and the spectacle is presented of a man who should know and do better urging the fighters on. . . . But in Pittsburg the most pitiable and contemptible spectacle of all was witnessed, where the crouching, cringing, skulking, slinking Decker tried to umpire. . . . It is said that Decker is a relative of Nick Young. That may account for his appointment. But it is certainly no excuse for his retention. Get somebody in his place who is at least suspected of sincerity.¹¹⁶

Decker denied any relation to Young, (although later correspondence between the two men revealed that they were friends) but to complete the story, the fisticuffs in Indianapolis resulted from an incident where Paul Hines attempted to obscure the view of Chicago's reserve catcher Del Darling and prevent him from catching a throw at home plate. "Darling made two attempts to *push* Hines away, and failing in that, struck him a smart blow on the back. That Hines stood there with the intention of balking Darling, I have Hines' own word." Shortly afterwards, Chicago baserunner Marty Sullivan intentionally collided with Hoosier first baseman Dude Esterbrook as Sullivan attempted to round first base and head towards second. (Despite his dandified nickname, Esterbrook appears to have been no stranger to the rough and tumble. Described as a "husky duck," he once "wiped the floor" with umpire John Kelly after a game in which Kelly fined him twice.¹¹⁷) The men went down, got back up, and then the Dude struck Sullivan three times in the gut. As Sullivan was already out, his fly ball caught by the Hoosier outfield, there was really no reason for him to be in such a position. This physical play resulted

¹¹⁵ "The Umpire Bull Movement" NA, *The Sporting Life*, December 28, 1887, 1.

¹¹⁶ "Disgruntled Detroit" MAT, *The Sporting Life*, May 2, 1888, 1.

¹¹⁷ "Chicago Gleanings" Harry Palmer, *The Sporting Life*, May 2, 1888, 8.

in a general brawl between the two nines, with Chicago's captain Anson the instigator. In an effort to return the favor the next day, Esterbrook slid into, and past, second base to break up a double play. He collided with Chicago second baseman Fred Pfeffer "and knocked him four or five feet from the bag."¹¹⁸

Others, especially in Detroit, agreed that Decker was incompetent, but one took a novel tack and tried to profit from his lack of skill. Horace Watkins, the Detroit manager, believed Decker favored the home nine consistently. Therefore, he wired to National League president Nick Young, "for heaven's sake send this man to Detroit. I will guarantee that we won't lose a game."¹¹⁹

Indianapolis joined in the criticism of the National League's quartet. One Hoosier sportswriter believed League umpire John Valentine was a decent umpire, but "Lynch, who followed Valentine, is rather to be pitied than censured. He is simply awful. That he is honest, however, is very clear, and that he is wholly incompetent is a fact to be deplored." Later, he wrote, "Mr. Lynch is one of the worst I ever saw. Lynch is one of those fellows who, when they make a rank bad decision, always try to even up by making a worse one against the other side." Lynch's problem was not partiality, therefore. "Lynch did not beat Indianapolis out of a game so far as I can remember . . . his work was simply that of a man who didn't understand his business." Decker was another matter. While "he is not a fool and is a very pleasant gentleman personally . . . that he is regarded as thoroughly dishonest by a large percentage of the people who saw his work here cannot be disputed." Decker reinforced this feeling when, "in the opening Boston game he made the worst decision against the home team that has been seen in Indianapolis in ten years, and at once aroused the old suspicion that he was crooked." Thus, the

¹¹⁸ "The Indianapolis Row" Observer, *The Sporting Life*, May 2, 1888, 1.

¹¹⁹ "Caught On The Fly" NA, *The Sporting News*, May 5, 1888, 5.

writer concluded, “President Young made a serious mistake in allowing all of the best umpires to leave the League for no other reason than that they were high-priced.”¹²⁰

By June, the continual complaints against Decker forced Young to remove him from the National League’s staff. The League was actually lucky in this regard, as it replaced Decker with “Honest” John Kelly. Although he began the year as the manager in Louisville, the team had started very badly (a 10-29 record as of June 7) and was now under new management, so Kelly decided to resign and return to his old trade of umpire. National League observers nationwide rejoiced at the upgrade.¹²¹ In Washington, “John Kelly’s umpiring has been the best seen here this season. His decisions are not questioned, and there is the absence of ‘that kicking’ which always mars the beauty of the game. Kelly received a rousing send off from the lovers of base ball when he made his initial appearance on the field, and his success as the finest and best umpire was noted by the spectators from the start.”¹²² Kelly actually worked an entire week in the same locale without incurring any wrath in the nation’s capital, a truly rare feat. “Kelly continued to umpire the games last week as only he can, and the result is perfectly plain. Every body is satisfied. ‘We want Kelly to umpire again when the boys get back home’ has been frequently heard.”¹²³

Closing the circle and returning to the Association’s staff in 1888, things did not turn out quite as rosy as the Association’s moguls intended. That Gaffney was the top umpire in the circuit, no one seemed to doubt. Most continued to express their entire confidence in his work. McQuaid, for the most part, escaped comment in the press, also a good sign. A few clubs complained about Ferguson’s work at times. His reputation for honesty remained impregnable,

¹²⁰ “Indianapolis Mention” A.G. Ovens, *The Sporting Life*, May 30, 1888, 4.

¹²¹ “Kelly Succeeds Decker” NA, *The Sporting Life*, June 13, 1888, 1.

¹²² “The Capital Club” Sam, *The Sporting News*, June 23, 1888, 2.

¹²³ “Successful Senators” Sam, *The Sporting News*, June 30, 1888, 1.

but there were complaints about his decisions on the bases, which some blamed on advancing age. The weakest link in the quartet was clearly Herm Doescher. Several teams complained of his work, especially Cincinnati, accusing him of harboring a spirit of revenge towards those who criticized him. This, combined with his liberality in assessing fines, made him the Association's most unpopular and heavily criticized arbiter of 1888. This led one sportswriter to state, "I am glad for the sake of base ball that he is scheduled away from Cincinnati the balance of the season, for with the passions of the 'cranks' warmed against him he might be numbered with the victims who have been mobbed by the hot-heads in years gone by."¹²⁴

Later in 1888, some in St. Louis accused Doescher of a much more serious offense than simply handing out fines for trifling reasons. A story circulated that he had tried to share the signs of the Cincinnati club with the Philadelphia Athletics, in order to help the Athletics overtake the St. Louis Browns for the American Association championship. Cincinnati manager Gus Schmelz, although he believed Doescher had nothing to do with the scheme, did admit to receiving an anonymous telegram from Philadelphia warning him that something was afoot, and that his team should change its signs for the series.¹²⁵ It turned out, however, that the story was simply another example of Chris Von der Ahe in St. Louis envisioning all possible schemes to thwart his beloved Browns from a fourth consecutive Association pennant, and nothing more.

The Association decided to reduce the salaries of its men after 1888, on the theory that while the overall umpiring performance had given adequate satisfaction, the Association could get equal satisfaction at a lower price. The National League's decision to employ men of inferior reputation actually helped in this regard, because while the work of the League's men had not always been up to par, the games had gone on all the same, and now the Association believed it

¹²⁴ "Cincinnati Chips" Ren Mulford, Jr., *The Sporting Life*, September 19, 1888, 4.

¹²⁵ "Their Battery Signs" NA, *The Sporting News*, September 22, 1888, 1.

could get umpiring that was good enough without paying each man \$1,000 more for the privilege.¹²⁶ This caused much wailing and gnashing of teeth on the part of the Association's supporters, one opining, "In no previous season had the Association so little trouble comparatively as last season. . . . The idea of lowering the salary of an umpire . . . is as big a blunder as any committed in base ball legislation for some years past, and the Association will realize the fact before the close of the season of 1889."¹²⁷

* * * * *

Other baseball observers advocated different measures to protect umpires, besides increasing their pay in order to attract better ones. Some writers thought more police protection at the grounds, including giving the police greater authority to remove unruly spectators, was a positive step, along with the related notion of barring all kicking from team captains and players, backed by a system of fines for violations of the rule.¹²⁸ One team actually tried this tack, and reported success. In 1889, Kansas City's President Speas instructed his men not to kick over the decisions of the umpires under any circumstances. As a result, "Ferguson has had an easier time than he has ever had before. . . . It does seem that an umpire would try to do better work if he knew that his decision was going to be unprotested."¹²⁹ While many did endorse the idea of more protection for umpires and less kicking by players, no other teams joined the Cowboys in their reform movement, however, and as a result, within about two months president Speas

¹²⁶ "It Is All Serene" NA, *The Sporting News*, November 17, 1888, 1.

¹²⁷ "An Association Mistake" NA, *The Sporting Life*, January 2, 1889, 3.

¹²⁸ "Threetees' Meditations" TTT, *The Sporting Life*, August 11, 1886, 1; "Caught on the Fly" NA, *The Sporting News*, August 23, 1886, 5.

¹²⁹ "Kansas City Briefs" Freeman, *The Sporting Life*, July 10, 1889, 5.

allowed his men to resume acting like petulant children, and the idea of allowing umpires to officiate unhindered by controversy died stillborn.

Some wanted to go beyond the protection offered by police, as

experience in Baltimore has proved that a good barbed-wire fence surrounding the stands and cutting off spectators entirely from the field is better. . . . not a single disturbance has occurred since it was placed there, though it happened often before and gave Baltimore a very undesirable name. When a rowdy, carried away by excitement, attempts to climb a barbed-wire fence to punch the head of the umpire, he suddenly thinks better of it and has all he can do to rub the scratches on his anatomy.¹³⁰

Although greater police protection was a good idea in theory, it was not always so in fact.

Looking to more police protection was a questionable strategy at times because the police themselves were questionable at times. In the late nineteenth century, police were not typically well-trained professionals. It is more accurate to think of them as men who were willing to get a little bit rough in their efforts to enforce the law. In addition, like many workers of this era, their recompense was not always sufficient to meet their daily needs, and so, sometimes, they would strike for better working conditions, leaving teams with no extra protection. This was a problem in Cincinnati in 1887, and so the Red Stockings decided “all the police at the ball park will be signed on regular contracts. Last year they struck too often and this new departure will prevent any such trouble.”¹³¹

The inverse of this situation, the unwillingness of some clubs to pay for any police to keep order at games, also caused problems. Early in the 1889 season, umpire Charley Daniels did not give satisfaction as far as Louisville patrons were concerned. More than one thousand of them rushed the field after one decision, forcing Daniels to retreat into his dressing room while things calmed down. Things took quite some time to calm down, however, because “the police

¹³⁰ “From Baltimore” TTT, *The Sporting Life*, February 16, 1887, 4.

¹³¹ “Cincinnati Chips” Ren Mulford, Jr., *The Sporting Life*, February 1, 1888, 3.

service at the park this year is very poor, owing to Manager Davidson's economical policy."¹³² (For more on Mordecai Davidson and his mismanagement of Louisville in 1888 and 1889, see chapter seventeen.)

Another idea, actually implemented by the Players League when it began play in 1890, was to place a second umpire on the field, so that the umpire at home plate could call balls and strikes and be responsible for making decisions on plays at third base, and the other could watch the action on the right side of the diamond and make the calls at first and second base.¹³³

Baseball tried this experiment, known at the time as the double umpire system, for the 1887 Detroit-St. Louis World Series, and all observers seemed to agree the experiment was a success. Many clamored for someone to try the double umpire system for 1888, and Cleveland writer F.H. Brunell advised the National League to do so that year, especially after it lost out to the American Association for the best umpiring talent. As Brunell wrote, "outgeneraled in my hunt for umpirical talent I'd hire eight of the next best men and give the double system a good fair trial. It is *the* system of the future and a season's trial will knock out the old way of doing things."¹³⁴ The League did not do so, apparently decided that hiring a second set of officials, which would have cost each club somewhere in the neighborhood of \$600, was not worth having its games umpired more accurately.

In the meantime, in the absence of a second umpire John Gaffney did some innovating. He tried a new technique in his placement on the field. Standard practice was for the umpire to stand behind the batter and catcher, as the home plate umpire still does in baseball today. In 1888, however, Gaffney began umpiring games by standing behind the pitcher when men were

¹³² "Disgruntled Louisville" NA, *The Sporting News*, April 27, 1889, 2.

¹³³ "An Umpire Suggestion" Marc, *The Sporting Life*, November 17, 1886, 1.

¹³⁴ "Needless Interference" F.H. Brunell, *The Sporting Life*, December 7, 1887, 4.

on base. This allowed him to judge balls and strikes with accuracy, yet still be near enough to the bases when tag plays took place against base runners that he could render an accurate decision. Observers contended this led to a significant reduction in kicking by players and spectators alike.¹³⁵ Many baseball people found this innovation such a capital improvement over the standard practice that, at once, the Association circulated a paper amongst its club presidents asking for their views on using the experimental system as part of league policy. Even team executives who had criticized certain umpires harshly in the past thought it would help. “Messrs. Byrne, Barnie, Williams, and Von der Ahe unite in pronouncing it the best system of umpiring ever devised, and superior even to the two-umpire system—which received such a satisfactory trial in the last world’s championship series—in that the expense is less, there is no divided authority and the results are equally good.” Equally miraculously, “the players also pronounce it excellent.”¹³⁶ National League president Nick Young was impressed enough that he directed one of his own officials, John Valentine, to try the plan in the National League, and if that proved a success, he would instruct all League umpires to use the “Gaffney system.”¹³⁷

By 1889, however, this practice waned. Some, such as John Rogers in Philadelphia, criticized it because, when standing behind the pitcher, the umpire had a difficult time judging whether a ball hit down the third or first base line was fair or foul. As a result, National League president Young ordered Gaffney and his brethren back behind home plate at all times, once again making an accurate call on tag plays at bases little better than a coin flip. This, of course, led to a new chorus of voices calling for the double umpire system.¹³⁸

¹³⁵ “Baltimore Bulletin” TTT, *The Sporting Life*, May 2, 1888, 7.

¹³⁶ “A New Move” NA, *The Sporting Life*, May 9, 1888, 1.

¹³⁷ “The Umpires” Bob Lerner, *The Sporting Life*, May 30, 1888, 1.

¹³⁸ “Lo, The Poor Umpire Again” NA, *The Sporting Life*, June 5, 1889, 4.

Gaffney also called for a second innovation in an effort to improve the lot of his brethren. Umpires had long had the power to fine players, but as mentioned previously, this threat did not carry much force because team management often paid the fines of its players. Gaffney reasoned, therefore, that if umpires were the recipients of the fines, rather than the league, any problems with kicking that umpires might have would go away very quickly. “Here’s the way some of the gentlemanly players will argue: ‘Well, I’ll not open my head to that sucker and let him fine me a tenner.’ If such a rule were made the players would cease ‘kicking,’ if for no other reason than to prevent the umpire profiting by any act of theirs.” When a listener queried Gaffney on whether this might lead to a situation of umpiring for personal profit, he replied, “In the four years that I have been umpiring my fines amount to \$165, \$100 of which I put on Anson for using vile epithets. Let them adopt that rule on Monday, and in one month a ball game will be as orderly as a prayer meeting.”¹³⁹

Neither the League nor the Association adopted Gaffney’s plan for 1889, but they did change one rule in an effort to reduce kicking and keep the games moving. Players guilty of verbal abuse of the umpire, or engaging in other acts of excessive kicking, now faced ejection from the game.¹⁴⁰ Not only would this hurt the team’s chances to win, as its starting players tended to be the best players, but given that most clubs had but one or two substitutes besides pitchers and catchers at any given time, losing a man might force a club to play men in unaccustomed positions, greatly compromising its defense. The one other reform in this line that the National League attempted in 1889 was to use the double umpire idea, but for only one game each day. Whichever series of games president Nick Young believed was most important, he dispatched a second man to officiate in that location for the duration of the series. This was both

¹³⁹ “Another Gaffney Idea” John Gaffney, *The Sporting Life*, August 8, 1888, 1.

¹⁴⁰ The League Grapples The Salary Evil” NA, *The Sporting Life*, November 28, 1888, 2.

helpful, as one game out of four each day had better officiating, but also harmful, as the six other teams not sharing in the bounty were left wondering why they were considered inferior.¹⁴¹

Other suggestions ranged from the practical to the comedic. One writer wondered, “How would the cooper, Graham, who went through Niagara whirlpool in a barrel, do for an umpire, to be permanently located at Washington. True, he may know nothing about base ball, but then he has lots of nerve, which requisite so many umpires seem to be lacking.”¹⁴²

Perhaps intrigued by the idea that bravery and fortitude mattered more for umpires than an intimate knowledge of the rules of the game, Louisville tried a variant of this idea for a November 1886 exhibition game in California at the Alameda Grounds. They tabbed the heavyweight champion of the world, John L. Sullivan, to preside that day. Technically, Sullivan did not umpire the game, as the throng of cranks, reported at 18,000 strong, mobbed the field just to get a look at the celebrated pugilist. Arrayed against this vast multitude and trying to keep order was “the entire police force of Alameda, consisting of as many as seven men and a short, but stout chief” who “worked sedulously to scatter the mob, but in vain.” The Louisville club did eventually play ball against the local nine, but only after Sullivan departed the scene.¹⁴³

The heavyweight champion apparently harbored visions of baseball glory, however, later opposing the Louisville team as a pitcher for its California opponents, but “his pitching was not very effective and he gave way to Raymond in the third inning. Sullivan’s delivery is extremely slow, and curves are apparently unknown to the pugilistic champion.” The champ then switched to third base, where his defensive skills earned similar comparisons to his pitching, but he did manage a hit off of Louisville (on loan for the exhibitions from St. Louis) pitcher Dave

¹⁴¹ “Chadwick’s Chat” Henry Chadwick, *The Sporting Life*, May 22, 1889, 3.

¹⁴² “Caught on the Fly” NA, *The Sporting News*, August 16, 1886, 5.

¹⁴³ “The Louisvilles Win” Gold Pen, *The Sporting News*, November 27, 1886, 1.

“Scissors” Foutz. Sullivan, despite a gait described as “lumbering,” then stole second and third base, eventually coming around to score one of two runs for the “Sullivan Nine” on the day.¹⁴⁴

The Sporting News once joked, “An American base ball player was in Belfast when the recent riot broke out. When he saw clubs flourishing and heard pistols popping he began to grow homesick. When the excitement subsided he asked a stranger if the umpire had escaped.”¹⁴⁵ The paper also deadpanned that “Tweedle’s patent umpire trap will be in use next season. It consists of a trap-door, down which the umpire can at any moment disappear, and by an underground passage get away from the mob that thirsts for his gore.”¹⁴⁶ Not stopping there, “the Czar of Russia gets a bigger salary than a base ball umpire, but his life is not in such imminent danger.”¹⁴⁷ (Recall that Tsar Alexander II was assassinated just five years prior, in 1881.) In addition, “life insurance companies now rate the base ball umpire in the ‘extremely hazardous’ class, along with men who work in dynamite factories” and “a scrupulous umpire in Oneida fined himself seventy-five cents for a wrong decision. He should kick and curse himself, to make himself feel perfectly natural.”¹⁴⁸

The most exotic idea of all, but sadly, also the most racist idea of all, came courtesy of Al Spalding’s tour of the world in 1888-1889. (See chapter fifteen.) When one paper learned the tour would stop in Australia, it stereotyped the native Australians, turning them into Zulus for the amusement of the paper’s readers, then writing, “a black-and-tan umpire clad in fearlessness and a bath towel, with his shield and assegai instead of the usual mask and cane, would lend a sort of éclat to the game. . . . Then, too, it would be more realistic and probably more effective if the

¹⁴⁴ “Sullivan as Pitcher” NA, *The Sporting News*, December 11, 1886, 1; “A Great Baserunner” NA, *The Sporting News*, December 18, 1886, 1.

¹⁴⁵ “Funny Cracks” NA, *The Sporting News*, August 23, 1886, 5.

¹⁴⁶ “Funny Cracks” NA, *The Sporting News*, August 30, 1886, 5.

¹⁴⁷ “Funny Cracks” NA, *The Sporting News*, September 6, 1886, 5.

¹⁴⁸ “Funny Cracks” NA, *The Sporting News*, September 20, 1886, 5.

umpire, when Buck Ewing would kick about a called ball, were to transfix him with an assegai instead of the usual \$25 fine.”¹⁴⁹

Recognizing that efforts to improve the lot of the umpires were, by and large, failing, *The Sporting News* printed a sympathetic mock dialog between a gun store owner and a young man set on a career in umpiring.

Man: “I’ll take two of those largest revolvers you showed me yesterday. . . . and just throw in three boxes of cartridges.”

Clerk: “Anything else?”

Man: “Yes, I want a long knife with a broad hilt.”

Clerk: “Anything else?”

Man: “Keep hand grenades?”

Clerk: “Yes; how many do you want?”

Man: “Half a gross of the largest size.”

Clerk: “What else?”

Man: “A lined breast-plate, if you have it, and you might toss in a small hand-axe.”

Clerk: “Must be going to hurt somebody, eh?”

Man: “Not necessarily. And while you are about it just wrap up a repeating rifle with a gross of explosive bullets.”

Clerk: “Going after O’Brien?”

Man: “No, no. Got any torpedoes?”

Clerk: “Don’t keep ‘em. What are you going to do with all this truck?”

¹⁴⁹ “Base Ball In Australia” NA, *Rocky Mountain News*, October 28, 1888, 1. The actual Zulus, of course, lived in southern Africa.

Man: "I've just hired out as umpire in Baltimore and I want to prepare myself for some close games."¹⁵⁰

* * * * *

The apparently sincere comments of men like Brunell and Chadwick aside, it was a bit hypocritical for the sporting papers to talk about protecting umpires, as they certainly contributed to the problem. By describing the performance of the umpires on a weekly basis, and printing the names of those men whose work the writers found lacking, they only encouraged the cranks in their abuse. The fact that sportswriters often justified the unruly behavior of players and fans, or made excuses for it in their columns, did little to curb that behavior. It is probably naïve to expect that the players would refrain from the occasional episode of kicking, given that most were fierce competitors playing a competitive sport, but there was no need for the sporting press to encourage the fans to emulate the players. Presumably, it made good copy for the papers, but to denounce violence on the one hand, and do things that tolerated, or even encouraged, violence on the other, seems a Janus-like strategy on their part.

Some commentators were brave enough to point out this hypocrisy. A piece written for *The Sporting Life* in 1886 called out other columnists for their contributions to the problem while also offering some practical solutions. The writer offered that writers frequently blamed umpires for a loss, and were loath to forgive them their mistakes while being much more magnanimous towards players when they erred. This eroded public confidence in baseball's officials while giving more ammunition to the kickers on each team. The writer's advice to his brethren was

¹⁵⁰ "Two Pistols Please" NA, *The Sporting News*, August 20, 1887, 1.

“gentlemen, if you expect to get the best service you must choose competent and honest men, and then treat them as though you had confidence that they were competent and honest, and it remains with you more than anyone else whether the umpiring system shall be made more successful and satisfactory than at present.” Even though the author put other writers at the top of his enemies list, he echoed former umpire Lon Knight by writing that team managers also deserved some heat for not standing up for umpires and making too many official complaints to the league office, which could result in an umpire’s dismissal. Finally, the author recommended less turnover in the umpiring staff of each league, as less turnover allowed the players and umpires more time to become accustomed to each other and would reduce the misunderstandings that occasionally resulted from unfamiliarity.¹⁵¹

Even though umpires realized the power of the press to make or break their reputation, there was very little they could do about it. As an International League umpire, Ben Young, put it, “his rise and fall, his ups and downs, depend not so much on his own individual work as on the favor or disfavor of the press. No matter how much the crowd may howl on day of games, let the newspapers say ‘he’s all right’ and the grievances of yesterday become the graces of today.” A few team managers of baser morality even used this to try to win more home games. One, Charles Cushman, who managed Toronto in the International Association, got caught red-handed in this practice in 1888. An umpire, by mere chance, intercepted a letter Cushman wrote to the *Toronto Mail*. “The Toronto papers, instead of roasting the umpire, gave [Jerry] Sullivan a fair show by complimenting him. This so enraged Cushman that he instanter wrote a letter to the editor of the *Toronto Mail* imploring him to roast Sullivan and all umpires that refused to favor

¹⁵¹ “The Umpire Problem” Veteran, *The Sporting Life*, November 10, 1886, 4.

Toronto. If this were done, said Cushman, the umpires will weaken and the pennant will fly in Toronto again.”¹⁵²

Unbelievably, Cushman was not the worst manager in the International Association, according to Young. That distinction belonged to Buffalo’s manager, John Chapman. Young wrote,

He caused my release in order to give Jack Remsen a livelihood. It was supposed that Remsen would prove himself grateful by favoring Chapman and Buffalo. To Remsen’s credit it must be said he did nothing of the kind, but did the best he knew how. The second and last day of Jack’s career the crowd in Bisontown imagined that Remsen was doing them up. It was evident to me, who was sitting in the grand stand, that the crowd meant business, and that Remsen needed protection after the game. What then was my surprise at the conclusion of the game to see Chapman walk up to Remsen white as a sheet, and instead of offering him his arm for protection, began gesticulating in a wild manner and denounced him most severely for his umpiring. The crowd needed not to look for a leader. . . . Chapman now turns Remsen over to the mob, while he himself sneaks toward the dressing room. Remsen was struck with bottles and cushions rather freely and would have been struck with fists but for the police that arrived in time to save his life.¹⁵³

A Buffalo associate of Chapman later wrote to *The Sporting Life* to refute Young’s story, although interestingly, he never denied the events concerning Remsen (whose umpiring career was rather short, as by the next season he was managing the Mansfield, Ohio, ball club). Rather, the author sought to impugn Young’s umpiring abilities, even going so far as to suggest Young was once an inmate in a Cleveland insane asylum.¹⁵⁴ Whatever the truth of the matter, this story demonstrates that umpires, whether major league or minor league, always seemed to be in some kind of danger, and dealt with enough hostility that people could easily believe a story such as that put forth by Young.

¹⁵² “An Umpire’s Tale” Ben Young, *The Sporting Life*, August 8, 1888, 5.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ “Chapman’s Eulogium” Olympic, *The Sporting Life*, August 15, 1888, 6.

The case of much-maligned Ted Sullivan was another case in point. Regardless of his abilities to officiate a baseball game, it is hard not to feel a little sympathy for the man. When he signed on to work games in the American Association midway through 1887, he arrived with a fine reputation based on his work in the International League. Unfortunately, he started his major league umpiring career in Baltimore, which in 1887 had “attained unenviable notoriety for its treatment of even the best umpires.” Furthermore, when he came to town to work games in the Monumental City, the Orioles were on a losing streak, so it was even easier than usual for the frustrated fans and players to scapegoat him for their continued woes. The Baltimore press raked him over the coals, and he became rattled, making the problem worse. When cranks at his next stop, New York, read the bad press given him in Baltimore and found that he was working the next set of games involving the Metropolitans, they became prejudiced against his work before he even set foot on the field, expecting the worst with every call and eager to jump down Sullivan’s throat over the first close call that did not go their way. Unsurprisingly, this treatment rattled Sullivan once again, and he could not umpire consistently. Fans in Philadelphia acted the same way, with the same results there. “Sullivan couldn’t please no matter how hard he tried and the Philadelphia crowds settled him; he quit.”¹⁵⁵

There was another man named Sullivan who umpired in the National League that same year, the recently mentioned Jerry Sullivan, and he must have empathized with his namesake, because his story was almost the same. After getting some ribbing from the Detroit press, he traveled east to work games in Boston. When the home nine went down to defeat one Monday in August, the crowd was ready to lay the blame on Sullivan. “All through the game he had been hooted at and gayed, and at the conclusion he would have been roughly handled but for the

¹⁵⁵ “Partisan Reporters’ Blunders” NA, *The Sporting Life*, August 24, 1887, 1.

interference of [Mike] Kelly, who, with the assistance of a policeman, escorted him to the dressing-room. As it was, a number of stones were thrown by small boys, one of which struck Sullivan in the head.”¹⁵⁶

The Boston press believed the attack justified, however, as one wrote that Sullivan “is playing tenth man on Jim Mutrie’s nine just at present. He was with us only a few days, thank fortune, when his grip was checked for other fields, on which he will show what he don’t know about base ball umpiring.” While the writer, of course, did not “excuse the acts of rowdyism in the least,” he then immediately excused the rowdyism by writing, “no one who saw the game will deny it, that this weak-backed Mr. Sullivan was the cause of all the disturbance and wholly to blame by being simply a puppet in the hands of Buck Ewing. . . . How could it be otherwise than exasperating for an immense home gathering to see the captain of a visiting team pull the strings which worked the umpire.”¹⁵⁷ Perhaps Sullivan should have modeled himself after American Association umpire Wesley Curry, who in one game that year fined Cincinnati shortstop Frank Fennelly nine times, to the tune of twenty-five dollars per offense. This gave rise to the story that Fennelly was intoxicated for the game, as clearly, only someone of reduced mental capacity would continue arguing under the circumstances.¹⁵⁸

The old man of the game, Henry Chadwick, pointed out additional problems with the press blaming umpires for nearly every loss by the home nine. He agreed that “one cannot pick up a daily paper containing Associated Press dispatches of games played out of town without reading that this or that club lost the game by the wretched umpiring of So-and-so” but he believed the best remedy was for umpires to sit on the kickers promptly and fine them liberally.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ “From the Hub” Mugwump, *The Sporting Life*, August 24, 1887, 5.

¹⁵⁸ “Notes and Comments” NA, *The Sporting Life*, August 24, 1887, 5.

Chadwick also believed, however, that one reason the press treated umpires with such remorseless criticism was that they frequently bet on games and lost, and needed to take out their frustrations for psychological reasons and get back at someone for costing them money. “As it is now, with the latitude allowed to kicking and with press criticism of umpires, generally written by scribes who bet on the games they write about, satisfactory work by umpires is out of the question.”¹⁵⁹ This practice of writers betting on games may not have been an isolated one, either. “In Topeka and other Western League cities base ball reporters have fallen into the reprehensible habit of betting on the ball games which they are called upon to report. Is a correct and impartial report possible under such circumstances?”¹⁶⁰

Hypocrisy or not, one reason, in addition to simple common decency, that observers wanted better protection for umpires was the fear of losing the few quality arbiters they had. Chick Fulmer, considered one of the best of the lot in the National League after his midseason appointment in 1886, considered giving up his position within half a season of joining the umpiring ranks, claiming he was tired of the abuse.¹⁶¹ Fulmer made this statement despite a reputation for fairness that decreased complaining from the contestants. “Charlie Fulmer, of the old Athletics, officiated as umpire and gave general satisfaction; he possesses one very good quality in being firm in his decisions. . . . The games were well conducted and without any kicking of any kind from either side.”¹⁶² Rather than take the abuse any longer, Fulmer went into public service instead, gaining election as a magistrate for the city of Philadelphia in 1887.

¹⁵⁹ “Chadwick’s Chat” Henry Chadwick, *The Sporting Life*, August 24, 1887, 3.

¹⁶⁰ “Notes and Comments” NA, *The Sporting Life*, August 24, 1887, 5.

¹⁶¹ “The Local Season” NA *The Sporting Life*, August 11, 1886, 5.

¹⁶² “New York Chat” Layman, *The Sporting Life*, August 18, 1886, 1.

This new position tripled his salary, to \$3,000 per year (for a five-year term) plus “perquisites.”¹⁶³

Additionally, but usually in vain, some papers tried to point out how difficult a job umpires had. The New York *Times* tried to remind its readers that “the umpire has to perform functions incomparably more incessant and important than in any other popular pastime . . . but accusations against him of partiality or deliberate violations of the rules are probably unjust in nine cases out of ten, the real difficulty being that of seeing with precision all that is going on.” In addition, the *Times* pointed out that seeing plays at second base that required a tag of the runner, especially when players on first base attempted to steal second base, was immensely difficult. Finally, the paper acknowledged the rough play and poor sportsmanship that existed in the game, and how umpires tended to take the brunt of the bad sportsmanship and complaining no matter what else they did right. “The umpire’s difficulties are further increased by the prevailing doctrine that all tricks are fair in baseball, as in war, and that a game that cannot be won squarely may be won by hook or crook. . . . Hoodwinking and bulldozing the umpire thus becomes a part of the game.”¹⁶⁴

Furthermore, imagine the dismay of baseball officials and observers when the rare umpire they actually liked lost his position. Such was the case with “Honest” John Valentine, who worked American Association games in 1886 to the general satisfaction of most observers. When the Association did not retain him for 1887, many papers and writers wondered why. Even Chris Von der Ahe, the mercurial owner who never shied away from controversy with anyone who did not support his beloved St. Louis Browns, expressed his surprise. “I have liked

¹⁶³ “Local News” NA, *The Sporting Life*, March 2, 1887, 6; “Local News” NA, *The Sporting Life*, March 9, 1887, 5; “Local News” NA, *The Sporting Life*, October 5, 1887, 5.

¹⁶⁴ “The Baseball Season” NA, *New York Times*, October 13, 1886, 4.

his umpiring all along and last season it was remarkably good. . . . I tell you good umpires are hard to get and no changes ought to be made as long as the staff gives satisfaction.”¹⁶⁵ Evidently agreeing with Von der Ahe’s assessment, the National League decided to swoop in and nab Valentine for their staff for 1888.

Valentine had a narrow escape in Philadelphia in August that year after some controversial calls aided in the defeat of the home nine in a game with the Boston Beaneaters, as “a crowd of men and boys waited on Broad street for Valentine to leave the ground, but they missed him.”¹⁶⁶ The *New York Times* speculated he was trying to redeem himself in the next series, when the New York Giants came to town, because his work did not give satisfaction then, either. “The crowd in an instant saw that he was treating New York unfairly, and when he presented Philadelphia with the runs he was roundly hissed. It is a rare thing for a Philadelphia crowd to hiss an umpire for favoring the home club, but today was an exception to the rule.”¹⁶⁷ This demonstrates that even a good man was at risk if he found himself in the wrong city on the wrong day.

Valentine was certainly a tough customer. Any umpire had to be, but in 1887, he proved his ability to go beyond the call of duty, as he umpired several games after breaking his arm. Finally, however, he succumbed to the pain and asked for leave to recuperate. The National League literally heaped insult on top of injury at this point as, true to the expectations about workplace safety in Gilded Age America, the League refused to compensate him for his time missed while injured on the job, claiming its constitution made no provision for such situations. Even though Valentine was hurt through no fault of his own, an errant pitch doing the deed, he

¹⁶⁵ “From St. Louis” Pritchard, *The Sporting Life*, January 19, 1887, 2.

¹⁶⁶ “An Umpire Causes A Row” NA, *New York Times*, August 21, 1888, 1.

¹⁶⁷ “Ten Men Against Them” NA, *New York Times*, August 24, 1888, 2.

had to get by without compensation during the down time, as baseball law considered this risk part of his job. Some of the sporting press actually sympathized with an umpire for once when it got wind of Valentine's plight.¹⁶⁸ The League finally gave in and allowed him eighteen days pay for the time he was out with injury, but not until its meeting in November of that year.¹⁶⁹

There was, believe it or not, one bright spot for baseball's arbiters beginning in 1887, as the idea of wearing a mask for protection started to gain traction. Umpire Doescher summed up the prevailing viewpoint when he stated, "I am wearing a mask for the first time, and I don't like it, because it is hard for me to see all the points, though, of course, it is a protection. I have had my face all battered up this season already, and only a couple of weeks ago had to have stitches put in my neck where I was hit with a ball, so I thought it was about time for me to adopt some protection."¹⁷⁰ This idea caught on, although there were limits to just how far a man would go. Prior to the 1889 season, a Western League umpire named Sandy McDermott decided to don a set of protective gear that the sporting papers described as "a suit of armor." It consisted of a chest protector and facemask with steel ribs covered over with stout bull's hide, along with shin guards made from the same material. While this sounds suspiciously similar to the modern attire of the home plate umpire, it was a little before its time and did not catch on immediately.¹⁷¹

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What, exactly, did umpires do to anger fans and players so much? Of course, any game where too many close decisions went against the home nine invited the crowd's anger. This has

¹⁶⁸ "Rough on Valentine" NA, *The Sporting Life*, August 31, 1887, 1.

¹⁶⁹ "Players And The League" NA, *New York Times*, November 17, 1887, 5.

¹⁷⁰ "Notes and Comments" NA, *The Sporting Life*, September 7, 1887, 3.

¹⁷¹ "One Intelligent Umpire" NA, *The Sporting News*, April 6, 1889, 1.

always been true of any sporting match that requires split-second calls on the part of its arbiters. There were also, however, enough actual examples of favoritism that it brought disrepute on the honesty and ability of all members of the profession. A few examples will suffice to show why teams, players, and spectators alike felt so much outrage at times.

In 1885, Boston engaged in a cross-league exhibition match with the Brooklyn Grays following the end of the championship season. All seemed on the up-and-up until the last inning. Brooklyn led 5-4 as the ninth inning opened. The umpire, Mr. West, decided the game should proceed. Boston opened with a hit, suffered an out, but their next batter tripled to tie the game. At this point, only two minutes into the ninth inning, West decided to call the game because of darkness. This caused the score to revert to what it had been at the conclusion of the last completed inning, giving Brooklyn a 5-4 victory. Even the home Brooklyn cranks, “whose better judgment was not obscured by partisanship,” kicked over the clearly partial decision. That same day, Brooklyn’s neighbors from New York, the Metropolitanans, crossed the Hudson River into New Jersey for an exhibition game with Newark, where “they suffered the same fate that has befallen so many clubs visiting that city. Umpire Ketcham took sides with the home team early in the game, and amused himself by calling men out at first when the ball happened to arrive some seconds after the runner.”¹⁷²

Apparently, fans did not always appreciate such sleight of hand, even when it benefited the home side. Just three days after Brooklyn’s heist of the game from Boston, the New York Giants took the field in Washington for an exhibition match with the Nationals. The game began with a substitute umpire, named Stearns, who only called the game because the Giants refused to take the field with umpire Holland on hand, feeling he had wronged them grievously the day

¹⁷² “Two Unfair Umpires” NA, *New York Times*, October 15, 1885, 5.

before. The Nationals led 2-1 as the seventh inning opened. A combination of hits by the Giants and errors by Washington resulted in New York plating four runs in the top of the seventh. “At this point the Nationals bulldozed the umpire and compelled him to call the game back to the end of the sixth inning, which threw out the 4 runs made in the first half of the seventh and gave the Giants a defeat instead of a victory. The spectators hissed the local players and warmly applauded the New Yorks as they left the field.” The cranks in the nation’s capital did not appreciate the display of cowardice, as “such a petty trick in order to escape a defeat was severely commented upon by the patrons of the game in this city.”¹⁷³

Another mistake an umpire might make, besides calling games too early or too late because of weather or darkness, was to allow players to do things in plain sight that clearly stood outside the rules. For instance, in an 1886 Jersey City-Newark game, umpire Charley Daniels allowed Newark player Tom Burns to block the paths of two Jersey City baserunners attempting to score on a ninth inning hit. Because of Burns, the ball beat the men to home, and the umpire declared them out, allowing Newark to triumph by a single tally. Following this case of excessive leniency towards the visitors, “an excited crowd made a rush for Daniels, and would have mauled him but for the interference of the police. The crowd was so determined to get at him that the police found it necessary to draw their revolvers to keep them at bay.” Furthermore, “after the game Daniels went under police protection to a near saloon, where he remained until his pursuers had withdrawn. The car in which the Newarks started for home was attacked, and Burns is said to have been struck.”¹⁷⁴

Similarly, there were incidents not covered by the rules where the umpire had to make a decision, but of course, this invited criticism that he had exceeded his authority, even though

¹⁷³ “Baseball” NA, *New York Times*, October 18, 1885, 2.

¹⁷⁴ “Mobbing An Umpire” NA, *New York Times*, July 6, 1886, 8.

there was no other option and the playing rules of both major leagues granted him the latitude to make such decisions. This appears to have been the case in a Tri-State League game in Canton on May 3, 1888, when umpire Sandy McDermott failed to declare a baserunner named O'Neil out, even though he had jumped on one of the fielders and spiked him badly. As a result, cranks in Canton "became infuriated and went for the unfortunate umpire, but he was gotten inside the club house before the mob could lay its hands on him."¹⁷⁵ Other observers pointed out that Sharpe, the catcher, had been standing on home plate to try and block O'Neil from crossing and scoring a run. McDermott ruled that the runner had a right to the base, and thus was safe.¹⁷⁶ The situation was so bad that *The Sporting Life* printed a missive from McDermott to describe the incident. To all the talk that he had stolen the game from Canton, McDermott replied that the home nine had lost by two after allowing five runs to score via fielding and baserunning errors. Furthermore, "every umpire has trouble in your city. How can it be otherwise? You allow open betting on your ground." Club officials of Canton even forced McDermott to undergo an eye examination. "The good doctor—Morrow by name—informed the man who would have me blind, that my 'lamps' were all O.K. Then you accused me of being intoxicated. I am pleased to say you are mistaken again, I don't drink."¹⁷⁷

Sometimes, there was nothing to blame but bad judgment. This might be embarrassing if the poor judgment imperiled the chances of the visiting nine, but if the umpire was unlucky enough to aggravate the home side with his mistakes, anything could happen. Consider the plight of former pitcher George Bradley, who officiated in the Brooklyn-Cincinnati game of July

¹⁷⁵ "Notes And Comments" NA, *The Sporting Life*, May 16, 1888, 9.

¹⁷⁶ "Celeryville Creeping Up" G Rusalem, *The Sporting Life*, May 23, 1888, 1.

¹⁷⁷ "Hitting Back" Sandy McDermott, *The Sporting Life*, May 23, 1888, 1.

11, 1886. After he called a Brooklyn runner safe on a close play at first, allowing the visitors to plate a pair of possibly undeserved runs in the sixth inning,

the wildest confusion ensued. Yells and hisses were hurled at the umpire, and ruffians threw beer glasses at Bradley. Several thousand people jumped from the stands into the field to mob Bradley. The excitement was still further increased by Frank Bell, formerly catcher of the Brooklyns, who became involved in a fight in the pavilion with a fellow named Clark, brother of Bob Clark, the present catcher of the Brooklyns. The fight was waxing hot, when Bob Clark, in full uniform, jumped into the pavilion, bat in hand, to assist his brother, who was being whipped. Then followed a pitched battle of the friends of the contestants. Bell's friends rushed to his rescue, and the followers of Clark took a hand in the melee, which lasted fully 15 minutes, during which the police seemed utterly powerless. That part of the crowd not engaged in the fight went for Bradley with beer glasses, but he was hustled off the field in time to save his life.

Amazingly, that was not the end of the story. "The Brooklyn players, fearing trouble, stood ready, bats in hand, to protect themselves. The police by this time had rallied and restored quiet. Bradley, under protection of the authorities, umpired the rest of the game. So far as can be ascertained, no one was mortally hurt in the fight, although several were injured."¹⁷⁸

While some umpires, regrettably, were the target of beer glasses hurled at them by fans, the beer glasses they lifted with their own arms could also be problematic. Observers sometimes pointed this out to excuse the poor treatment. In retrospect, it is easy to see why an umpire might choose to drown his sorrows in the bottle, given the stress his job entailed. However, this did not help him perform his job any better the next day, thus perpetuating the cycle of abuse followed by drinking followed by more abuse. Even a relatively good man like John Kelly sometimes fell into this trap. During his time in Detroit in September of 1888, "Umpire John Kelly has been on an extended spree here, and night after night has been seen on the streets in a beastly state of intoxication. His umpiring in consequences has been outrageously poor. Yesterday, as the result of a tear the night previous, he was unable to appear at the grounds and umpire, John Ward

¹⁷⁸ "An Umpire's Peril" NA, *New York Times*, July 12, 1886, 1.

taking his place.” Kelly, not yet finished with his escapades in the City of the Straits, “in company with a Detroit tough, went out on a painting expedition last night, assaulted a woman, and is now in the Police Station on a charge of assault and battery, preferred by the woman in question.”¹⁷⁹ Kelly tried to clear his name, blaming sickness rather than intoxication for his failure to show, and pointing out that the courts dropped the charges against him for assault for lack of evidence. His explanation did not convince many in the baseball world, however given all the other evidence he could not explain away.¹⁸⁰

The same month, another man on the National League’s staff stood accused of the same indiscretion. “Mr. Valentine is stupid and unfit to act as umpire in his present condition. He has reached the point where he is unable to keep accurate count of balls and strikes.” The accuser, A.G. Ovens of Indianapolis, was careful to point out he did not accuse Valentine of favoritism, just poor work due to alcohol. “I am not finding fault with him because of anything he has done against the Indianapolis team any more than for what he has done against the visitors. He has been impartially bad and the crowds have grown tired and disgusted with his miserable work. It is the impression here that his habits are not good and that he stops too often between his hotel and the ball grounds.” Ovens also believed a third man on the NL’s roster of officials, Charley Daniels, did the same. “His work here has been better than Valentine’s, but that does not mean that he is a good umpire. He has many of the latter’s faults, and they come from the same source in my opinion. . . . In to-day’s game he made some awful decisions and the bleacher element raised a great row, repeatedly calling him a ‘lusher’ and demanding his withdrawal on that account.” If Ovens was correct, that meant that three-quarters of the National League’s regular

¹⁷⁹ “John Kelly Disgraced” C.F. Mathison, *The Sporting Life*, September 26, 1888, 1.

¹⁸⁰ “That Bad Break” NA, *The Sporting Life*, October 3, 1888, 1.

umpires were consistently intoxicated during the heat of the 1888 pennant race.¹⁸¹ League president Nick Young tacitly admitted there was a problem once the season concluded. “I regret to say that this has been the trouble with some men this year who would otherwise be first-class in the position. It is a matter of great regret to me, and I hope to steer clear of the trouble next year.”¹⁸²

Another practice of some umpires, which earned the scorn of many cranks, was what observers called “evening.” As the name implies, this meant that if an official gave a poor decision on a play, and realized it, he would then attempt to even things out by calling the next play in favor of the other club, no matter how obviously wrong the decision. This infuriated people because, in addition to a poorly called game, by this practice the umpire essentially admitted he had made a mistake on the previous decision. All these things provided the kickers with fresh ammunition to use in questioning the umpire’s judgment. Most preferred that, even if a mistake occurred, the umpire would continue to call the rest of the game as even-handedly as he was capable.

Finally, there was the fact that some umpires unabashedly favored the home team. This was always a risk when the regularly scheduled umpire could not appear due to injury, illness, intoxication, delays in transportation, and the like. Such cases required producing a substitute, of course, and as there was not always time to find a man with good qualifications, local umpires sometimes got the nod regardless of their merit. This always raised doubts regarding whether the visiting team would receive a square deal or not. This system showed its worst features when Philadelphia traveled to Boston in June of 1889. A local man, Charles Weeden, got the call when George Barnum could not go. “He knew what was expected of him, and from the first

¹⁸¹ “Indianapolis Mention” A.G. Ovens, *The Sporting Life*, September 26, 1888, 5.

¹⁸² “President Nick Young” Sam, *The Sporting News*, October 20, 1888, 4.

game to the last gave the Phillies an unmerciful deal in most brazen fashion.” When Philadelphia captain Arthur Irwin questioned his interpretation of a rule, as the rules allowed captains to do, Weeden responded, “I don’t have to know; I’ll umpire as I like.” Weeden momentarily weakened in his resolve to steal games from the Quakers when, after another poor call at second base, even the home crowd hissed him for incompetence, but when one of the Boston Triumvirs, Conant, yelled out “Good decision, good decision!” Weeden continued playing the role of benefactor towards the home nine.¹⁸³

Bad judgment, on the field and off, certainly occurred, but it is amazing that baseball’s decision makers took so long to decide to place another umpire on the field (the desire to save the pittance of an umpire’s salary was the primary obstacle to this reform), because there were some situations where one man could not possibly be correct all the time, no matter how good and impartial. Probably the most notorious of these situations was when a baserunner attempted to steal second base. The umpire, stationed behind home plate to call balls and strikes, had to make an instantaneous decision on a tag play at second base, which was more than 100 feet away, and where the bodies of players, dust from the sliding baserunner, or even the pitcher’s body might easily obscure his vision of the play and cause him to give the wrong decision. This was one situation where players kicked mercilessly, claiming the umpire had wronged them, which he often did, whether it was intentional or not. Umpires admitted this was their toughest play. Ted Sullivan stated in 1887, “that most of the umpire’s troubles came from decisions at second base, which, in most cases, are as he claims—guess work.”¹⁸⁴

This is why veteran baseball observers, led by the most veteran of them all, Henry Chadwick, called long and loud for a second man to watch plays in the outfield and on the bases.

¹⁸³ “Philadelphia Pointers” NA, *The Sporting Life*, June 12, 1889, 5.

¹⁸⁴ “The Umpire Question” O.P. Caylor, *The Sporting Life*, August 17, 1887, 4.

As Chadwick wrote, “I don’t care how able or experienced an umpire may be, he cannot attend to the double duty of judging balls and strikes, and of running down the field to judge questions of outs on the bases that two men—each in his own position—can achieve.” Chadwick even brushed off the extra cost of having a second man on the field, stating, “the only one point that can be brought to bear against it being the extra expense it involves, and this should be a matter of secondary consideration; for, in comparison with the pecuniary losses likely to be involved in the continuance of the rows and disturbances incident to umpires’ decisions, with the consequent loss of patronage, the extra expense . . . is merely nominal.”¹⁸⁵

Major league baseball teams actually did put a second man on the field at times during the 1888 season, but it was not exactly what proponents of the double umpire system had in mind. That season, whenever the regularly scheduled umpire was unable to appear and officiate the game, as a replacement, league policy was for each team to have one player from its roster not playing that day perform as umpire, one at home plate and the other in the field. In retrospect, it is almost impossible to imagine why baseball’s leading men could possibly conceive this would be a good idea. The potential conflicts of interest were so numerous they require no elaboration here. Yet, that is what the game’s leaders decided to do, rather than stand the expense of hiring regular men as substitute officials. Predictably, this inspired vigorous protests from all involved, including, of course, vigorous protests from some of the men who approved this idea in the first place. Just one example of the folly of this arrangement comes from Kansas City, where “we have had even a more exciting time than we had in the Baltimore series. . . . Of course that nonsensical double umpire system was the occasion of the row, and once again the visiting club was to blame.” The schedule called for a double-header, and in the

¹⁸⁵ “Chadwick’s Chat” Henry Chadwick, *The Sporting Life*, February 8, 1888, 3.

first game of the two, pitcher Adonis Terry of Brooklyn umpired balls and strikes. “In the first game Terry umpired and Kansas City won by the score of 5 to 1. Terry did well and Kansas City was pleased. In the second game Terry, for some occult reason, was not permitted to umpire, but Darby O’Brien was put in. Captain Barkley did not know O’Brien, but took McGunnigle’s word for his honesty.” From that point, trouble began because, “well, Darby was not honest by a long shot. He robbed Kansas City of a game fairly won.” The next day, therefore, when a controversial call took place late in the game and Brooklyn protested, “there was a great big able bodied row, in which the crowd joined.” The whole matter ended up involving several severe fines for bad behavior, and a hearing by baseball’s Board of Arbitration in order to iron everything out.¹⁸⁶

It is a wonder that cranks or players did not actually kill a major league umpire, as hard as they tried sometimes. They were almost responsible for one minor league fatality, however. On September 6, 1889, in Darlington, South Carolina, fans and players attacked umpire William Marshall when the game did not go in their favor, and one of them, shortstop Leon Dorgan (sometimes spelled Dargan), reportedly killed Marshall. After one call, which the press regarded as accurate, the Darlington team threatened violence, “and during the excitement young Dorgan, Darlington’s shortstop, rushed up with a heavy bat in his hand and with a mighty blow on the side of the head felled Umpire Marshall to the ground like a log. Pistols, knives and bats were drawn, and a general riot seemed imminent.” The assailant was seventeen years old, and he was also the son of a Congressman.¹⁸⁷ While initial reports stated Marshall died from the blow, fortunately, the blow was not fatal, and he slowly recovered.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁶ “A Heap Of Trouble” McHenry, *The Sporting News*, July 21, 1888, 1.

¹⁸⁷ “An Umpire Meets With Death on The Ball Field” NA, *The Sporting News*, September 7, 1889, 1. When *The Sporting Life* reported on the near-murder, that paper confirmed that, to its

In addition, there were at least two umpires killed in the line of duty, but not by players or fans. Instead, the ball itself was responsible. In one case, a foul tip struck Samuel Hainbrook, a merchant from Kincaid, Kansas, in the neck, and he died instantly on August 31, 1888.¹⁸⁹ The other case was the death of Steve Hagan, who umpired many western games in Kansas City. The official cause of Hagan's death was blood poisoning, exacerbated by being stuck in the leg by a swift pitch that broke a bone that did not heal properly. Hagan appears to have been the rare umpire whom both fans and players liked. His skill in making calls was not his best trait; rather, it was his honesty and friendly nature. "I don't think he ever left the field with hard feelings against him, and I have never heard anyone charge him with doing wrong intentionally," remarked one Kansas City sportswriter.¹⁹⁰

There were cases in which the reverse happened, and umpires killed unruly cranks and players. In 1889, there was a delay in a minor league game in Sunbright, Tennessee, when a fan came on the field and threw rocks at the umpire, W.R. Staples. Staples, instead of taking the abuse, drew a knife and stabbed his attacker, Davidson Hill, who also happened to be his cousin. Hill died instantly.¹⁹¹ There was also the incident in Owensboro, near Louisville, where umpire Ben Bates got into a row with an argumentative player, Frank Morris. During the fracas, he drew a pocketknife and stabbed Morris, killing him. The amazing thing was, according to the newspaper account, "Bates is but sixteen years old."¹⁹²

knowledge, Marshall was the first umpire killed on the field to that point in baseball history.

"An Umpire Murdered" NA, *The Sporting Life*, September 11, 1889, 1.

¹⁸⁸ "Notes And Comments" NA, *The Sporting Life*, September 18, 1889, 4.

¹⁸⁹ "An Umpire Killed" NA, *The Sporting News*, September 1, 1888, 1.

¹⁹⁰ "Kansas City Briefs" Freeman, *The Sporting Life*, January 9, 1889, 1.

¹⁹¹ "Notes And Comments" NA, *The Sporting Life*, June 26, 1889, 4.

¹⁹² "An Umpire Stabs His Man" NA, *The Sporting News*, July 27, 1889, 1.

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By now, it is clear that monetary considerations made finding quality umpires an important matter. There is, however, another important point about umpires to remember. The treatment of umpires, in all likelihood, influenced the results on the field. If this chapter proves anything, it is that umpires who ruled too frequently against the home nine were either brave, foolish, incorruptible, spoiling for a fight, or some combination of these all at once. Unless the man enjoyed the sterling reputation of a Bob Ferguson or John Gaffney, the risk to life and limb was considerable. Whenever in doubt, many umpires must have chosen to favor the home side simply out of their sense of self-preservation. One contemporary recognized this fact, writing, “to induce the best men to serve, the umpire must receive positive protection from bodily harm. Even if poverty compels him to serve, he cannot take his life in his hand and at the same time exercise the requisite good judgment to make himself and the game a success.”¹⁹³

It is impossible to prove definitively, of course, but the results on the field support this conclusion. In the 1880s, the home team won 58.3% of their games, the second best decade ever for home teams, trailing only, unsurprisingly, the 1890s, when the hosts triumphed in 60.3% of the contests. There are other reasons the 1890s were a golden age for home clubs, such as the practice, appearing in American Association in 1887 and the National League 1892 and becoming more prevalent as the 1890s progressed, of teams with weak home attendance giving up home games to play more road games because the visitor’s share of the gate on the road was more money than their home share would have been from a poorly attended home game. (This practice remains a central feature of college football in the present day, incidentally.) In 1890s

¹⁹³ “From Baltimore” TTT, *The Sporting Life*, February 16, 1887, 4.

baseball, however, the result was that poor teams played more road games, where they were more likely to lose in the first place, driving up the winning percentage of the usually better to begin with home teams. To take an extreme example, in the 1880s, Louisville was 261-195 at home, for a solid .572 winning percentage, but a dismal 171-315 in road games, equating to a .352 winning percentage.¹⁹⁴

It is not hard to fathom some other reasons why home teams had the edge in the 1880s. Many teams put their players up in third-class accommodations while traveling in order to save cash. Another method teams used to save a few shekels while away from home was simply leaving some reserve players behind in order to avoid paying for their room and board on the road, thus playing its road games with a depleted roster. The St. Louis Browns were the masters of this maneuver, largely because two of their pitchers, Bob Caruthers and Dave Foutz, were also versatile players and outstanding hitters who could play right field on the days they did not pitch, so the team could get by with fewer men because of their diverse talents. Other clubs, however, without such useful players, often played at a disadvantage when playing road games without

¹⁹⁴ The home winning percentages in baseball, by decade, are

1870s: .563

1880s: .583

1890s: .603

1900s: .552

1910s: .540

1920s: .543

1930s: .553

1940s: .544

1950s: .539

1960s: .541

1970s: .538

1980s: .541

1990s: .537

2000s: .544

James, *The New Bill James Historical Baseball Abstract*, 13, 39, 57-58, 75, 98, 124, 148, 200, 224, 252, 279, 298, 312.

their full complement of ballplayers. Being away from home for an extended period also takes its toll, especially on people not fond of traveling in the first place, and when teams hit the road in the 1880s, it was often two weeks or more before they returned home. In addition, each ballpark has its own quirks and subtleties, of which the home side is more adept at taking advantage.

These things, however, with the possible exception of team travel arrangements and lodgings, have always been true, yet in the 1880s and 1890s home teams won more often, by far, than in any other decade. Although there is no way to prove the hypothesis that treatment of umpires favored the home team in any mathematical way, of course, it seems safe to assume that the treatment of umpires contributed to this phenomenon of dominance by the home teams of the 1880s and 1890s.

We even have a few tantalizing hints that baseball's umpires did favor the home side on purpose. As mentioned earlier, Ted Sullivan's time as a National League umpire in 1887 did not go well. He could not seem to please anyone, anywhere, and writers in many cities reported on his inconsistency and incompetence. Late in August, with the air thick with rumors about his resignation from the National League's staff of umpires, he said league president Nick Young had told him (and thus, presumably, other umpires as well) he was supposed to favor the home side when in doubt about a call. "Yet Sullivan was blamed for obeying orders. His instructions were that where a decision is so close that it can be given either way to give it to the home club, and this he did in all cases. He said he was disgusted with the whole business."¹⁹⁵ Later testimony confirms this, according to Washington sportswriter Bob Lerner, who often spoke with Young and had access to him consistently for interviews and official statements. "Mr. Young, in

¹⁹⁵ "Umpire Sullivan's Case" NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, August 24, 1887, 3.

discussing the objectionable decisions with Umpire Kelly, advised him that in all cases where a reasonable doubt existed to give the home club the benefit of the doubt.”¹⁹⁶ Another National League umpire, George Barnum, told the press that Young gave him the same instructions. It seems safe to conclude, therefore, that at least in the National League, the home team really did get the benefit of the doubt.¹⁹⁷

Former manager O.P. Caylor admitted to this tacit understanding between major league baseball and its umpires as well. In 1887, he described the umpiring in games involving his club, the American Association’s New York Metropolitans, on one road trip thusly: “No, we were not robbed by the umpire. The team got, as a general thing, fair treatment in that respect all the way through. Bauer umpired nine of the games and McQuade three, and umpired well. They may have leaned a little toward the home club, but I always not only expect that, but am a warm advocate of the system. Both Bauer and McQuade umpired splendid ball.”¹⁹⁸

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It is clear that in the 1880s, umpires were very important to the overall success of baseball, and very visible in terms of their treatment in the press. Fans and sportswriters knew the identities and reputations of each man, and commented freely upon their merits or lack thereof. Newspapers held discussions of the problems facing umpires almost continually, and everyone involved in the game sought ways to improve the officiating of baseball games. This is a major difference between Gilded Age baseball and baseball today. With the exception of a few

¹⁹⁶ “Washington Whispers” Bob Larnier, *The Sporting Life*, July 4, 1888, 6.

¹⁹⁷ “Notes And Comments” NA, *The Sporting Life*, June 19, 1889, 4

¹⁹⁸ “Caylor’s Comment” O.P. Caylor, *The Sporting Life*, September 7, 1887, 5.

high profile unsatisfactory umpiring performances, such as that of Eric Gregg in the 1997 National League Championship Series, umpires in recent decades almost never garner the attention that their nineteenth century predecessors did.

Partly this is because there are so many more of them today, while in the 1880s there were just eight for all of major league baseball. These eight men operated under a media microscope of the same magnitude as players did, their performances scrutinized just as minutely. This was because their performance meant a great deal for each club financially. Poorly officiated games, whether actual or imagined, caused bad behavior from players and spectators alike. This might sour middle class patrons on the game, and hurt teams at the turnstiles. The search for good men to serve as umpires was akin to the search for star players. There never seemed to be enough to satisfy the demand. It is strange, therefore, that in the late 1880s ownership never embraced the obvious solution to its problems, finding a second umpire to work each game. The same owners engaged in an unceasing search to find ways to gain greater control over their players, but did not even attempt something that offered no controversy but had widely acknowledged benefits.

Chapter 9

Gambling and Dishonest Play

With only one umpire on the field to police the game, there were sundry opportunities for cheating, and the temptations to come out ahead on the scoreboard often overruled the better angels of the players' natures. This was a problem, certainly, but it was just one of the issues regarding honesty in Gilded Age baseball. In 1885, most people still remembered the dark days when the honesty of the games themselves was questionable. Betting on games by players and throwing games to gamblers had become part of the game as soon as baseball players became professionals who played for money. While this practice was on the decline by the mid 1880s, the memory of what had happened so often in the 1870s haunted baseball like a specter, just waiting to reveal itself and spoil the game as its popularity soared.

As a result, while baseball observers certainly noticed the prevalence of cheating on the field, and commented accordingly, it was cheating off the field that worried people the most. Any game that looked suspicious might result in charges of throwing the game, or hippodroming, as people called it in the 1880s. The worst thing for baseball, players and owners both, was that the charges did not even have to be true in order to damage people's faith in the game. The fact that such charges had a foundation in the past was enough that accusations of throwing games in the mid-1880s drew strenuous denials from team executives and players alike. With attendance growing and baseball's popularity on the rise, one major scandal might undo everything.

Everyone with a stake in the honesty of the game was motivated to make sure such a scandal never occurred.

Part of the problem, however, was that even though gambling and betting by players declined in frequency, and any connections with gambling and throwing games meant a permanent place on the blacklist, those who surrounded the players faced no such prohibitions on their behavior. As we have already seen, sportswriters bet on games, as did spectators. Some clubs allowed open betting on their grounds, and others allowed saloons to connect telegraph wires to the ballpark to transmit scores to patrons. These people might well gamble on the outcome of the games, and teams had no control over such behavior. As a result, the gambling issues hovered like a dark cloud just on the edge of sight, ready to cast a shadow on the game should baseball's guardians let down their defenses even for a moment.

Cheating by players might have paled in importance to insuring the honesty of games, but cheating or bending the rules happened nonetheless, and it took many forms. "Bolicky Bill" Taylor, besides enjoying the bottle, also enjoyed pulling a fast one whenever the situation was promising. "Few will forget Billie Taylor's trick of standing outside the coach lines and having the ball thrown to him on the claim that it was ripped, allowing it to pass and the man on third to come home. Taylor is the first man who was also known to score a run without going nearer than 20 feet of the base. He cuts across the field whenever the opportunity is offered."¹ That was not the only Billy Taylor story, either. There was also a game where Taylor went towards second base, where there was going to be a close tag play. Taylor ran into the second baseman, Joe Quest, and wrestled with him a moment, causing Quest to muff the ball. Before anyone

¹ "Caught on the Fly" NA, *The Sporting News*, August 9, 1886, 5.

could notice, Taylor grabbed the ball and secreted it in his pocket, then proceeded to run all the way home and score while the rest of the players searched for the ball.²

Many others copied Taylor in his unsportsmanlike feat of cutting corners on the bases. Mike Kelly did so frequently, but the practice was common enough by 1887 that National League president Nick Young actually told umpires to watch for the occurrence in his written instructions to them for that season. Young's same missive also called for umpires' alertness regarding two other common tricks. One was when, on a ground ball to an infielder, the pitcher would cross the first base line and disrupt the runner on his way to first in the name of backing up first base. The other was the sleight of hand practiced by catchers whereby they would catch a pitch that was off the plate but almost imperceptibly move their glove back over the plate while catching the ball, making a ball appear to be a strike. This practice, known today as framing the pitch, allowed catchers, players, and fans to call the umpire's judgment into question, and Young wanted his arbiters to keep their attention on the location of the pitch and avoid getting taken in by this subterfuge.³

Other forms of distracting the opposition occurred frequently. One trick was the practice of a player on the batting team yelling confusing instructions to the outfielders as they attempted to catch a fly ball that was about halfway between them. With both men concentrating on tracking the ball, and usually having to worry about not stumbling over ruts and potholes in the outfield as well, they sometimes had to depend on verbal signals from their teammates on who should take the ball. The offensive team might yell some signals of their own, hoping to confuse

² "Notes And Comments" NA, *The Sporting Life*, May 16, 1888, 9.

³ "For League Umpires" Nick Young, *The Sporting Life*, April 27, 1887, 5.

the defenders enough that the ball would fall in for a hit. Baltimore Orioles pitcher Matt Kilroy got himself ejected from a game for precisely this practice in early August of 1889.⁴

Outfielders had their ways of striking back, however. No one was more devious in this regard than Hugh Nicol. Besides being the luckiest man in baseball (see chapter eighteen), he was among the craftiest. When he played right field for the St. Louis Browns, he perfected a trick later copied by such men as Jim O'Rourke of the New York Giants and many others.

Sportsman's Park in St. Louis had benches with seats in the outfield, rather than an outfield fence, during Nicol's tenure in the Mound City.

Hugh would report for duty every morning, and before he left the park for his dinner he would place a couple, and sometimes three balls under the right field seats, and he knew just where to find them, too, when necessity demanded it. When a batsman of an opposing nine knocked the ball under the right field seats Hugh would go over the inside fence in a twinkling, grasp the hidden ball, and before the runner could reach second, 'Robbie' would be waiting on the line, ball in hand, to retire him. Of course Captain Comiskey was not on to the scheme, and he has often purchased Nicol a good cigar after the game on account of his quick movements in returning the ball to the diamond.⁵

In the heat of the 1886 pennant race between his New York team, Detroit, and Chicago, someone asked New York captain John Ward which team was more difficult to defeat. His answer reveals much about dishonest and rough play.

Chicago, of course. All you have to do to beat Detroit is to play better ball than they do. To down the Chicagos, however, you have not only to play good ball, which is hard to do when playing with them, as they are continually attracting your attention by their tricks, but you must also watch them or they won't go near second or third base. Besides this, they rattle the umpire and the opposing nine by their 'bulldozing' tactics.⁶

Similarly, after Mike Kelly left Chicago to play in Boston in 1887, an interviewer asked him what was the strongest point of the Chicago nine. While admitting the team still had a terrific

⁴ "Baltimore Bulletin" TTT., *The Sporting Life*, August 7, 1889, 2.

⁵ "St. Louis Siftings" Joe Pritchard, *The Sporting Life*, August 7, 1889, 2.

⁶ "Caught on the Fly" NA, *The Sporting News*, August 9, 1886, 5.

infield, which deserved much of the credit for the team's success, Kelly also said, "the Chicagos can beat any nine in the country at cunning and maneuvers."⁷ Indeed, it was difficult to find anyone in 1880s baseball who believed Chicago was not the best in this regard. "Old-time players will tell you that Chicago has generally played a rough-and-tumble game for years; in fact, has won the championship on it frequently. Many umpires will permit the Chicago Club to do it."⁸

The American Association's answer to the Chicago White Stockings was the St. Louis Browns. Equally infamous for their rough and dishonest play, the Browns' tactics mirrored the attitude of their captain, first baseman Charlie Comiskey. "I go on a field to win a game by any hook or crook. It is the game we are after, not reputations as society dudes." Comiskey did not always like fighting or brawling, but believed in bending the rules as far as they would stretch, then bending them a little more.⁹ The unholy trinity of Comiskey and teammates Bill Gleason and Arlie Latham was the inspiration for baseball installing a box on the field for coaches. Recall that in the 1880s "coaching" was not usually about instructing your own men, but about rattling the opposition. Baseball decided to put down chalk lines to limit where coaches could stand because

Comiskey and Bill Gleason used to plant themselves on each side of the visiting catcher and comment on his breeding, personal habits, skill as a receiver, or rather lack of it, until the unlucky backstop was unable to tell whether one or a dozen balls were coming his way . . . so for the sake of not increasing the population of the insane asylums or encouraging justifiable homicide, the coach's box was invented. This helped out the catcher, but the pitcher and other players on the opposing team were still at the mercy of

⁷ "Mr. Kelly Of Boston" FWS, *The Sporting News*, May 19, 1888, 1.

⁸ "Pittsburg Pencillings" Circle, *The Sporting Life*, August 1, 1888, 7.

⁹ Daniel Pearson, *Baseball in 1889: Players vs. Owners* (Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1993), 13.

Comiskey, and I know of no man who had a sharper tongue, who was in command of more biting sarcasm, or who was quicker at repartee.¹⁰

Even if observers acknowledged the White Stockings and Browns as masters of manipulation, trickery, and bulldozing, John Ward's own New York team had a few tricks up its collective sleeves, too. In an exhibition game with the Washington Nationals in 1885 (why use trickery in an exhibition game that does not count in the standings? It at least suggests that there was money at stake due to possible betting by some players.), the left fielder for the Giants, Jim O'Rourke, came under suspicion for trying to introduce an unofficial ball into play. In the first inning of the game, with New York in the field, Washington's players (the home team was responsible for supplying the ball) detected a ball in play that was not the official ball they had presented. Soon players discovered the O'Rourke had concealed a ball in his shirt. He would not produce the ball or leave the field, however, and his manager, Jim Mutrie, backed his outfielder when O'Rourke claimed the ball was his personal property. Washington's manager Mike Scanlon refused to continue the game unless O'Rourke produced the ball, so New York packed up their equipment to leave the grounds. Only the introduction of a new, standard ball allowed play to continue, while commentators speculated whether this chicanery might be responsible for New York's strong offensive showing from the day before.¹¹

Another example of creative play and bending the rules to New York's advantage occurred early in the championship season of 1885, when the Giants faced off with the Chicago White Stockings. These two teams, easily the best in the National League that season, were in the eighth inning of a tie game when New York's catcher, Buck Ewing, batting with two strikes, intentionally swung at a wild pitch from Chicago's John Clarkson. Baseball's rules state the

¹⁰ Gustav Axelson, *COMMY: The Life Story of Charles A. Comiskey* (Chicago: Reilly & Lee Co, 1919), 74.

¹¹ "A Tie Game in Washington" NA, *New York Times*, April 28, 1885, 2.

batter can attempt to reach first base on a strikeout if the catcher does not catch the pitch cleanly. The defense must throw him out at first base to complete the out if this happens. Knowing this, Ewing took his chances that the ball would escape from Chicago's catcher, Sy Sutcliffe, and swung and missed the ball on purpose. It did elude Sutcliffe, Ewing reached base, and later came around to score the winning run of the game. While legal, Ewing's play clearly perverted the intent of the original rule, and not all baseball observers considered such actions honorable.¹²

No one had more tricks and subtleties than Mike Kelly did. New York Giants manager Jim Mutrie told the story of how, in one game at the Polo Grounds in New York, Kelly was on second base for Chicago when Cap Anson drove the ball into right field for a hit. As Kelly rounded third (whether he actually touched third was debated) Giants right fielder Mike Dorgan uncorked a wild throw to the plate. The ball sailed up the third base line and through a gate that led under the grandstand, which happened to be open. As Giants catcher Tom Deasley and pitcher Tim Keefe raced under the stands to retrieve the errant throw, Kelly raced over and shut the gate, standing in front of it to prevent the ball from coming back onto the field. Anson, meanwhile, circled the bases and scored a run for the White Stockings.¹³ Philadelphia Quakers outfielder Jim Fogarty also got credit for performing this manner of interference against Indianapolis in 1888.¹⁴

Kelly also had his own version of hiding an extra ball in the outfield. When the batter hit a home run over the fence at Boston's South End Grounds, if it barely cleared the wall, he would suddenly scramble after the imaginary ball that had "caromed of the top of the wall," grab a ball

¹² "The Chicagos Beaten" NA, *New York Times*, May 16, 1885, 2.

¹³ "From the Hub" Mugwump, *The Sporting Life*, March 30, 1887, 3.

¹⁴ "Philadelphia Pointers" NA, *The Sporting Life*, July 11, 1888, 9.

secreted in his uniform, and fire that ball to teammates to halt the progress of the baserunners.¹⁵

Another of his tactics to defend against the home run while playing the outfield was, if it was late in the game and difficult to see clearly because it was getting dark, he would fake a catch of a home run that traveled over the fence, then extract his extra ball from his uniform and return it to the infield.¹⁶

Kelly also perfected a defensive technique as catcher to impede baserunners. One of baseball's oldest plays used to pressure the defense comes when the offense has men on first and third base. The man on first attempts to steal second, and when the catcher throws the ball to second to prevent the stolen base, the man on third breaks for home plate. Kelly's strategy for disrupting this play was, after throwing down to second, to toss his catcher's mask into the baserunner's path about four feet from home plate. Unable to slide for the risk of injury, the baserunner attempting to score from third base had to arrive at home plate standing up after avoiding the mask, leaving Kelly with a split-second of extra time to apply a tag against the runner. A few other catchers learned to copy this trick. Eventually, baserunners responded by stomping on Kelly's mask at non-critical times, such as when he tossed it away to chase a foul pop up, to smash it and make him finish the game without one.¹⁷

Tactics of questionably legality might or might not succeed, depending on the mood of the umpire. For instance, consider the 1885 game between the New York Metropolitan and their cross-borough rivals in Brooklyn. It was an overcast September day, and in the fourth inning New York led 4-0 when scattered raindrops started to fall. A game is official if stopped by weather after five innings or more. At first, Brooklyn's players complained to umpire John

¹⁵ "Hub Happenings" Mugwump, *The Sporting Life*, August 7, 1889, 4.

¹⁶ Pearson, *Baseball in 1889*, 13.

¹⁷ "The Same Tricky Kelly" NA, *The Sporting Life*, October 3, 1888, 1.

Connelly that the field was unplayable and the game could not continue, thus hoping to avoid a probable defeat. When Connelly was unmoved by their entreaties, the Brooklyn players immediately employed various delaying tactics to slow the game and force a cancellation as more rain fell. The key to their filibustering was pitcher Henry Porter, whose “conduct made him the recipient of loud, long, and continued hissing. He wiped the ball with sawdust every time before he delivered it, saying, ‘it’s wet,’ and several times would drop it on the wet grass for the purpose of getting it wet again.” It was all for naught, however, as Connelly would not cancel the game, despite some heavy rainfall, until after the seventh inning, when it was truly pouring.¹⁸

Cincinnati performed another variation of this maneuver in a July 1888 game against Brooklyn. Brooklyn led 2-0 in the fifth inning when the skies darkened, raindrops began to fall, and the Red Stockings began stalling to get the game rained out before five innings were completed. Lee Viau was pitching for Cincinnati when the mischief began. He retired the first two men of the inning, then threw a pitch to the backstop, because it took more time to retrieve that way. Then the Red Stockings, realizing this was not nearly slow enough to achieve their objective, pulled out all the stops.

He pitched the ball and it again went into the grand stand, Baldwin again got it and this time threw it away out to Corkhill at center field. Corkhill gazed at the ball and stood like a lump on a log for a few moments. Fennelly then walked lazily out into the field, picked the ball up and threw it over Reilly’s head. Reilly made a great splurge for the ball, got it and fired it away over Carpenter’s head. As Carpenter picked up the ball threw it in to Viau, the rain came down in torrents.

It worked, in a way, as umpire John McQuaid had to call off the game at that point. Before doing so, however, he fined Reilly, Carpenter, Viau, and Baldwin twenty-five dollars each for their shenanigans. Outraged, Brooklyn’s owner, Byrne, accosted Cincinnati owner Stern and

¹⁸ “On The Diamond Field” NA, *New York Times*, September 6, 1885, 2.

told him, “Now I do not propose to submit to any further robbery. I insist, even though it cost me my share of the gate receipts, that you at least protect your patrons in giving them back their money or rain checks, since that you robbed them of the opportunity of seeing a game of ball.” Stern chose rain checks, and Cincinnati picked up an expensive no decision.¹⁹

Pittsburgh employed a more subtle variation of this trick when faced with some rain before a late May game with Indianapolis in 1888, in an effort to circumvent the judgment of the umpire altogether. At the time, the home club determined if its grounds were fit to play ball before the game started; only after the action commenced did the umpire gain this authority. Pittsburgh, realizing this, and also realizing that they did not have many cranks on hand for the game, but still had to pay the visitors from Indianapolis a \$150 guarantee no matter how many spectators braved mother nature’s surliness, decided to take preemptive action and cancel the game. This outraged Indianapolis, as they claimed the grounds were quite playable given a bit of sawdust and sand, and when the sun came out during the afternoon and dried up the grounds, they vowed revenge on the men from the Smoky City.²⁰

This was not the only time that Pittsburgh management was guilty of shenanigans of this type. Just a few days later, in fact, they pulled the same trick on the New York Giants, but with an even more infuriating financial sleight of hand. Pittsburgh executive Horace Phillips declared the game was off at about 1:30 in the afternoon, but failed to notify New York manager Jim Mutrie of the fact. Mutrie, therefore, brought his men to the grounds at Recreation Park as planned, paying eight dollars for the transportation of his players. Upon arrival, he found there would be no game that day, and then paid for transport once again to return his team to their lodgings. The only entity to profit from the fiasco was the omnibus company. The president of

¹⁹ “Stern And Byrne” NA, *The Sporting News*, July 7, 1888, 7.

²⁰ “The Hoosiers Charge Phillips With Sharp Practice” NA, *The Sporting News*, June 2, 1888, 1.

this company was none other than Nimick, the same man who also was president of the Pittsburgh baseball club.²¹

The Giants returned the favor shortly afterwards when Pittsburgh was supposed to play at New York's Polo Grounds in early June. Rain had fallen at the Pittsburgh hotel, the Rossmore, most of the day. At 2:30, Phillips telegraphed to the Polo Grounds for instructions of whether to bring his nine to the grounds for the game or not. Mutrie did not answer, and Pittsburgh only received a response when New York owner John Day sent one at 3:55. As the game was supposed to begin at 4:00, and the Alleghenys could not reach the ballpark within five minutes, the umpire declared New York the winner by forfeit.²²

Teams could also try to manipulate the home environment, giving them an unfair advantage. Besides the individual ground rules that were unique to many ballparks in the days before permanent outfield fences were common, there were other tactics teams employed to get a leg up on the competition. The Philadelphia Athletics, for instance, painted their grandstand white for the 1887 season, believing, "the idea that it will injure the players' eyes and affect their play is fallacious. Of course it will affect the men a little at first, but the home team will soon get used to it and as for the visiting players, if they should happen to be affected it will rather inure to the benefit of the home team. See?"²³ In another case, the Athletics tried to prepare for a series with the St. Louis Browns in 1886, and believed that the aggressive baserunning tactics of the Browns gave the visitors a decided advantage. The Athletics responded by spreading loose gravel around second and third base, hoping that the threat of injury from the rocks might deter

²¹ "That Forfeited Game" Circle, *The Sporting Life*, June 6, 1888, 1.

²² "That Forfeited Game" NA, *The Sporting Life*, June 13, 1888, 1.

²³ "Local News" NA, *The Sporting Life*, February 23, 1887, 5.

any base stealing. The strategy failed, however, as the Browns located brooms and swept the gravel away before the game began.²⁴

Because there was just one umpire to watch the game, anything went on the base paths when that umpire was watching another part of the action. Interfering with baserunners was a very common trick. Besides pitchers interfering with a runner on his way to first, if the ball entered the outfield and the umpire's gaze was focused on the action there, infielders would slow down baserunners as they attempted to advance by grabbing belts, tugging shirts, tripping, even punching, shoulder blocking, and tackling. The St. Louis Browns, following the example set by their first baseman and captain, Charles Comiskey, were famous for these tactics of rough play. Just one example out of many occurred in an August 1887 game with Cincinnati. When speedy runner Hugh Nicol had a chance to advance a base on a wild throw, Browns shortstop Jack Gleason tackled him to the ground and did his best to apply a chokehold and prevent "Little Nick" from advancing at a key point in the game. Although Nicol did deliver a sharp kick to the shins of Gleason in return, he did not advance a base or score a run, and "this garroter's trick robbed Cincinnati of a chance to win."²⁵

It was possible to go too far, however. In May of 1888, Indianapolis was playing Chicago when one of the Hoosiers, third baseman Jerry Denny, dove back to second base to avoid a tag by White Stockings second baseman Fred Pfeffer. He arrived safely, and when Pfeffer dropped the throw, Denny proceeded to grab the ball and hurl it into the outfield, advancing himself to third base in the process. When the Chicago outfield returned the ball to third baseman Ned Williamson and he applied a tag to Denny, the umpire declared that Denny

²⁴ Nemecek, *The Beer and Whiskey League*, 118.

²⁵ "From Cincinnati" Ren Mulford, Jr., *The Sporting Life*, August 17, 1887, 3.

was out. Incredibly, Denny tried to protest the call, but eventually retired to the bench.²⁶ Although this did not work for Denny, it did for former Louisville outfielder Monk Cline. Playing for Memphis in the Southern League, he snatched the ball away from a fielder and flung it into the outfield in order to advance a base, just as Denny had done, but in this case, umpire Edward Hengle did not call him out.²⁷

A few players pioneered another trick relying on the standard practice of having two baseballs for play at a time. As the game went along, these two balls became darker in color, softer, and scuffed as batters hit them and they passed through the dirt and grass in the course of play. The further the ball's condition eroded from its original state, the better for the pitcher, as balls that were less white, softer, and scuffed were harder for batters to see, hit for distance, or hit at all. As a result, in 1888 two International League pitchers, Bob Barr and Pete Wood, tried a new tactic to make sure they got to pitch a well-used ball. When umpires finally decided to throw out an old ball and introduce a new one, they of course preferred the other remaining ball to the brand new one. To make sure they were pitching with the older ball, their first pitch with the new ball would "accidentally" fly over the batters' heads and either into or entirely over the grandstand. Others began to imitate them, until International League executives instructed their umpires to fine pitchers \$25 whenever this took place.²⁸

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²⁶ "Notes And Comments" NA, *The Sporting Life*, May 16, 1888, 9.

²⁷ "Notes And Comments" NA, *The Sporting Life*, June 13, 1888, 10.

²⁸ "Notes And Comments" NA, *The Sporting Life*, May 23, 1888, 9.

As mentioned already, baseball's leaders maintained constant vigilance against gambling and throwing games. It does seem that this problem was on the decline by the late 1880s, at least when it came to throwing games. Players who bet on their own team to win were still an issue, and there were some other problems, certainly, but it appears teams played more games on the level by the later 1880s than they had previously. When queried about the influence of gambling on the national pastime in 1886, National League president Nick Young stated, "From a thorough acquaintance with the clubs, that never in the history of base ball has the game been so pure as to-day."²⁹ Former New York Metropolitan manager George Williams was even more positive about the honesty of the national pastime. "As now conducted it is the most innocent and honest outdoor sport we have. . . . It is honest and clean, and that constitutes its greatest charm to me, as it does to the thousands who spend their money at the gates to support it."³⁰ The New York *Times* echoed president Young that same year when it opined, "so far as we recall, no umpire, club, or individual player of either of the two leading associations has been known to sell or 'throw' a game during the past season, and while that honorable record lasts professional baseball will hold its great and well-merited popularity."³¹

Things were not completely pure, however, largely because some teams allowed open gambling at their grounds. The entire Southern League did so in 1886 and 1887, which probably did a great deal to contribute to the unmerciful abuse suffered by Southern League umpires. The Washington Nationals openly allowed gambling at the Swampoodle Grounds in 1886. Prior to a game in October, Washington Nationals manager "Honest" John Gaffney received several warnings that betters had placed unusually large wagers on Kansas City, and that he should

²⁹ "A Square Game" NA, *The Sporting Life*, August 11, 1886, 1.

³⁰ "Sensible Views" George Williams, *The Sporting Life*, November 10, 1886, 3.

³¹ "The Baseball Season" NA, *New York Times*, October 13, 1886, 4.

change his battery (pitcher and catcher) for the game as a precaution. Gaffney also sensed that strange things were afoot, and purposefully gave out misinformation to thwart the nefarious plot. “Never as long as I am manager will I allow the nine to be used as the tool of sharps and the latter will have to work some scheme less transparent than the one they tried at St. Louis” was Gaffney’s official statement regarding the matter. The fact that Gaffney portrayed himself as an old hand at dealing with such matters surely holds significance. *The Sporting News* elaborated on the scheme, stating, “That there was a scheme to sell that game . . . there is no longer any doubt. The Kansas Citys were not only backed heavily in St. Louis, but a large amount of money was placed on them in pool rooms at Chicago, Pittsburg and Kansas City. It is estimated that about \$60,000 changed hands on the result.”³²

Because baseball’s officials realized that this problem could do major damage to the game’s reputation, if there was even the slightest hint that gamblers were influencing the outcome, as the years passed they continued their efforts to clamp down on any connections with the gambling element. Realizing the harm betting had done to the Southern League, where many teams were on the brink of dissolution during this era, the officers of the Birmingham team persuaded the Board of Aldermen of the Magic City to ban all types of betting on baseball games before the 1888 campaign got underway. The Board also banned Sunday baseball at the same meeting.³³ Other Southern League cities wisely followed suit, according to the editor of the *Spirit of the South*. In an effort to convince Henry Chadwick that the failings of the Southern League in 1889 were due to poor management rather than gambling, he wrote Chadwick a letter stating, “Pool rooms may do a good business on the game in other leagues in the South, but they

³² “The Sharps Taken In” NA, *The Sporting News*, October 18, 1886, 1.

³³ “Pool Selling Prohibited” NA, *The Sporting News*, February 4, 1888, 1; “A Good Move” NA, *The Sporting Life*, February 8, 1888, 1.

do not in connection with the Southern League; at least they have not for the past three years.” The editor admitted that some cities, New Orleans and Memphis, for instance, had pool rooms, but only for betting on racing rather than baseball. Other than those two, “Mobile, Chattanooga, and Atlanta have no pool rooms. The Birmingham room was broken up by the city . . . and I don’t believe there is a pool room in Charleston.”³⁴

Additionally, when gamblers in the horseracing world set up a Bookmakers’ Alliance in 1887, New York Giants owner John Day was emphatic that this group should never become affiliated with the national game in any way. Day recalled the problems and black clouds surrounding the New York Mutuals and their gambling propensities in the 1870s all too well. “There will be no gambling in base ball as long as I have anything to do with the game. Those gentlemen are not wanted in base ball and will not be tolerated. When open betting is allowed on base ball games, good-bye to our National game. The managers will not soon forget the trouble and blow to base ball caused by such practices a few years ago, and they will not fall into error again.”³⁵

We can imagine Day’s anger and concern, therefore, when, prior to a game in May of 1888 against Boston, an incident surfaced involving his own captain, Buck Ewing. Prior to the game stalwart outfielder George Gore took up his position in left field. Ewing, however, called Gore back to the bench and replaced him with Mike Slattery, an unproven twenty-one year old player in his first full major league season. Some observers reported that Ewing did so under instructions from the “brokers’ box” at the Polo Grounds. Ewing flatly denied the charge, stating it had been his plan to play Slattery all along but that he had not communicated the change to

³⁴ “Chadwick’s Chat” Henry Chadwick, *The Sporting Life*, July 24, 1889, 6.

³⁵ “New York News” George Stackhouse, *The Sporting Life*, February 1, 1888, 4.

Gore in time.³⁶ Ewing's manager, Jim Mutrie, also upheld his catcher and captain. Not all observers bought the explanation, however, including New York sportswriter George Stackhouse. He wrote, "There were nearly 7,000 people at the grounds on that day, and it will be a difficult matter to make the majority of them change their mind about that little incident, even if Captain Buck pens the denial himself. It may have been entirely unintentional as Buck says, but it did not look that way." As evidence, Stackhouse cited, "the score card had Gore in left field in clear black type. . . . When the game was to start Ewing looked out at left field, made a motion with his hand, and Slattery came in and sat down on the players bench. Just as Umpire Daniels called play, that genius in the broker's box made that famous yell, and Gore was called in and Slattery was sent out to take his place."³⁷

Gambling, and attempts to fix games, was not limited to the major leagues by any means. Minor league umpire Felix McIver revealed how an Eau Claire businessman had attempted to bribe him in order to fix a game between the Eau Claire nine and the Oshkosh team in October of 1886. McIver revealed that the man, Rooney, who owned an Eau Claire livery stable, offered both himself and Oshkosh pitcher Krock \$100 to go easy on the local nine. Neither proved obliging, and McIver decided to make the matter public after the Eau Claire cranks accused him of favoring Oshkosh during the game.³⁸

Usually, gambling took place through the pool halls and related establishments that marred the cityscape of almost every burg in the United States. The Wheeling, West Virginia correspondent for *The Sporting Life* described their pernicious effects on baseball in that city.

³⁶ "Chadwick's Chat" Henry Chadwick, *The Sporting Life*, May 16, 1888, 8.

³⁷ "New York News" George Stackhouse, *The Sporting Life*, May 16, 1888, 4.

³⁸ "M'Iver Hits Back" Felix McIver, *The Sporting Life*, November 3, 1886, 1. The pitcher, Krock, was probably future major leaguer Gus Krock, who pitched in the major leagues for three seasons, beginning in 1888, and was born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

“The first of these is the decreased attendance and consequent financial loss to the clubs. Hundreds of these gamblers congregate in the pool rooms instead of going to the games, and watch with eagerness the result of their speculations.” This paled in importance, however, beside, “the second, and more deplorable evil, is the mob spirit manifested by such persons when they do attend ball exhibitions in which they are pecuniarily interested. All close decisions must go their way or the umpire’s head must suffer the penalty.” The writer believed that the city authorities should take action against such establishments, but they proved negligent in this responsibility. “The only explanation of their slowness in the matter is that some of them indulge in the ‘sport’ frequently themselves.”³⁹

Major league teams agreed with this assessment. In St. Louis, team president Von der Ahe attempted to make a move against the Western Union Telegraph Company’s practice of wiring scores to local drinking establishments after each inning of the game. Von der Ahe believed this hurt his attendance at the gate, as many people would go drink at saloons rather than pay a quarter to come to Sportsman’s Park. It also drew younger men to saloons before their time, in the eyes of the mothers of these young men, at least, and some of these mothers deluged Von der Ahe with remonstrances against having scores readily available in drinking establishments. Western Union did have the contract to send out wires from Sportsman’s Park, but the St. Louis president hoped the company would eschew this practice of sending scores to saloons, because that was of minimal value compared to how often sportswriters used its service. Therefore, Von der Ahe hoped he could leverage the potential loss of the larger profits to get the

³⁹ “More Gambling” Pickwick, *The Sporting Life*, May 23, 1888, 1.

company to abandon the lesser one. In the end, however, his attempts went nowhere, and the transmission of scores to saloons continued unabated.⁴⁰

Things were much worse in the Texas League in 1888, where the gambling element gained a stranglehold on the league's officials. The League's president, F.W. Turner of Austin, had to resign his office after investigations revealed his financial interests in an Austin pool room. Another team official, Robert Purdy, a director of the Dallas team, also owned a pool room in Dallas. As a result, "in the later series with Dallas at this place [Fort Worth] an umpire (substitute) was sent here from Dallas, and his decisions were so biased and so evident that the admirers of the Dallas team, who came along to witness the game, freely admitted that the umpire won the game for them." Not only that, "we have an affidavit setting forth that this umpire (Creeland by name) admitted he was paid to throw the game, and it is now before Acting President Adair as evidence in support of our protest against the game."⁴¹

Players as well as umpires in Texas were under the control of the men of vice. The same Fort Worth writer offered "I have letters before me from our manager dated at Houston, May 26, in which he states that Fudger and Rodgers, a battery for Fort Worth, undoubtedly threw the game to Houston played that day, and were assisted by O'Connor, a fielder." This manager also claimed to have uncovered hard evidence of a gambling connection.⁴²

Trying to prevent such sordid occurrences, some minor league teams attempted to enforce clean play by putting clauses mandating exactly that into the constitution of their franchise. The Nashville Athletic Club, of the Southern League, stated that, "all games of cards, games of chance, wagers of every description, profane or vulgar language, and the use of

⁴⁰ "St. Louis Siftings" Joe Pritchard, *The Sporting Life*, January 9, 1889, 4.

⁴¹ "In Trouble" Truax, *The Sporting Life*, June 13, 1888, 1.

⁴² Ibid.

alcoholic or malt liquors on the club's premises are strictly prohibited."⁴³ They promulgated these rules before the 1887 season, possibly because they believed the rumors emanating from Macon about the team of that city dropping games intentionally in 1886. "Several persons in Macon interested in base ball have volunteered the information that the team they have had was a bad one and sold games straight along."⁴⁴

Gamblers bet on exhibition games, just as they did championship season ones. In the winter of 1886-1887, the Louisville club, along with a few other players including pitcher Dave Foutz of the champion St. Louis Browns, was playing a series of exhibition games in California. Near the end of their tour of the Golden State, they suffered a 10-4 loss at the hands of a picked nine of California players. Seeing that Louisville had won every other game of the tour but one, charges of hippodroming flew immediately. Betting patterns before the game leaned severely towards the picked team, while on the field, the Louisville tourists certainly played as if their hearts were not in the game. Pitcher Dave Foutz, featuring a delivery that "would not have puzzled an amateur," allowed fourteen hits without recording a single strikeout, and his fielders erred nine times to aid the opposition. The play of Louisville was so lackluster that "any person who ever participated in a game of ball could detect the presence of fraud." The Louisville outfielders played too shallow, allowing the ball to travel over their heads, while the infielders either threw poorly to first or "handled the ball as if it were a sphere of fire," resulting in several mistakes. Fans in California lost no time in declaring the game a hippodrome.⁴⁵

Louisville's manager for the tour, Jim Hart, would have none of this nonsense. He noted that the picked nine featured many quality major league players, while some of his had already

⁴³ "Notes and Comments" NA, *The Sporting Life*, January 26, 1887, 3; "Caught on the Fly" NA, *The Sporting News*, January 29, 1887, 5.

⁴⁴ "Old Time Crookedness" NA, *The Sporting Life*, March 30, 1887, 1.

⁴⁵ "Now Here's A Pretty Mess" NA, *The Sporting News*, February 5, 1887, 1.

departed for home (Joe Werrick to get married, Monk Cline because of the tragic death of his child) or were ill. He also claimed that he looked into the matter “most religiously” and detected no foul play on the part of his club.⁴⁶ Of course, it behooved him to declare that everything was on the level, given the serious penalties and loss of public confidence that accompanied getting caught gambling on games. Still, given the relative strengths of the nines, not to mention the uncertainty that means even the better baseball team cannot win every game, circumstances seem to lean towards manager Hart’s take on the story. The fact that the same picked nine defeated what was left of the Louisville tourists again a week later added credibility to the belief that they really were capable of defeating the men from the Falls City. The Louisville players who toured California, and those from other teams who joined them, such as utility player Fred Carroll, outfielder Jim Fogarty, outfielder Tom Brown, and second baseman Reddy Mack, also denied the charge of hippodroming. They claimed that the original accusation of dishonesty came from a man who was angry with manager Jim Hart after Hart denied the man and friends free passes to attend a game.⁴⁷

Still, because of gambling’s history in the game, some people wondered whenever something unexpected happened on the field. Early in 1889, for instance, defending American Association champion St. Louis went down to defeat against Kansas City, a team that finished last in the Association the prior season, three times in four games. Some could not believe the mighty Browns would play so poorly unless something illicit was afoot. It took a lengthy interview with “Honest” John Gaffney, back to umpiring by this time, to convince people that the games were indeed on the up and up. (The Browns’ players denied the charge too, of course,

⁴⁶ “Jim Hart’s Letter” Jim Hart, *The Sporting Life*, February 9, 1887, 2; “Notes and Comments” NA, *The Sporting Life*, February 16, 1887, 3.

⁴⁷ “Base Ball” NA, *The Sporting News*, February 26, 1887, 5.

laying the blame on hard luck, good play by the Cowboys, and of course, home team umpiring by Gaffney.) In fact, the 1889 Cowboys truly were an upgrade over their 1888 predecessor, as the team went on to win twelve more games than it had the previous season. They now had future Hall of Famer Billy Hamilton full time in their outfield, and they had found a new shortstop as well, Herman Long, who went on to a lengthy and successful career, drawing rave reviews for his defensive wizardry from the moment observers first saw him.⁴⁸

Rumors of gambling in St. Louis in 1889 refused to abate, however. They resurfaced again in July and surrounded two prominent Browns, third baseman Arlie Latham and pitcher Silver King. Both played lackluster ball during the first half of that month, and eventually, some St. Louis newspapers began charging the duo with throwing games. Second baseman Yank Robinson also drew a bit of suspicion with his sub par play. All involved denied the charges, of course, as did writers associated with the Browns. St. Louis sportswriter Joe Pritchard blamed King's performance on a sore arm that needed some rest (he was on his way to pitching 458 innings that season, despite the fact he was suspended for a while in September and October, so the claim was plausible) while Latham and Robinson had been ill. Pritchard admitted that players certainly gambled, writing, "Ball players gamble a great deal, and some of them have bet on their own club winning—this I am positive of—but I have never known any one of them to bet against their own team, as this would certainly give ground for rumors that crookedness was going on." His strongest evidence that the accused were clean was to write, "I have known for some time past several of the Browns' men were being watched pretty closely by detectives, and

⁴⁸ "Joyous Cowboys" Freeman, *The Sporting Life*, May 15, 1889, 6. In fact, Long's career defensive WAR was 16.8, an exceptional total indeed, which ranks him seventy-seventh in baseball history as of 2014.

I am positive that the men with ‘eagle eyes’ have discovered nothing that would throw even a shadow on any of the gentlemen who now compose the St. Louis team.”⁴⁹

By August, however, Pritchard was no longer so sure, at least regarding Latham. The Browns suspended their third baseman indefinitely that month, at the insistence of team captain Charlie Comiskey, who spoke on behalf of several other Browns as well. The reason for the suspension was “Latham’s failure to play the game that he was capable of playing, and he was also charged with associating with men who are interested in pool rooms and others who are known to bet heavily on ball games.” Pritchard was not yet ready to accuse The Freshest Man On Earth of throwing games and being in the pay of gamblers, but he did write, “I don’t claim that Latham is crooked, but the fact of his associating with men who bet all the way from \$500 to \$3000 on a single game and place their money for the Browns to lose—so ‘tis said—and then for Latham to go into the games and play like a wooden man, looks very much like there was a screw loose somewhere.”⁵⁰

Latham tried his best to clear his name, but in the process of doing so, admitted to some rather suspicious activities. He acknowledged keeping unsavory company, including some late evenings with one Boston gambler, but denied ever betting against his team or that he was in any way connected with gambling establishments. The Browns did finally reinstate him, on his promise that he would not associate himself again with the shady companions that got him into hot water in the first place.⁵¹ The reinstatement did not last for long. By late September, the team’s Board of Directors fined him \$200 and suspended him for the rest of the season; Silver King got the same treatment although with half the fine. Once again, the directors believed the

⁴⁹ “Joe Pritchard Sifts the Story” Joe Pritchard, *The Sporting Life*, July 24, 1889, 5.

⁵⁰ “St. Louis’ Sensation” Joe Pritchard, *The Sporting Life*, August 21, 1889, 6.

⁵¹ “The Browns Coacher” NA, *The Sporting News*, August 24, 1889, 1.

men were losing games on purpose. With the Browns in a monumental pennant race with the Brooklyn Bridegrooms, it is unlikely the team would take such an extreme measure unless something really was afoot between Latham, King, and the representatives of St. Louis gambling interests.⁵²

The most probable punishment for legitimate cases of hippodroming was the blacklist. A handful of players and one umpire, former New York Mutual Dick Higham, were on the permanent blacklist by the later 1880s. While some in the game had sympathy for players who engaged in contractual shenanigans, there was little sympathy anywhere for those who were crooked. The ancient seer of baseball, Henry Chadwick, thought that crooked play was one of the only legitimate reasons to use the blacklist. “To tell the truth, I don’t approve of blacklisting except for very dishonorable conduct. Drive ‘crooks’ out of the fraternity forever. Let no mercy be shown the Devlins, Cravers, Nichols, Highams et al, of the crooked class. Blacklist out-and-out contract-breakers and persistent, irresponsible drunkards, but let a lesser penalty be inflicted for more venial offences.”⁵³

Gambling on the games themselves was not the only form of gambling that worried baseball observers. The players might gamble in other situations, even if not betting on baseball games. Baseball observers lamented this vice for many reasons. As long as baseball players, as a profession, held a reputation for being dissolute patrons of bars, brothels, racetracks, and faro banks, there was always the risk this would harm public confidence in the game. It also tended to bankrupt players whose salaries should never have seen them in such financial jeopardy. This resulted in players frequently asking their clubs for advance money to see them through to the

⁵² “Shaking Up the Browns” NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, September 26, 1889, 3.

⁵³ “Chadwick’s Chat” Henry Chadwick, *The Sporting Life*, February 16, 1887, 2. For more on the expulsion of Devlin, Nichols, and Craver from organized baseball, see Seymour, *Baseball*, 87-88.

beginning of the season, to the never-ending dismay of team executives. Finally, the mere knowledge that baseball players participated in gambling of any kind fueled fears that they *might* get involved in gambling on baseball games themselves, with the serious risk to public confidence that any hippodroming scandal might entail.

Given these fears, it is not hard to understate the consternation of baseball observers when newspapers began reporting that one player, pitcher Ed Morris of Pittsburgh, was running a gambling establishment in his Smoky City saloon in 1889. Morris and his partner, utility player Bill Kuehne, pled innocent to the charge. “Morris denies very emphatically that any gambling took place in the house within his knowledge. He admits that the boys occasionally played for cigars and soft drinks in that little back room, but nothing more.”⁵⁴ Things did not look good for the left-hander, however, as “his claim is smiled at by the police and others who have looked into the matter.” True to form for Gilded Age baseball, however, when the Pittsburgh club learned one of its prized performers was in legal jeopardy, “in the event of a true bill by the grand jury every effort will be made to stave the case off until fall, so that the club will not lose the services of the men.”⁵⁵

Everyone in the game breathed a collective sigh of relief when an official hearing cleared the players of wrongdoing. Suspicion lingered, however, and the brief accounts describing the situation leave the modern reader wondering if team officials perhaps pulled some strings with the local authorities to make sure their men were in the clear. One Pittsburgh sportswriter described their brief hearing by writing, “they were discharged from custody at their hearing last night on a charge of keeping a gambling house. The witnesses did not show up. As they were

⁵⁴ “Pittsburg Players” NA, *Chicago Daily Inter Ocean*, March 9, 1889, 2.

⁵⁵ “A Bad Case” NA, *The Sporting Life*, March 13, 1889, 1.

policemen, the circumstance is very odd. . . . The result of the hearing was a surprise, but when it is known what influence was at work one will not wonder much longer. The boys are in luck.”⁵⁶

Still, even taking all these events into account, by the late 1880s, things were better than formerly when it came to the honesty of the game. Hardy Richardson recalled the days when betting on games by players was legal, so long as you bet on your own team. The problems with this practice were many, but foremost was the possibility for lucre if many players did bet on their own club but one man sold out and went the other way on the sly. Richardson described one such event that he witnessed in person.

The first game I ever saw sold was at Philadelphia. . . . The pitcher of one of the contesting teams had bet a good deal of money that his team would win. The short stop of the club had made exactly opposite financial calculations. The game hadn't proceeded very far when the pitcher became aware that the short stop was working against him. He accordingly sent in slow 'raise' balls in order that the batters would hit them up in the air away from the short stop. He succeeded, and when the opposing team went to bat in the last half of the ninth the betting pitcher's team was two runs ahead. The short stop was desperate. With two men out, the next three batters got to first and the bases were full. Now if the pitcher could only get a fly knocked up. The next hitter sent a grounder straight at the short stop, who fielded it and threw it forty feet over first and out of the grounds. Four runs came in.⁵⁷

With such events still fresh in the memories of current players, taking all possible precautions against gambling was important.

The scheme could always work the other way, however. Mike McGeary, a mediocre player who nonetheless managed to play for twelve seasons in major league baseball, had a lucrative scheme he perfected. O.P. Caylor described how it worked:

Mike McGeary at that time was a notable player, but every once in a while when Mike's nine was playing, he would not be well, would have a Charley-horse or something of the kind, and would lay off. On such occasions Mike invariably got up on the stands back of the Gold Board, and that stand had no roof over it. Consequently Mike carried a very peculiar yellow umbrella or sun shade. It was amusing and instructive to notice how

⁵⁶ “Out Of Trouble” Circle, *The Sporting Life*, March 20, 1889, 1.

⁵⁷ “Old Time Crookedness” Hardy Richardson, *The Sporting Life*, March 30, 1887, 1.

often Mike raised his yellow parasol, and just as often lowered it. Indeed, he seemed to go through a regular drill with it, and his fellow players down in the field could always know where their captain was by the shade of his peculiar umbrella. 'By gosh, it's hot,' Mike would say and up went his umbrella. Strange to say a few bad errors would invariably follow, and a number of runs would result to his club. Then Captain Mike would move over into another part of the stand where some one was offering a heavy bet that his club would not score a run in the next inning. A man following close to Mike would take the bet. In order to wipe the perspiration from his brow the yellow umbrella had to be lowered and while this work was being done, his men out on the field would become possessed, and fairly knock the ball out of the enclosure. That old yellow umbrella was worth more to McGeary in those days than any old pair of shoes or gloves in these days of the \$2,000 limit rule.⁵⁸

Like Caylor and Richardson, anyone who had been around the game long enough had a gambling story of one kind or another, and as a result, they knew just how much damage any further scandals might cause. These individuals worked strenuously to ferret out even the slightest hint of crookedness. Nick Young, who umpired National League games before moving to the League's front office and eventually becoming its president, remembered well the dark days of 1876. Speaking in 1889, he said,

For thirteen years base ball has been as square as a die. Since 1876 there has not been one well authenticated case of crooked ball playing even on the part of a single member of a League team. In 1876 there was an epidemic of crooked work, and as a natural result the national game was nearly swamped. I umpired a game on one occasion which I remember with great distinctness. To my positive knowledge the members of both teams had been paid to lose the game and I doubt if your imagination could conjure up such a contest as that was. I am very happy to say, however, that of all the players against whom the slightest charge was ever made or upon whom the faintest suspicion rested of crooked ball playing there is hardly one actively playing to-day."⁵⁹

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⁵⁸ "Caylor's Comment" O.P. Caylor, *The Sporting Life*, May 30, 1888, 4.

⁵⁹ "No Ground For Prevailing Gossip" NA, *The Sporting Life*, September 11, 1889, 4.

Honest play, and especially honest competition, fit squarely in the mold of what influenced the behavior of teams in the Gilded Age. The honesty of the game, even more directly than alcohol use or player fitness, had an enormous impact on the financial health of baseball. If fans ever became convinced that players were not playing the games on the level, the consequences would be disastrous. All the goodwill and growth in patronage achieved over the course of the 1880s might disappear in an instant. The middle class patrons all teams hoped to draw to their grounds would not stand such a scandal, and even the denizens of the bleaching boards would thin out and the working classes might spend their scarce entertainment dollars elsewhere.

This is why ensuring the integrity of the game seemed to matter so much more than ensuring the integrity of the rules themselves. Players like Mike Kelly or Billy Taylor might do underhanded things at times, but they did them in the spirit of winning the games. It is probably fair to say that the prevailing social values of the Gilded Age did not look on such tactics as deadly sins. Many might even see them as a baseball equivalent of the entrepreneurial spirit that Americans professed to admire so greatly. Even if players employed tactics that were not strictly “honest,” both sides had an equal opportunity to do them, and players did them in the open, relatively speaking. In this respect, the transgressions of the rules in the 1880s are somewhat like the steroids scandal of the 1990s and 2000s in baseball. Players on every team were involved, but as the scandal involved individual performances, rather than the integrity of the outcome of the games, the blowback was modest.

This was not so with gambling and hippodroming. No one wants to play, or watch, a game where the deck is stacked or the dice are loaded. Similarly, spectators enjoy competitive sports, in part, because the demands of the competition inspire the performers to a high level of

excellence, and because there is uncertainty over the outcome. That is part of what makes the games entertaining for observers, the chance of seeing something truly spectacular or memorable, and knowing that your favorite team has at least a chance to win on any given day. Baseball offers many such chances, which helps explain why it remains a mainstay of American culture after nearly 150 years of professional play.

In the 1880s, baseball's leaders wanted to put the game on a sound financial footing. In order to do so, they had to have the confidence of the public. In order to have the confidence of the public, one piece of the equation was to have honest games. Even though baseball was closer to this goal than ever before, the legacy of the past still loomed in the collective consciousnesses of players and front office members of each team. This fueled the fanatical efforts of the teams to root out gambling and dishonesty from the game, a goal that might encourage them to turn to the Brotherhood, with its code of conduct for members, as a potential ally.

Chapter 10

Violence and Baseball

On and off the field, Gilded Age baseball could be quite rough. In his *Historical Baseball Abstract*, no less an observer than Bill James ranked on-field violence as the second worst problem in the game during the 1880s, right below the introduction of segregation and above such things as arguments with management, frequent player movement, and alcoholism. By the 1890s, on-field violence rated first in James' eyes, surpassing even racial segregation as baseball's greatest sin.¹ It is possible that James underrated the issue of drinking, as we have seen, but no doubt, violent behavior was a discredit to many players, and something that both team management and the Brotherhood tried to counteract in the eyes of the public.

At times, there was a lot of counteracting to do. As Cleveland sportswriter F.H. Brunell put it, baseball needed "to squelch the idea held by the general public that a ball player is a tough, unfit for decent society, a creature of people of sporting tastes to be tolerated in his public capacity because of his peculiar talents, but not fit for society other than his own and his immediate admirers." He saw hope, however, and believed the Brotherhood might play an important role in elevating the moral stature of the game. "There has been a moral growth among the ball players of the last six years . . . the Brotherhood can help it, and the Brotherhood

¹ James, *The New Bill James Historical Baseball Abstract*, 45, 63.

should, and should also extend its arms as far as possible. This will be an influence that the public cannot resist—that of merit.”²

Violence took many forms and happened at all levels of the game. Sometimes, players got rough in their efforts to hold back the opposition, considering physical play to be part of the game. St. Louis Browns center fielder Curt Welch was one such player. In the fifth inning of a game on June 9, 1887, an opponent, Philadelphia Athletics pitcher Gus “Cannonball” Weyhing, struck the ball and scampered towards second base for a double. Welch ran all the way to second base from his position in center field, and upon arriving at the infield, “struck Weyhing with his clinched fist in order to prevent the latter from making second.” The American Association fined him forty-five dollars for this and various other offenses perpetrated that day.³ Other Browns played just as dirty. Second baseman William “Yank” Robinson had a habit of punching baserunners in the gut as they rounded second base to deprive them of their wind, as long as something else on the field distracted the umpire’s eyes.⁴ Curt Welch was also among the group of ball players with a habit of leaning over home plate to let pitches hit him while at bat. The goal, of course, was a free trip to first base, despite the fact that the rules state a batter should try to evade a pitched ball rather than let the ball hit him on purpose. (Statistics corroborate Welch’s reputation. He led the American Association in times hit by the pitch in three separate seasons. As Joe Pritchard put it, “he would stop any kind of a ball with his ribs in order to gain the initial bag.”⁵) The umpire had the power to deny the batter a free base in this

² “From Cleveland” F.H. Brunell, *The Sporting Life*, February 23, 1887, 4.

³ “Notes of the Game” NA, *New York Times*, June 10, 1887, 2.

⁴ “Notes and Comments” NA, *The Sporting Life*, April 27, 1887, 11.

⁵ “St. Louis Siftings” Joe Pritchard, *The Sporting Life*, December 5, 1888, 5.

instance, but because this was a judgment call, it only encouraged more kicking by either the batter or pitcher, depending on which way the umpire called the play.⁶

Probably contributing to Welch's ungentlemanly style was his fondness for liquor, as according to contemporaries, he could drink almost any amount and not miss a beat while playing, either at bat or in the field. As one writer put it,

He stands unrivaled as an outfielder. He makes plays that other outfielders cannot touch with such little effort that the plays lose half of their effect as they look to be easy. What makes his great work all the more remarkable is the fact that he does not take care of himself. It is a fact that Welch very frequently comes on the ball field almost stupid from his excess in liquor, with a load on that would put most men to bed. In spite of his drunkenness he will make almost impossible catches, hit the ball hard and run bases in grand style. He is the only ball player who can drink and play good ball.⁷

Nor was Welch especially picky about when he imbibed. "Welch nearly threw away his career in his rookie year at Toledo by swilling beer whenever there was a break in action—an argument with an umpire or a conference in the pitcher's box—from a stash he hid behind a loose board in the outfield fence at the Blue Stockings park."⁸

The roughhouse tactics employed by Welch and Robinson were, by many accounts, typical of the entire St. Louis Browns organization, as noted in the previous chapter. There was another episode, this one in 1885, where they had the bases loaded in a close game. On a ground ball to the shortstop, Browns baserunner Bill Gleason collided with the catcher at home plate and knocked him to the ground. He continued wrestling with the catcher, Jack O'Brien, until both other baserunners and the batter had circled the bases and scored. As the incident took place at

⁶ "From Cleveland" F.H. Brunell, *The Sporting Life*, August 31, 1887, 4.

⁷ "Philadelphia Pointers" NA, *The Sporting Life*, May 22, 1889, 4.

⁸ Nemece, *The Beer and Whiskey League*, 98.

the Browns' home grounds of Sportsman's Park, "the umpire would have declared all hands out, but that he valued his life too highly."⁹

Although he did not become a full time major league player until joining the Browns in 1888, Tommy McCarthy was already a full time thug in the eyes of many contemporaries. As a result, he had no trouble fitting in with his new mates in the Mound City. Early in that season, he and John Reilly of Cincinnati earned reputations for continually spiking fielders as they slid into bases, in the hope of distracting them from catching the ball or applying a tag. (It is interesting to see Reilly accused of this tactic, considering that in the off-season, he would walk alone in the woods and make artistic sketches of woodland scenes, but competition can bring out both the best and worst in people.¹⁰) When attempting to spike someone, as the runner slides into a base, he raises one foot and kicks at the fielder with his spiked shoe, usually striking for the shin. While this violent practice helped in the short run, it was dangerous if done repeatedly, as there were ways for fielders to strike back. As one explained, "If McCarthy, Reilly, or any other dirty ball player ever spikes me intentionally, I will signal my catcher to throw the ball high to me the very next time that player starts to come my way, and if I don't jump high into the air and bring my spikes down squarely on him and spike him so badly that he won't play a month after that my name ain't -----."¹¹

Welch did not learn his lesson from his healthy fine for his assault on Weyhing. Just six days later, in Baltimore, he did a similar thing to Orioles player Bill Greenwood, only this time Welch was the baserunner. The "game between the Orioles and the Browns was truncated by a crowd riot after Welch smashed into Baltimore second baseman Bill Greenwood on a steal

⁹ "Notes And Comments" NA, *The Sporting Life*, May 16, 1888, 9.

¹⁰ "Cincinnati Chips" Ren Mulford, Jr., *The Sporting Life*, November 21, 1888, 3.

¹¹ "Dirty Ball Playing" NA, *The Sporting Life*, June 6, 1888, 1.

attempt. Bernie and Oyster Burns . . . both rushed onto the field in streetclothes to assail Welch and several spectators exhorted a policeman to arrest the Browns star for assault.” The police did arrest Welch, and the Browns had to pay \$200 to bail him out of jail to play the next day. This time, it is just possible that Welch went too far, even for the Browns. A short time later Tip O’Neill, one of the largest men on the team, lost control of his bat during a swing while Welch was in the on-deck circle. The bat flew towards Welch and struck him in the face. This may have been a message from his teammates that enough was enough.¹²

Although he was the aggrieved party in St. Louis in 1887, Weyhing did not necessarily mind the rough and tumble. Just two months later, he was involved in another ruckus. He drove the ball into the outfield at the home grounds of the New York Metropolitan on Staten Island, whereupon he reached third base. The umpire ordered him back to second, claiming that the ground rules for the park dictated a double for any ball hit in that location. Weyhing refused to retreat, “the players and umpire were soon mixed up in an excited mass,” and eventually umpire Sullivan awarded the game to New York by forfeit when he could not restore order.¹³ In spite of his willingness to risk injury in physical confrontations, Weyhing had a long career in major league baseball and, true to the reputation the stories above seem to give him, he is easily the all-time leader among pitchers in batters hit by the pitch. He plunked 277 men in his career, far outdistancing the second place pitcher, Chick Fraser, whose career lasted from 1896-1909. In his first two seasons of pitching alone, Weyhing hit 79 men with pitches, almost one for every ten innings pitched.

Violence occurred off the field as well, and players in the minor leagues were every bit as likely to take part as their major league brethren were. One example comes from San Francisco.

¹² Nemeč, *The Beer and Whiskey League*, 138-139.

¹³ “Broke Up In A Rumpus” NA, *New York Times*, August 13, 1887, 2.

The city was not a major league city in the 1880s, of course, but minor league baseball was hot in the Bay Area, with fully six minor league teams operating there at various points in time. With a population of 234,000 by 1880, San Francisco already ranked ninth in the United States in total population, and was the center of West Coast baseball in the nineteenth century. In 1886, two highly regarded California League pitchers squared off in a boxing match to settle a long-standing grudge between the two. They arranged a bare-knuckles match, complete with timekeeper, seconds, and a referee. The opponents, Mike Finn and Charles Gagus, went three rounds (“Both young men were tolerably scioned in boxing, and exhibited large and iron-like muscles.”) before, just prior to the conclusion of round three, Gagus stunned his opponent with a blow to the chin. Gagus won the fight, but not before “the visages of both men were greatly disfigured” from the intensity of the contest.¹⁴ It seems Gagus was no stranger to the rougher side of things in Golden State. In the winter of 1886-1887, when Louisville toured in California, and he frequently acted as their guide. “Clever Charlie Gagus knows every person in ‘Frisco, and they all know and like him. He has acted as a guide to our boys on a good many sightseeing night and day trips since we have been here. Gag knows when there is any fun to be had of all description, from seeing a Chinaman hanged to attending a hoodlum ball.”¹⁵

In Pennsylvania in August 1886, a man named Christian Loper clubbed an opponent’s pitcher, Elmer Foster, over the head with his bat during a game, to the point where observers feared for Foster’s life. The source of their quarrel was a cigar.¹⁶ Another example of on-field violence occurred during an exhibition match between the New York Metropolitan and Newark just prior to the 1886 season. Two players, Tom Foster for the Metropolitan and Tom “Oyster”

¹⁴ “On Their Muscle” NA, *The Sporting Life*, April 14, 1886, 3.

¹⁵ “Manager Hart’s Screech” James Hart, *The Sporting Life*, January 12, 1887, 2.

¹⁶ “Notes and Comments” NA, *The Sporting Life*, August 18, 1886, 5.

Burns (not the same man who played third base for the Chicago White Stockings that same year, and who had no shellfish-based nickname) for Newark, engaged in fisticuffs following a raft of verbal abuse directed from Burns towards Foster. The dispute arose over the umpiring performance of former major league player Dave Pierson, whom both teams accused of inconsistency in his interpretation of the rules. At one point, Pierson called a balk on Newark pitcher John “Phenomenal” Smith, and when Burns protested and Foster stood up for Pierson’s call, Burns became infuriated and struck the second baseman. “This was the signal for the crowd to take part in the row. Men and boys left their seats, and in an instant all was confusion. . . . While the trouble was at its height, one man rushed out on the field with a revolver in his hand. Some of his friends interfered, and before he could do any damage he was disarmed.”¹⁷ Eventually, law enforcement restored order, herding the 300-400 brawling spectators off the grounds. Needless to say, New York field manager Jim Gifford pulled his club off the field, and shortly thereafter American Association Chairman Byrne instructed Association teams to boycott all further games with Newark as long as Burns remained a member of the club.¹⁸

Some defended the Newark infielder, however, with *The Sporting Life* offering “the Washington papers generally sympathize with Burns, and rejoice at the thrashing he gave Foster, of the Mets, who is described as a good player but quarrelsome.” Burns asked Newark for his release as a penalty for his volatile behavior, but the team rejected his request. He ended up on the blacklist instead, although he later cleared his name. That same week, some New York fans attempted to avenge their man, Foster, by assaulting Burns on the streets. Burns required a

¹⁷ “Almost a Riot on the Field” NA, *The New York Times*, April 9, 1886, 8.

¹⁸ “Notes and Comments” NA, *The Sporting Life*, April 14, 1886, 5; “The Row at Newark” Metropolitan Eyewitness, *The Sporting Life*, April 21, 1886, 1.

police escort to a safe house for protection.¹⁹ Although best known as an outfielder, by 1887 he was playing shortstop for Billy Barnie in Baltimore, where he produced several solid seasons as a hitter (he sported a lifetime OPS+ of 135 and a WAR of 26.3) but never quite shook his temper. At least he admitted he had a problem. “Tom admits having the hottest kind of a temper which is easily ruffled, but claims that no serious troubles need ever be apprehended on that score if he is properly dealt with. What he asks, he says, are respectful demands and he will readily comply with them.”²⁰

Tony Mullane, despite his reputation as a dandy, was not averse to brawling when he felt so inclined. We have already seen the bad blood that existed between Mullane and second baseman Sam Barkley, who once threw his bat at the pitcher during an exhibition game. Mullane, while pitching for Cincinnati, also got into fisticuffs with Cleveland utility player Bob Gilks after an exhibition game in 1889. During the game, Gilks accused Mullane of trying to hit him with pitches intentionally, knowing that Mullane had a reputation for trying to intimidate batters who could hit his curveball, and they exchanged words. After the game, Mullane entered Cleveland’s dressing room, stating he wanted to explain himself to his opponent. Gilks, not feeling conciliatory, grabbed a bat and feinted at Mullane, whereupon the Porkopolitan grappled Gilks and tossed him to the floor, landing several blows before teammates and police separated the two.²¹

Managers and other club officials, although supposedly above such rowdyism, sometimes were not. In an 1887 exhibition game against Des Moines, Mobile manager Kelly entered the stands to do battle with a spectator applauding the Des Moines nine too vigorously. “A row

¹⁹ “Notes and Comments” NA, *The Sporting Life*, April 21, 1886, 5.

²⁰ “Baltimore Bulletin” TTT, *The Sporting Life*, March 7, 1888, 4.

²¹ “Tony Mullane As A Slugger” NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, April 10, 1889, 5; “Brunell’s Budget” F.H. Brunell, *The Sporting Life*, April 17, 1889, 3.

followed and the result was that a meeting was called that night at which Manager Kelly was suspended.” In addition to a fine, as further disciplinary action, Mobile cautioned Kelly, “under no provocation whatever, should he give way to his temper, under penalty of dismissal.”²²

Managers might also brawl with members of their own nine. That is what nearly happened in Kansas City in 1888, when manager Dave Rowe got into the face of right fielder Jim McTammany after the outfielder had allowed a ball to get past him in that day’s game. Rowe threatened his own player, according to witnesses, telling McTammany, “if it had not been that so many people were in the grand stand this afternoon, I would have left my place, gone out into the field to you and smashed your jaw, for allowing that grounder to pass you.” Taken aback, McTammany protested that his effort was up to par and he was trying his best. His manager replied, “no, you ain’t. You are playing lazy ball, and if you let any more ground hits get away from you, I repeat, I’ll smash your face.” Unable to take any more, McTammany challenged his manager to make good on his threat on the spot, promising to pay him back with interest for any damage sustained. The men did not come to blows, but the intensity of the exchange was quite common in baseball in this era.²³

Whether money is the root of all evil or not, it was sometimes the root of conflicts in baseball. There was an unsightly row between the manager of the St. Paul club, Barnes, and the treasurer of the Omaha club, McCormick, in May of 1888. Barnes became angry at perceived insults in his efforts to collect the visitors’ share of the gate for his team, and when McCormick attempted to attack him, Barnes “knocked him silly and was giving him a good pounding when several men who were in an adjoining room to see that the Omaha man was not whipped, rushed upon Barnes and commenced to kick and abuse him in a terrible manner.” According to

²² “A Pretty Mess At Mobile” Jack Brennan, *The Sporting News*, March 12, 1887, 1.

²³ “A Pleasant Episode” RWB, *The Sporting Life*, June 20, 1888, 1.

witnesses, these men might have killed Barnes, if not for the timely intervention of future Hall of Fame manager Frank Selee, who was the Omaha manager at that time.²⁴ Writers from Omaha, predictably, portrayed the incident in a somewhat different light. While admitting that Barnes was a large man who probably would get the better of McCormick, the Omaha correspondent for *The Sporting News* wrote, “Barnes knocked nobody down, did not ever hit anybody. He simply got bounced for being too fresh, and then went off and cried about it.”²⁵

When the Baltimore Orioles traveled to Brooklyn to open the 1889 season, the Orioles displayed both new uniforms and a surly disposition. One of their catchers, a journeyman named Pop Tate, collared Brooklyn’s Darby O’Brien when O’Brien threatened to escape a rundown between third and home. Tate dragged O’Brien to the ground, whereupon third baseman Billy Shindle tagged him. The umpire declared O’Brien out, the Brooklyn crowd erupted in protest, and the two clubs exchanged threats.²⁶ The disturbance caused by the hundreds of fans storming the field in protest was so great, the Bridegrooms took the extreme measure of installing a barbed wire fence to separate players and spectators at Ridgewood Park.²⁷

Rough tactics were, on occasion, so blatant that one wonders why players even tried them. For instance, there was the May 1889 series in which Indianapolis faced Cleveland, and the actions of the Hoosiers ran the gamut from dumb to imbecile. In one game, the umpire ruled Hoosier third baseman Jerry Denny out for baserunner interference. Twice. Meanwhile, catcher Con Daily took up the Mike Kelly practice of tossing his catcher’s mask down along the third base line, so that runners heading home could not slide without injuring themselves. To top things off, in another game, Daly hit a weak ground ball to the infield with a runner at second

²⁴ “A Western Sensation” Joe Pritchard, *The Sporting Life*, May 16, 1888, 1.

²⁵ “J.S. Barnes Of St. Paul” Omaha, *The Sporting News*, May 19, 1888, 1.

²⁶ “Brooklyn Brevities” J.F. Donnelly, *The Sporting Life*, May 8, 1889, 3.

²⁷ “Notes And Comments” NA, *The Sporting Life*, May 15, 1889, 4.

base. In an effort to reach base, rather than dropping his bat at home plate, he carried it with him down the first base line, finally throwing it at Cleveland first baseman Jay Faatz just as Faatz was about to receive the throw at first base. The umpire let Daly off easy for this violent act, calling him out and mulcting him a paltry ten dollars. It seems only fair that the same game ended when Cleveland fooled a Hoosier baserunner, Jumbo Shoeneck, with the hidden ball trick, which is literally the oldest trick in baseball and works roughly once per decade.²⁸

Sadly, in 1885 a dark incident brought home the risks of all the rough play that the game featured in the 1880s. The Southern League's Atlanta team had a first baseman named Louis Henke. Much bad blood existed between Henke's team and Nashville, and in the August 14 game between the two nines, both sides did everything possible to thwart the efforts of the opponents. In that fateful game, Henke drove a ball into the outfield, and ran towards first base with the intent of heading to second. Before he could, however, the Nashville first baseman cut off his path to the base and "assumed a position to meet him, and standing with bent knee, Henke ran against him with tremendous force. He rose, staggered, and fell." Louis Henke died from internal injuries at 5:30 PM the next day.²⁹

Nor was this the only baseball fatality due to rough play on the field. In 1888, *The Sporting Life* wrote, "spikings are of common occurrence, far more than the public has any idea of, and it is really a matter of wonder that fatalities are not more frequent. Any and every player who suffers from the spikes is liable to meet the fate of the Newark second baseman Simmons, as the danger of blood poisoning is always present, contingent upon the injured man's physical condition or improper treatment of the wound." Because of the death of Simmons, considered among the most promising players in the Central League, the paper advocated the interesting

²⁸ "The 'Spiders'" F.H. Brunell, *The Sporting Life*, May 22, 1889, 5.

²⁹ "Killed On The Ball Field" NA, *New York Times*, August 16, 1885, 1.

innovation of allowing baserunners to overrun all bases without fear of the fielder putting them out, rather than just first base, putting an end to the need for sliding altogether except for close plays at home plate. It concluded, “it is bad enough to have many valuable players crippled each season without in addition sacrificing their lives to the Moloch of base sliding.”³⁰

* * * * *

Some players, by virtue of their kicking and willingness to run their mouths too freely, made plenty of enemies. Foremost among such players was “The Freshest Man on Earth,” Arlie Latham of the St. Louis Browns. While people also called Latham “The Dude” for his colorful personality and flashy wardrobe, the “fresh” part of his nickname reflected his tendency to speak too provocatively towards opponents. “Latham’s coaching methods and his free tongue may be nuts for spectators, but they make him lots of enemies in the profession. The boys have to be careful about scrapping during the playing season, but there is no law against it after the season closes. For this period Latham has no less than twenty fights to settle, five of which are with [second baseman Yank] Robinson, of his own team.”³¹ Following the 1886 World Series with the Chicago White Stockings, the major Chicago papers lambasted Latham and his jumbled utterings. The *Times* remarked that Latham “made an antiquated idiot out of himself in a vain attempt to rattle the veteran players of the Chicago team,” while the *Daily Inter Ocean* deplored “the disgusting mouthings of the clown Latham. There was a universal sentiment of disgust

³⁰ Quotes from No title, NA, *The Sporting Life*, December 19, 1888, 2; “The Primary Cause of a Well-Known Player’s Untimely Death” NA, *The Sporting Life*, December 19, 1888, 4.

³¹ “Notes and Comments” NA, *The Sporting Life*, August 25, 1886, 5.

expressed by the crowd that left the ball park at the close of the game at this hoodlum's obscene talk on the ball field." Finally, the *Daily Tribune* stated that one contest was

chiefly remarkable for the coaching of Latham, a sawed-off Brown, with a voice that would put to shame the most ambitious fog-siren on the lakes. His incessant howling, a meaningless jumble of catch phrases, was funny for about fifteen minutes. Then it grew tiresome, and before the fourth inning he was universally conceded to be the worst nuisance ever inflicted upon a Chicago audience.³²

Latham's energy and wit was such that, along with another of baseball's most charismatic performers, Mike Kelly, he sometimes performed on stage during the winter months to supplement his income and keep himself occupied.³³ He admitted to having no experience at all, and furthermore, to having no idea what he was doing, telling an interviewer, "I just simply accepted the proposition that was made to me last summer and went in on my gall. . . . You see I don't exactly know my part yet. In fact I haven't any part. I just come on and say what I please. It's generally different every time. A part was written for me but I didn't have time to study it."³⁴ (Interestingly, Emmett Seery tried his hand at being a thespian as well, which seems a strange choice for a man with somewhat of an intellectual reputation for his ability as a chess player.³⁵ Seery, however, did sing the part of the Assessor in the play "Chimes of Normandy" during the winter of 1888-1889.³⁶)

Besides being one of the great mouths in the game of the 1880s, Latham also had one of the sharper brains. In 1886, a sportswriter mentioned him as the originator of a subtle tactic for reaching base. Latham's technique was to foul away pitches intentionally in order to make the pitcher work harder and eventually throw enough balls that Latham could walk to first. That

³² "Latham's Coaching" NA, *The Sporting Life*, November 3, 1886, 5.

³³ "Louisville Laconics" JA, *The Sporting Life*, November 21, 1888, 4.

³⁴ "Cincinnati Chaff" FKW, *The Sporting News*, November 24, 1888, 4.

³⁵ "Seery Turns Actor" NA, *The Sporting News*, November 24, 1888, 1.

³⁶ "Notes And Comments" NA, *The Sporting Life*, December 5, 1888, 2.

way, he could avoid the risk of the defense putting him out and reach base safely. Some observers deplored this maneuver as an unmanly bending of the rules, but others approved of Latham's ingenuity and creativity.³⁷ He also developed a less controversial strategy for securing hits in which he would move his bat into position to bunt the ball, thus causing the infielders to charge in to defend the bunt. At the last moment, however, Latham would pull the bat back and slap at the pitch, swinging with his wrists, in an effort to drop the ball just over the heads of the onrushing fielders and score a hit in that manner.³⁸

As the story of Burns and Foster demonstrates, players sometimes instigated fights with each other. They instigated the occasional fight with fans as well. In an 1886 exhibition game in St. Louis, Maroons pitcher Al Bauer nearly made a heckling fan into a landscaping tool. "Bauer, of the Maroons, is perhaps the most muscular ball-player in the profession. During one of the recent games at Sportsman's Park, someone in the crowd where Bauer was standing made an insulting remark about the Maroons, and Bauer almost made a hole in the fence with him."³⁹

It seems like this penchant for aggressiveness would have served Bauer well when he ended his mediocre pitching career ("because his exertions caused his arm to lose its cunning"⁴⁰) and became an American Association umpire before the 1887 season, considering all the abuse that baseball's officials took from players and cranks, but it appears he was just as mediocre an umpire as he was a pitcher, at least initially. Just two weeks into the 1887 season, Bauer had already made enemies of St. Louis owner Von der Ahe and Louisville's Zack Phelps, who

³⁷ "From Baltimore" TTT, *The Sporting Life*, November 10, 1886, 4.

³⁸ "Chadwick's Chat" Henry Chadwick, *The Sporting Life*, January 26, 1887, 2.

³⁹ "Notes and Comments" NA, *The Sporting Life*, April 21, 1886, 5. The author approves of these characterizations of his namesake's physique. Bauer's official measurements were 5'9", 190 pounds.

⁴⁰ "Columbus Chatter" F.W. Arnold, *The Sporting Life*, March 27, 1889, 7. Arnold was also the sports editor for the *Columbus Dispatch*.

alleged they had “suffered as the result of his work against them in all games in which he has officiated thus far,” and these men tried to engineer Bauer’s dismissal because “he was so deficient in the necessary qualifications of a fair and correct interpretation of the rules as to make it a hardship and a wrong to compel clubs to play under him.”⁴¹ A Louisville sportswriter at one of the games agreed that Bauer’s work had not given satisfaction, but that his lack of judgment showed no favoritism and that players for St. Louis, especially first baseman Charlie Comiskey and second baseman Yank Robinson, had kicked so badly as to delay the game with their whining over Bauer’s decisions. Robinson also had the nerve to cut twenty feet in front of third base while trying to score on one hit, and this almost produced a fight with Louisville catcher John Kerins when Bauer failed to notice the subterfuge.⁴² Bauer resigned from the American Association’s umpiring staff on May 6.⁴³ Following his failure in the Association, he signed on in the Ohio League that same year and improved his work to the point that the desperate Association gave him another chance in August when Ted Sullivan threw in the towel in disgust over his treatment.⁴⁴

Apparently, Bauer spent his time in the Ohio League productively, as “Al Bauer made his reappearance as an American Association umpire here yesterday and there wasn’t a chirp of dissatisfaction from either audience or players. The game was quickly played—it required one hour and eighteen minutes to finish it—and was the shortest on the home grounds this year.” Even though each team put “four or five players on the coach line at once” in order to whine about favoritism and poor calls, “it was a game in which the coacher had little to do,” and Bauer sailed through the game “without hearing a word of protest from either side.” Cincinnati

⁴¹ “Umpire Bauer’s Goose Cooked” NA, *The Sporting Life*, April 27, 1887, 1.

⁴² “From The Falls City” XXX, *The Sporting Life*, April 27, 1887, 5.

⁴³ “Umpire Bauer Resigns” NA, *The Sporting News*, May 7, 1887, 1.

⁴⁴ “Notes and Comments” NA, *The Sporting Life*, August 24, 1887, 5.

manager Gus Schmelz even went so far as to say, “his work to-day has not been excelled this season!”⁴⁵ Bauer continued to excel in the environment of the minor leagues. Working the Tri-State League in 1888, one Columbus writer praised his performance by writing, “he is one of the fairest and best posted umpires in the business. He is not a home umpire. He plays no favorites, and any club that wins a game over which he presides does so upon the merits of their superiority. He is absolutely fearless, and will not be bulldozed. Sober and reliable, a gentleman at all times.”⁴⁶

Another example of player violence against fans came in 1888 when St. Louis outfielder Tommy McCarthy tried to peg a Cincinnati fan with the ball during a game. The batter, Kid Baldwin, hit the ball into the outfield crowd and while McCarthy was retrieving the ball, one of the spectators began taunting him. Rather than return the ball to the infield to halt Baldwin’s progress, McCarthy attempted to bean the fan instead. He missed, and Baldwin circled the bases before anyone could retrieve the ball. This behavior constituted a pattern on McCarthy’s part, as earlier that year he had attempted to do the same to umpire Bob Ferguson when Ferguson’s call did not go his way.⁴⁷

While McCarthy and Ferguson did not escalate their disagreement any further, one of the worst cases of fighting between a player and umpire at the major league level took place at the end of the 1889 campaign. In a game between Cleveland and Boston, Beaneaters captain Mike Kelly arrived at the ground intoxicated, forcing manager Jim Hart to relegate the star player to the bench for the day. After an unexceptional call went against his men, Kelly rushed the field to give the umpire, McQuaid, a piece of his mind. Just as Kelly drew back his arm to strike a blow,

⁴⁵ “From Cincinnati” Ren Mulford, Jr., *The Sporting Life*, August 31, 1887, 3.

⁴⁶ “Columbus Chatter” Patrol, *The Sporting Life*, January 9, 1889, 4.

⁴⁷ “Notes And Comments” NA, *The Sporting Life*, October 24, 1888, 2.

teammates Charlie Bennett and John Clarkson tried to restrain him. While Kelly was pushing them away, McQuaid had just enough time to call for police protection, so that when Kelly made another rush at him, the officers took the King by the throat and escorted him from the grounds.⁴⁸

Kansas City Cowboys catcher Charlie Hoover got himself into hot water for reasons similar to McCarthy late in the 1889 season. When some members of the home crowd started giving him grief in an October 3 game, Hoover let a pitch get to the backstop on purpose. Instead of retrieving the ball, however, “the catcher pulled off his gloves, threw down his chest protector and climbed over into the seats. He had blood in his eye and was looking for the man who had presumed to guy him. The individual who did the yelling was just at this time the quietest man on the grounds.” Mortified at such behavior, Cowboy management removed Hoover from the game after the inning concluded (rules prevented mid-inning substitutions at the time, except for cases of injury) and decided to suspend him for the remainder of the season. After being relieved of duty, Hoover left the bench to drink away his frustration in a nearby saloon.⁴⁹

Even seemingly benign events could lead to trouble, if the mix of personalities involved was too volatile. At one point in 1886, players attempted to organize a benefit for former major league player Curry Foley, as described in chapter four. However, two of the men responsible for selling tickets to the benefit, recently retired player Lew Brown and Pat Sheeham, got into a row when Sheeham accused Brown of trying to embezzle tickets to the benefit.⁵⁰

Brown had a knack for getting into hot water, so the accusation might have been legitimate. By the end of the 1886 season, his name was on baseball’s blacklist, because his

⁴⁸ “Cleveland Excited” Commodore, *The Sporting Life*, October 9, 1889, 6.

⁴⁹ “Hoover Had A Jag” Home Run, *The Sporting News*, October 5, 1889, 2.

⁵⁰ “Notes and Comments” NA, *The Sporting Life*, April 14, 1886, 5.

team in 1886, Norwich of the New York Central League, advanced him some money as part of his contract, but Brown never showed up to play.⁵¹ Perhaps it was karma catching up to him, but by 1889, Brown was dead. He broke his kneecap in a wrestling match and died from complications from the injury after a doctor amputated his leg and pneumonia set in.⁵² One source reported he broke his kneecap not from wrestling itself, but when the owner of the drinking establishment he worked for struck him with a gas pipe for a refusal to stop wrestling.⁵³ Whatever the truth, Brown's problems, like those of so many Gilded Age ballplayers, stemmed from his long and intimate association with liquor. Several writers remarked on his abilities and friendly disposition when in proper form and free of demon rum, and most appeared saddened at his death. "If Brownie had let booze alone no catcher would have compared with him. His backstopping was marvelous. All deliveries were the same to him. He handled them all with equal ease. A more good hearted, white souled fellow never lived. Peace unto his ashes."⁵⁴

Because of baseball's competitive nature, it is no surprise that teammates squared off at times. In Pittsburgh, first baseman Otto Shomberg (or Schomberg) got into a row with catcher Fred Carroll when Schomberg started rumors that Carroll had it out for him. When the rumors got back to Carroll, he went hunting for the first baseman. "He found him and accused him of carrying tales. This Shomberg denied, and Carroll after applying some language more forcible than polite, hit him. Shomberg immediately retaliated and witnesses say was getting the best of the bout when separated by friends." Later, the two men shook hands and smoothed over their

⁵¹ "Notes and Comments" NA, *The Sporting Life*, August 4, 1886, 5.

⁵² "Hub Happenings" Mugwump, *The Sporting Life*, January 23, 1889, 4; "Lew Brown Dead" NA, *The Sporting Life*, January 23, 1889, 4.

⁵³ "John Morrill Happy" THM, *The Sporting News*, February 9, 1889, 3.

⁵⁴ "The Boston Club" A.G. Merwin, *The Sporting News*, February 2, 1889, 3.

differences, though not before the club fined Carroll fifty dollars for his violent outburst.⁵⁵ The team traded Schomberg after the 1886 season, so the situation with Carroll could not escalate any further.

Another example emerged in Boston in 1888. There, outfielder Joe Hornung and shortstop Sam Wise made each other's enemies list when Wise initiated several fictitious stories in an effort to discredit the team's left fielder. It appears Wise even paid a visit to Hornung's home in an effort to injure his marriage and anger his wife, but the woman chased Wise from her home with a carving knife.⁵⁶

The language used by players towards other players, fans, and umpires was violent, as well. Although the Baltimore Orioles teams of the National League in the 1890s would gain the greatest renowned for this, and took the practice to extremes, they had predecessors from whom they drew inspiration. Cap Anson's Chicago teams of the 1880s perfected the art of kicking, and as mentioned earlier, Charlie Comiskey in St. Louis was no slouch when it came to bulldozing opponents and umpires. Some owners liked this, because they believed that fans liked it and would pay to see it.

Eventually, however, the frequency and intensity of the profanity became so great that baseball's powers that be decided they must tone things down for the sake of the ears of female spectators if nothing else. Things were bad in the 1880s, certainly, and by the 1890s, National League owners feared it was hurting attendance by keeping respectable women away from the park. This fear grew so great that in 1898 the owners distributed (by hand, as the language involved would invite federal prosecution for indecency) a memorandum to all clubs titled, "Special Instructions to Players." This memo, proposed by Cincinnati owner John Brush,

⁵⁵ "From the Smoky City" Natural Gas, *The Sporting Life*, August 18, 1886, 4.

⁵⁶ "Hornung And Wise" NA, *The Sporting News*, February 25, 1888, 1.

indicated that the National League, when investigating incidents of unseemly behavior by players, received nearly one hundred credible reports (from umpires, club managers, and other team officials) of abusive language directed from players towards other players and umpires. When league officials learned that players were trying to intimidate others by calling them “cunt-lapping dogs” or informing their opponents that they had “fucked your mother, your sister, your wife,” they decided that they must enforce a minimum standard of behavior lest potential patrons desert the national pastime. The memo concluded, “Whether it be the language quoted above, or some other indecent and infamous invention of depravity, the League is pledged to remove it from the ball field . . . any indecent word, sentence, or expression, unfit for print or the human ear . . . will be dealt with without fear or favor when the fact is established by conclusive proof.”⁵⁷ Owner Brush even proposed a rule that any player speaking to other players or the umpires with such heinous disregard for public decency must appear before a three-man tribunal, with lifetime banishment from major league baseball the penalty for a guilty verdict.⁵⁸

The Southern League attempted stronger measures against some of its most unrepentant sinners in 1886. Shortstop Marr Phillips, who had played in the majors the prior season with both Detroit and Pittsburgh, nearly had to plead his case to Atlanta’s authorities. “Marr Phillips, Charleston’s short stop, was arrested at Atlanta last week for profanity upon the ball field and

⁵⁷ Mention of this memorandum appears in Thorn, *Baseball in the Garden of Eden*, 247, and the full text is available at <http://www.lettersofnote.com/2011/06/special-instructions-to-players.html>, accessed May 20, 2014. Thorn believes the note authentic, while the website with the full text claims it is possible the memo was a satirical document circulated among players, but no one denies that it expresses real concerns about a real problem in the game that team owners wanted to address in these years. The memo also provides information as to what type of profanity was in vogue in the late nineteenth century.

⁵⁸ Brush’s SABR biography, available at <http://sabr.org/bioproj/person/a46ef165>, accessed on May 30, 2014. The National League was correct to fear the negative publicity. When the American League began play in 1901, it posed as a more friendly alternative to the National League in this regard.

hauled before the chief of police. At the request of the Atlanta Club directors he was discharged and thus saved an appearance in the police court.”⁵⁹ Curt Welch was another player known for his profanity. “Welch? There is one thing certain and that is *The Sporting Life* would not publish the talk he indulged in out in center field last Friday, and if he ever sent it to you by mail, he would be liable to indictment by a United States Grand Jury for violating the postal laws.”⁶⁰

Fans often showed manners as poor as the players’. A sarcastic article written for *The Sporting Life* in 1886 gives readers an idea of the ungentlemanly behavior of some spectators. “When there is a high wind smoke cigars with broken wrappers. Those next to you will have their interest in the game greatly increased if their eyes are filled with tobacco ashes.” In addition, the writer advised, “the managers are always pleased to have their attention called to the weak points of the nine. It isn’t to be supposed that the gentlemen who have thousands of dollars at risk would notice defects in the players as soon as the spectator.” Finally:

Don’t be so credulous as to believe the umpire is selected because of his knowledge of the game. There was never known a base ball audience that couldn’t tell a pitched ball better than he. One reason for this is because the umpire stands too near the home plate and almost in a direct line with the batsman and pitcher. It is reasonable to suppose that the spectators opposite the second and third bases are far more competent to detect pitchers’ errors than a person in the position described.⁶¹

O.P. Caylor also noticed that spectators, no matter where they were sitting, always believed they knew better than the umpire did. He sarcastically suggested, therefore, that the umpire call the game from a similarly distant point. “Maybe a balloon anchored several hundred feet above the diamond would be a handy place for him. Then he would be out of reach of beer glasses, and if he made a mistake he could cut the cables and sail away out of danger, thus doing

⁵⁹ “Notes and Comments” NA, *The Sporting Life*, August 25, 1886, 5.

⁶⁰ “Cincinnati Chips” Ren Mulford, Jr., *The Sporting Life*, July 18, 1888, 7.

⁶¹ “A Few Pointers for the Benefit of Spectators at Base Ball Matches” NA, *The Sporting Life*, April 28, 1886, 1.

away with a strong police escort.”⁶² Detroit’s president in 1886, Marsh, poked fun at such behavior, too. “I’ve got an idea. I am going to have some cards printed. On one set I will have the reasons why our club did not win the last game; on another, the condition of all our pitchers, and on another, the reasons why Brouthers doesn’t knock the cover off the ball every time he comes to bat. . . . It will give me a rest, and perhaps I can recuperate before the scheme wears out.”⁶³

* * * * *

Despite the occasional distasteful episode on the field, the greatest threat that violence posed to the game, from the Brotherhood’s perspective certainly, but from the viewpoint of the owners as well, was the damage to baseball’s reputation. Every time someone did something violent, and the press found out about it and published the story, there was the risk people would consider all the players guilty by association. This could also hurt management; if the public believed that baseball nines were simply a collection of uncouth hooligans, people might well stay away from the park and spend their money elsewhere. In February of 1888, for instance, old-time player Dickie Flowers, who had once performed for the Troy Haymakers and Philadelphia Athletics back in the National Association days, entered a Philadelphia barroom and engaged in a “playful struggle” with the barkeep, Peter Whalen. He ended up stabbing Whalen in his abdomen, and Whalen died four days later. While a coroner’s jury found Flowers innocent

⁶² “Caylor’s Comment” O.P. Caylor, *The Sporting Life*, August 21, 1889, 3.

⁶³ “Notes and Comments” NA, *The Sporting Life*, August 25, 1886, 5.

of murder, ruling the death accidental, incidents such as this certainly did not improve the reputation of ball players among the sporting public.⁶⁴

Likewise when, that same month, a young player with the Cincinnati Reds, John O'Connor, and a few of his friends decided to have some fun and ended up behind bars. In an episode that helped earn him his sobriquet of "Rowdy Jack," O'Connor and his comrades "wanted to scare a couple of damsels by impersonating police officers and arresting them, and while the boys were playing the joke on the thoroughly scared dusky females they were arrested and locked up for impersonating police officers."⁶⁵

This was small potatoes compared to the brawling nature of Jules Piyol, who played third base for the New Orleans Pelicans of the Southern League. Demonstrating yet again that alcohol was a ballplayer's worst enemy, in late March of 1888, news came out that a policeman had killed him during a fight in a Crescent City saloon. The rumors proved unfounded, however, leading one paper to remark, "Jules Piyol . . . is not dead after all. He'll live to drink more whiskey and thump more policemen."⁶⁶ Whiskey likewise led to the incarceration of Andy Cummins, who got one year in a Kentucky pen for stealing chickens in 1888. "A few years ago Cummins was one of the best all-round base ball players in the country—a hard hitter, sure fielder and a splendid sprinter. Harry Wright once offered him \$3,000 a year to play ball and keep sober, but his love for the ardent was too much. He has been arrested several times in the past few years for stealing, but always got off with a workhouse sentence."⁶⁷

Ed Beatin, a pitcher with the Detroit Wolverines, also gave his associates reason to fear for their reputations. In April of 1888, Beatin attempted to seduce Miss Annie Merkel, of

⁶⁴ No title, NA, *The Sporting Life*, February 22, 1888, 2.

⁶⁵ "St. Louis Siftings" Joe Pritchard, *The Sporting Life*, February 29, 1888, 4.

⁶⁶ "Notes And Comments" NA, *The Sporting Life*, April 4, 1888, 5.

⁶⁷ "Notes And Comments" NA, *The Sporting Life*, December 5, 1888, 2.

Trexlerstown, Pennsylvania, and Miss Merkel retaliated by pressing charges against him. Merkel worked at the Eagle Hotel in Allentown, where Beatin had stayed for a time. It took until August for the law to catch up with Beatin, but once it did, he spent two days in jail before settling the case and paying \$400 in damages.⁶⁸

When it came to trouble involving young women, worse by far was the case of John Glenn. Like Flowers, Glenn entered major league baseball in the National Association in 1871, lasting long enough to play two National League seasons with the Chicago White Stockings in 1876-1877. In the 1880s, Glenn spent time in New York's state prison for assaulting women, including his own niece. He was out of prison by 1887, but apparently, he had not reformed his ways. In that year he shot, but missed, at a carriage driver while drunk. Then, in November of 1888, he assaulted another person, a nine year old girl. "When he was taken to the police court a mob made an attempt to lynch him. The police endeavored to protect him, and in the scuffle that ensued Glenn was accidentally shot in the head by a policeman." He did not die on the spot, but the police moved him to his brother's house for an attempt at recuperation. "If Glenn survives he will most assuredly be lynched. . . . Had he not been shot yesterday the mob would have succeeded in getting him away from the policemen and would have hanged him to the nearest lamp-post." Mob action turned out to be unnecessary, however, as Glenn died from the gunshot two days later, on November 10.⁶⁹ Few missed him, it seems. "Glenn, who was addicted to drink, is one of the very few professionals who have disgraced themselves by criminal conduct. At Sandy Hill, where he resided of late years, not an expression of sympathy for the dead man could be heard. The police officer who accidentally shot him was conceded to be blameless."⁷⁰

⁶⁸ "Notes And Comments" NA, *The Sporting Life*, September 12, 1888, 2.

⁶⁹ "In Deep Disgrace" NA, *The Sporting Life*, November 14, 1888, 1.

⁷⁰ "Glenn's Record" NA, *The Sporting Life*, November 28, 1888, 6.

With so much on the line in terms of public reputation, teams went to varying lengths to keep their men out of trouble. The precautions teams took against alcohol were many. When Columbus regained major league status and joined the American Association for 1889, its management even drew up a code of conduct for the players.

- 1 – Players are expected to be gentlemen at all times.
- 2 – While in Columbus report at grounds daily, except Sunday, at 10 AM and 2 PM, unless excused by captain or manager.
- 3 – Retire at 11:30 PM.
- 4 – No drinking of intoxicants will be allowed at any time.
- 5 – Players are cautioned against associating with harlots and gamblers.
- 6 – Avoid pool rooms and saloons.
- 7 – While in the field the captain has charge of the team, and his authority is not to be questioned at any time.
- 8 – No finding fault with another player's work will be allowed. If you have any grievance go to the manager.
- 9 – Players are expected to keep themselves in proper moral and physical condition.

Any breach of these rules resulted in a \$10 fine, except for the no-drinking clause, which carried a \$50 fine for the first offence and a \$100 penalty plus suspension for the second.⁷¹

As with some of the attempts to prevent drinking described in chapter six, it is not that any of these rules were poor in the abstract. The problem lay in the fact that the definitions of so

⁷¹ "Columbus Chatter" F.W. Arnold, *The Sporting Life*, April 3, 1889, 3.

many of the behaviors they purported to control were ill defined. This left them open to abuse by team officials hoping to recoup some of their outlay for salaries by fining their players for trivialities. There was also the fact that grown men may well resent having their employer try to control who they associated with and when those associations took place. Yet, the teams had to do something, if they did not want to see their fan base melt away in disgust over the actions of some players.

This is where the Brotherhood's efforts to improve the conduct of its members might prove useful. As John Ward stated many times, the BPBP considered that the interests of the players and the team owners were almost identical, and on the issue of general behavior by players, they were. If fans grew disgusted over the actions of players and stayed away from the ballpark, teams would make less money, and they would then be unable to pay their players as much. Furthermore, if the BPBP wanted to raise salaries for all of its members, making sure that those members behaved themselves would give them a stronger hand in negotiations. It meant that management would have one less issue with which to disparage them in public and in salary negotiations. That is part of the reason why the Brotherhood did not accept every National League player into its ranks. It turned away a few men for their moral shortcomings, for exactly the reasons described here.

In the end, the issue of violence in baseball is important for the same reasons that alcohol abuse, umpire abuse, gambling, dishonesty, and physical fitness were important. All of these were about improving baseball's image and presenting spectators with a better product for their entertainment half-dollar. Negative incidents involving any of these vices threatened to dampen public enthusiasm for a sport growing in popularity and profitability. No one connected to the game wanted to see those things injured or disrupted, especially the owners who had invested

sizable sums in baseball. This fact next raises the question of the fortunes of the owners and the general financial situation in Gilded Age baseball.

Chapter 11

Team Finances in the 1880s

As the clubs of the National League and American Association moved to institute their salary cap for the 1886 season in an effort to hold down player salaries, and then contemplated what they should do in response to the players forming their brotherhood, it seems worthwhile to ask: were the teams in financial straits to begin with? Was it necessary to check player salaries in order to keep the franchises afloat, or was this simply another way to squeeze the players and take tighter control of labor? Leaving aside, for the moment, the point about proportionality, and whether or not men who made millions of dollars in business *should* care if their baseball team made or lost a few thousand dollars in a season, there remains the question of how much money the teams actually made or lost.

Without access to the account books of each franchise, it is impossible to know the precise figures. Nor can we always take the public claims of owners at face value. In some cases, especially during the Brotherhood War of 1890, the need to foster an image of stability and profitability colored the public pronouncements of the teams. Not only was each team competing for fan support and favorable press coverage; each major league was competing with the other for a reputation as the superior organization. True, the two major leagues were not in open warfare after 1883, but if the numerous and frequent rumors (that occasionally panned out, too) of franchise moves in the sporting papers of the 1880s are any indication, each league

incessantly tried to get the jump on its rival organization. In some cases, examining circumstantial evidence may be the best we can do in estimating the financial conditions of the teams, but there are some solid figures to work with as well. In any case, we must give the figures we do have a careful examination to see what they tell us.

The city of Cleveland fielded a major league team for most of the 1880s, taking a break only when they left the National League after the 1884 season in protest over poor treatment from the League. They returned in the American Association in 1887, taking Pittsburgh's place, headed by Frank Robison, who made his wealth in street railroads, as president. In order to gain readmission to the major leagues, their ownership group proudly pointed to the financial success the team enjoyed in its League days as part of their efforts to persuade the Association to take them on. The owners revealed that their club operated in the black even before joining the National League. In 1878, when they were the Forest City team in a league known as the League Alliance, they turned a profit. After joining the National League in 1879, they finished sixth in the championship race (out of eight, and at 27-55, they were a very long way from fifth) but made money regardless. Despite never finishing better than third place in their six years in the National League, the team made money each year, except for small losses in 1881 and 1884, with the profits reaching as high as \$20,000 for the 1883 season. By the time Cleveland entered the American Association in 1887, the club believed its prospects brighter still. Their new grounds (known, confusingly, by the same name as their old grounds, both being called National League Park), "as level as a billiard table," seated 5,000 spectators and was more centrally

located than the old grounds, being four blocks closer to the Public Square and accessed by three street car lines.¹

Other team executives used the same tactic of pointing out past profits in order to justify current actions. O.P. Caylor, manager of the Cincinnati Red Stockings in 1885 and 1886, provided his readers in *The Sporting Life* with some financial information in his effort to prove how the National Agreement between the two major leagues served to boost franchise values far beyond what they had been before the National Agreement existed. He claimed that the Red Stockings, who entered the American Association in its inaugural 1882 season, made \$12,500 in their first year. They continued pulling in the cash the next two seasons, profiting about \$10,000 in each campaign, before losing \$7,000-8,000 in 1885 when the team had greater than usual expenses in an effort to sign new players. In the just-concluded 1886 season, the team resumed operating in the black (how far went unspecified) but Caylor did claim receipts for the season in excess of \$55,000. This was slightly down from 1883, when the Red Stockings had between \$65,000 and \$70,000 in receipts, but near 1884's total of \$60,000.²

The story of Chris Von der Ahe reads along the same lines as that from Cleveland. The St. Louis entrepreneur started out as the owner of a grocery store, and then added ownership of a saloon, butcher shop, and food store to his portfolio. In 1880, he joined a group that wanted to renovate Grand Avenue Park in St. Louis and fit it for baseball purposes. By 1881, St. Louis had a team playing on the grounds, and although it was not a major league club, he and the other owners cleared \$25,000 for the season, as St. Louis turned out to be excited over baseball. The profits grew from there, as St. Louis fielded a team in the American Association during its

¹ "The Cleveland Club" FHB, *The Sporting Life*, December 15, 1886, 1; "Fully Organized" NA, *The Sporting Life*, December 15, 1886, 1.

² "From Cincinnati" O.P. Caylor, *The Sporting Life*, December 15, 1886, 3.

inaugural 1882 season, pulled in about \$50,000, and continued doing so well that Von der Ahe devoted almost all of his attention to baseball because of the great profits realized from the national pastime.³

Caylor later provided his readers with an important caveat when it came to official attendance figures, however, and one we should keep in mind over the course of this chapter. He once described how it was standard practice for teams to exaggerate attendance figures by up to, and sometimes exceeding, forty percent in order to make their teams appear more successful to the public than they actually were. The only club that reported exact figures consistently, he believed, was Boston, although Caylor believed New York also did so for the most part. That left fourteen other major league teams, however, where inflated attendance figures were the order of the day. “St. Louis always did magnify their crowds, and other clubs not desiring to be outdone in the eyes of the public in a drawing sense got into the habit gradually of adding a percentage to their actual numbers. This system has done much harm. It has made the players believe the club for which they played has made a great deal more money than was the fact.” Caylor, as a former team manager who handled the visitors’ share of the gate receipts, was in a position to speak with authority on this matter. He also pointed out that there might be a modest discrepancy between actual attendance and paid attendance, as many spectators obtained free passes to the games (more on this matter later) but, in all, we should take the official figures given by most clubs with at least one grain of salt.⁴

His remark about official attendance figures misleading the players is an important one, however. One of the factors that motivated the players towards forming the Players’ League for the 1890 season was that they believed there was more money in baseball than their salaries

³ “Base Ball” NA, *The Sporting News*, February 5, 1887, 5.

⁴ “Caylor’s Comment” O.P. Caylor, *The Sporting Life*, May 16, 1888, 9.

indicated. If teams reported the terrific attendance numbers that they sometimes did, how, then, could the same teams cry poverty and do things like pass the Brush Plan (see chapter sixteen) claiming that such things were necessary to prevent financial ruin? In this respect, baseball's magnates contributed to their troubles with their players. The revolt of 1890 was a self-inflicted wound in this regard.

Charles Byrne, owner of the Brooklyn franchise, joined Caylor in his belief that most teams exaggerated their attendance numbers, although he claimed that his team was pure in this regard. After Brooklyn opened the 1889 season on the road against the Philadelphia Athletics in front of huge crowds, Byrnes said, "There was a big crowd there, and the lowest number I have heard estimated is 12,000, and I am informed that the Athletic management gave out 15,000 as the figures. As a matter of fact there were about 10,000 people on the ground. This much I am certain of, and that is that the Brooklyn Club was paid for 9,935 admissions at the three gates." Byrne also agreed with Caylor that this deluded players into a belief that all the teams were more profitable than they truly were. "Now over in Brooklyn we never lie about our crowds. There are the turnstiles and the exact number of persons passing through them are given to the press and the public. That is what the turnstiles are for. I shall have a talk with the Athletic people tomorrow and will endeavor to show them the harm they are doing in adding to their crowds."⁵

Keeping this in mind as we proceed, we can get a round estimate of the overall profitability of the game from Chicago's Al Spalding. He once admitted that the eight teams of the National League profited \$750,000 for the five seasons of 1885-1889. Even if the teams plowed some of that profit back into their own organizations, in the form of improving their grounds, grandstands, and so forth, as Spalding claimed, that still leaves a nice sum in

⁵ "Big Base Ball Crowds" Charles Byrne, *The Sporting News*, April 27, 1889, 1.

management's pockets each year.⁶ This equates to \$150,000 profit per season for the league as a whole, or \$93,750 per team over the five-year period, or \$18,750 average profit per team, per year. Teams did not participate in any kind of revenue sharing plan, however, other than the share of gate receipts awarded the visiting team at each game, and so these averages conceal significant discrepancies between each team. As with the tendency to inflate attendance figures, we must keep this fact in mind as we delve into team finances.

Estimations of the wealth of the backers for each club are not easy to make, especially considering a person's wealth varies with the vagaries of business, but nonetheless, one writer attempted to do so for the American Association's teams in 1887. The goal was to refute the claim of Boston Triumvir J.B. Billings that the National League was in stronger financial condition than the Association. Claiming that some figures might be low, but none high, he provided the following figures for the wealth of each team's head its ownership group:

Philadelphia Athletics - \$100,000

Brooklyn Grays - \$450,000

Baltimore Orioles - \$500,000

Cincinnati Red Stockings - \$1,000,000

Cleveland Blues - \$500,000

Louisville Colonels - \$250,000

New York Metropolitans - \$10,000,000

St. Louis Browns - \$250,000

⁶ Seymour, *Baseball*, 119.

The sum of all these is a shade north of \$13 million, although clearly the vast wealth of the New York franchise, headed by Staten Island developer Erastus Wiman, raises the group's average considerably.⁷

There are documented attendance figures to help us in our estimates, although regrettably, the leagues did not start to publish official attendance figures until 1891. Teams sometimes published attendance totals on their own authority prior to 1891, however, and baseball researchers have reconstructed totals by reading newspaper reports and taking attendance totals from those reports, with the understanding that the totals might contain some owner-created inflation. Below is a table indicating total yearly attendance, average yearly attendance, and revenue from attendance (see the discussion in note eight below for more detail regarding the formula used to determine revenue) by team for the five years of 1885 to 1889.

⁷ "New York Chat" Regular, *The Sporting Life*, February 23, 1887, 5.

Table 1 Yearly Total Attendance, Average Attendance, Estimated Attendance Revenue, and Winning Percentage for Major League Baseball Teams, 1885-1889⁸

<u>Team</u>	<u>Season</u>	<u>Total Attendance</u>	<u>Average Attendance</u>	<u>Attendance Revenue</u>	<u>Winning Pct.</u>
Baltimore AA	1885	66,000	1,200	\$24,750	37.6
	1886	70,000	1,129	\$26,250	36.6
	1887	142,000	2,254	\$53,250	57.0
	1888	38,000	679	\$14,250	41.6
	1889	115,000	1,797	\$43,125	51.8
Boston NL	1885	110,290	1,969	\$68,931	41.1
	1886	133,683	2,285	\$83,552	47.9
	1887	261,000	4,314	\$163,125	50.4
	1888	265,015	3,955	\$165,634	52.2
	1889	283,257	4,426	\$177,036	64.8
Brooklyn AA	1885	85,000	1,518	\$31,875	47.3
	1886	185,000	2,624	\$69,375	55.5
	1887	273,000	3,957	\$102,375	44.8
	1888	245,000	3,427	\$91,875	62.9
	1889	353,690	5,053	\$132,634	67.9

⁸ All attendance figures in this table come from estimates found at baseball-almanac.com, and researchers have reconstructed these estimates from attendance figures given for games in sporting newspapers. They are, admittedly, estimates, but should be sufficient for our purposes. The dollar values given in the attendance revenue column are my projections, based on multiplying the home attendance by 62.5 cents for National League cities and 37.5 cents for American Association cities. In the National League, tickets cost 50 cents for general admission and 75 cents for a seat in the grandstand, while in the American Association the numbers were 25 and 50, respectively. I have averaged the two. As a result, these numbers are not absolutely correct, but reasonable estimates. O.P. Caylor, one of the most astute observers of baseball and a former team manager for two different clubs, believed teams took in an aggregate of about \$900,000 in 1888. The data in this table for 1888 sums to a total a bit higher than Caylor's estimate, although if we take the possibility that teams over reported their totals a bit, then our numbers square well with his estimate. Frank Brunell in Cleveland actually used a higher figure than I have or Caylor did, 65 cents per game, in his calculations of the Cleveland club's revenue, so my figure of 62.5 cents probably is near the mark. "Brunell's Budget" F.H. Brunell, *The Sporting Life*, July 17, 1889, 7. Finally, for American Association data for 1888, I used a multiplier of 50 cents, because that was the year that the Association switched to National League ticket prices at the beginning of the season but reverted to their old prices about halfway through the campaign, so I average the two standard multipliers to get this number. All data from baseball-almanac.com accessed January 30, 2015.

Table 1 (Cont.)

<u>Team</u>	<u>Season</u>	<u>Total Attendance</u>	<u>Average Attendance</u>	<u>Attendance Revenue</u>	<u>Winning Pct.</u>
Buffalo NL	1885	35,000	660	\$21,875	33.9
Chicago NL	1885	117,519	2,080	\$73,449	77.7
	1886	142,438	2,261	\$89,024	72.6
	1887	217,070	3,418	\$135,669	58.7
	1888	228,906	3,366	\$143,066	57.0
	1889	149,175	2,194	\$93,234	50.8
Cincinnati AA	1885	120,000	2,143	\$45,000	56.2
	1886	138,563	1,965	\$51,961	47.1
	1887	185,397	2,726	\$69,524	60.0
	1888	132,606	1,936	\$49,727	59.7
	1889	131,000	1,858	\$49,125	54.7
Cleveland AA	1887	72,000	1,241	\$27,000	29.8
	1888	60,000	1,000	\$22,500	37.9
Cleveland NL	1889	144,425	2,124	\$90,266	45.9
Columbus AA	1889	90,000	1,304	\$33,750	43.5
Detroit NL	1885	43,000	827	\$26,875	38.0
	1886	105,000	1,694	\$65,625	70.7
	1887	95,000	1,557	\$59,375	63.7
	1888	75,000	1,136	\$46,875	51.9
Indianapolis NL	1887	84,000	1,333	\$52,500	29.4
	1888	78,000	1,182	\$48,750	37.0
	1889	105,850	1,557	\$66,156	44.0
Kansas City NL	1886	55,000	821	\$34,375	24.8
Kansas City AA	1888	50,000	877	\$18,750	32.6
	1889	85,000	1,214	\$31,875	40.2

Table 1 (Cont.)

<u>Team</u>	<u>Season</u>	<u>Total Attendance</u>	<u>Average Attendance</u>	<u>Attendance Revenue</u>	<u>Winning Pct.</u>
Louisville AA	1885	108,000	1,929	\$40,500	47.3
	1886	123,000	1,836	\$46,125	48.5
	1887	128,000	1,882	\$48,000	55.9
	1888	76,000	1,357	\$28,500	35.6
	1889	60,000	938	\$22,500	19.6
New York AA	1885	64,000	1,231	\$24,000	40.7
	1886	67,000	1,063	\$25,125	39.3
	1887	105,000	1,780	\$39,375	33.1
New York NL	1885	185,000	3,304	\$115,625	75.9
	1886	189,000	3,176	\$118,125	63.0
	1887	270,945	4,406	\$169,341	55.3
	1888	305,455	4,663	\$190,909	64.1
	1889	201,989	3,206	\$126,243	65.9
Philadelphia AA	1885	169,000	3,018	\$63,375	49.1
	1886	179,000	2,594	\$67,125	46.7
	1887	163,000	2,362	\$61,125	48.1
	1888	201,000	2,680	\$75,375	60.9
	1889	220,000	3,235	\$82,500	56.4
Philadelphia NL	1885	150,698	2,740	\$56,512	50.9
	1886	175,623	3,081	\$65,859	62.3
	1887	253,671	4,125	\$95,127	61.0
	1888	151,804	2,335	\$56,927	53.1
	1889	281,869	4,439	\$105,701	49.6
Pittsburgh AA	1885	82,000	1,478	\$30,750	50.4
	1886	195,000	2,847	\$73,125	58.4
Pittsburgh NL	1887	140,000	2,258	\$87,500	44.4
	1888	112,000	1,672	\$70,000	49.2
	1889	117,338	1,778	\$73,336	46.2
Providence NL	1885	49,000	961	\$30,625	48.2

Table 1 (Cont.)

<u>Team</u>	<u>Season</u>	<u>Total Attendance</u>	<u>Average Attendance</u>	<u>Attendance Revenue</u>	<u>Winning Pct.</u>
St. Louis AA	1885	129,000	2,304	\$48,375	70.5
	1886	205,000	2,950	\$76,875	66.9
	1887	244,000	3,615	\$91,500	70.4
	1888	166,000	2,459	\$62,250	68.1
	1889	175,000	2,593	\$65,625	66.7
St. Louis NL	1885	62,000	1,107	\$38,750	33.3
	1886	99,000	1,623	\$61,875	35.2
Washington NL	1886	60,000	968	\$37,500	23.3
	1887	80,000	1,356	\$50,000	37.7
	1888	57,000	891	\$35,625	35.8
	1889	68,652	1,295	\$42,908	33.1

We should not take the estimates in the “Attendance Revenue” column as an exact income for each team each year, because teams had many other sources of income, and this column only estimates revenue from attendance. In addition, remember that the attendance estimate only includes championship schedule games, and teams played many exhibition games each season to supplement their incomes. Outside of the games themselves, there was also advertising and concessions, as we will see below. Still, we can use these figures as a decent beginning to understand how much money a typical team might make in one season.

An additional factor here is that not all gate revenue went to the home team. The home club split the gate receipts with the visitors, in various ratios and with various stipulations over the years. During the 1886 season, for example, the visiting team for National League games received thirty percent of the gate from the game. This was, in most cases, more liberal towards the visiting nine than the American Association rule, which stipulated that the visitors receive a

flat sum of sixty-five dollars.⁹ At their league meeting preparatory to the 1887 season, eastern owners of NL franchises succeeded in pushing through a change in this policy similar to the American Association rule. The change was that for 1887, all visiting teams received a guarantee of \$125 each game, except on national and state holidays, when they would get fifty percent of the gate.¹⁰ One interesting quirk of these league meetings was that owners coveted appointments to the Scheduling Committee, so that they could schedule home games for their teams on important holidays and other choice days when crowds would be huge. This rule was supposed to help alleviate such practices, although teams that generally saw lighter attendance might acquiesce in playing road games on big holidays anyways because they did receive half the money taken in that day.

It is important not to underestimate the gate receipts from turnout on holiday games, either. As an example, Henry Chadwick once reached back into his misty memories of the game's early years to produce some facts regarding the 1869 Cincinnati Red Stockings. After scanning old files of the Brooklyn *Eagle*, he announced that the 1869 team drew 23,217 fans for six May match ups, banking \$11,500 in the process. Yet, he claimed, "The six matches above referred to did not equal the number present at the Polo Grounds on Decoration Day, 1886, nor did the entire receipts of those six May games of 1869 equal those of the single game of last Decoration Day in which the Detroit and New Yorks took part."¹¹

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⁹ "The Base Ball Business" NA, *The Sporting Life*, November 10, 1886, 2.

¹⁰ "The Maroons Victory" NA, *The Sporting News*, November 20, 1886, 1.

¹¹ "Chadwick's Chat" Henry Chadwick, *The Sporting Life*, February 16, 1887, 2. Today, we call Decoration Day Memorial Day, and it falls on May 30 of each year.

Teams debated what was better, a straight guarantee for the game or a percentage of the gate. The answer, of course, varied depending on whether your home crowds were larger or smaller. The Boston Beaneaters of 1886, for instance, paid the National League's four western franchises \$6,847.05 more from games in Boston than it received from games on the road with those clubs. For the league as a whole, the Beaneaters came out \$5,740.80 poorer because of the scheme of dividing the gate receipts with thirty percent going to the visitors. Furthermore, according to the team's account books from which their sportswriter took these figures, Boston had subsidized every western team in the same way in every season going back to 1883, with the singular exception of the Detroit team of 1884. This writer also noted Boston's official attendance in 1886, which was 133,682 spectators, and claimed this figure was significantly weaker than in the previous few seasons when the team won more frequently (they won 56 games against 61 defeats in 1886) and drew more fans to their ballpark at the South End Grounds.¹²

The Chicago White Stockings also resented supporting visitors with thirty percent of the take when those visitors did not reciprocate by equally strong attendance on the return engagement. Following the 1885 season, with the National League down to six members after Providence and Buffalo dropped out, Chicago owner Al Spalding favored the National League staying with six teams instead of the typical eight. One reason he cited was that in road games played at Buffalo in 1885, his White Stockings realized only \$383 in revenue, not even enough to pay their hotel bills during the stay.¹³

On the other side of the coin from Boston and Chicago was the Detroit Wolverines. Their ownership beefed up the club, and its payroll, significantly when they acquired the "Big

¹² "From the Hub" Mugwump, *The Sporting Life*, November 17, 1886, 4.

¹³ "Sporting Affairs" NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, January 3, 1886, 10.

Four” of Dan Brouthers, Hardy Richardson, Jack Rowe, and Deacon White prior to the 1886 season. They did so in pursuit of a business model that fit their situation in the City of the Straits. They knew that their home market would struggle to support a large payroll, being eighth out of the eight National League cities in population, but of course, they still wanted to field a first-class nine and win games. Their solution was to put together a team of heavy hitters that would draw big crowds on the road, and then use their thirty percent visitors’ share of the gate receipts to make up for the fact that they could not draw as many cranks to their home games at Recreation Park.¹⁴ Their plan had merit. For instance, of the approximately 189,000 cranks who witnessed games played at New York’s Polo Grounds in 1886, 64,000 of those, about one-third, attended games featuring Detroit. Figure two shows estimated attendance in National League cities when Detroit came to town in 1886.

Table 2 Estimated Attendance at National League Ballparks in Games Featuring the Detroit Wolverines in 1886¹⁵

City	Total Attendance	Detroit Attendance	Percentage	Detroit's Take
Boston	133,682	30,000	22.4%	\$5,625
Chicago	142,438	65,000	45.6%	\$12,188
Kansas City	55,000	No data	No data	No data
New York	189,000	64,000	33.9%	\$12,000
Philadelphia	175,623	48,000	27.3%	\$5,400
St. Louis	99,000	No data	No data	No data
Washington	60,000	12,000	20.0%	\$2,250
			Total	\$37,463

¹⁴ Confusingly, Pittsburgh, Detroit, and the Philadelphia Quakers all played at home fields named Recreation Park in 1886.

¹⁵ “Detroit Dethroned” MAT, *The Sporting Life*, December 1, 1886, 4. Note that these numbers are estimates and as such, are in the ballpark but not absolutely accurate. Also, remember that Philadelphia charged twenty-five cents for admission to the bleachers, so the Detroit take in Philadelphia was smaller than it was in other cities.

If the percentages attributed to the Wolverines seem absurdly high, accounts from individual games seem to back the claim. When the Wolverines went to Gotham to play a double header with New York on Decoration Day in 1886, 7,000 fans paid to watch the first game and 20,000 the afternoon contest.¹⁶ A June 19 game in Detroit against Chicago saw 10,000 in attendance. The next month, when Detroit visited the Windy City, 14,000 people came out to watch on July 10, which observers believed to be the largest crowd in the city's history. Another 11,000 cranks watched Detroit play in New York on August 9, with 9,000 in the stands the following day, and 8,000 more were on hand on August 11 to see the Giants beat the Wolverines for the third straight game. Even on September 30, with New York out of the race for the pennant, 5,200 came to the Polo Ground to witness Detroit's last appearance in the city that year.¹⁷ The following season they were again one of the League's top drawing cards, as an August three game series in Chicago saw an aggregate attendance of about 28,000.¹⁸

The salaries Detroit offered its players were indeed substantial, and in many cases quite a bit higher than the supposed \$2,000 dollar maximum for 1886 described in chapter three. Second baseman Fred Dunlap pocketed \$4,500 for the season, while first baseman Dan Brouthers and outfielder Hardy Richardson pulled down \$4,000 for themselves. The left side of the Wolverine infield, shortstop Jack Rowe and third baseman Deacon White, earned \$3,500 each, and catcher Charlie Bennett \$3,000, while the club's best pitcher in 1886, Charles "Lady" Baldwin, got \$2,500 for his efforts. The club's other primary outfielders, Ned Hanlon (\$2,250)

¹⁶ "Around The Bases" NA, *The Sporting News*, March 5, 1887, 5.

¹⁷ "Chicago Wins The Game" NA, *New York Times*, June 20, 1886, 2; "Detroit Again Defeated" NA, *New York Times*, July 11, 1886, 2; "New York Whips Detroit" NA, *New York Times*, August 10, 1886, 3; "Detroit's Unhappy Nine" NA, *New York Times*, August 11, 1886, 3; "It Is A Habit They Have" NA, *New York Times*, August 12, 1886, 3; "Detroit Defeated" NA, *New York Times*, October 1, 1886, 2.

¹⁸ "From Detroit" MAT, *The Sporting Life*, August 24, 1887, 4.

and “Big Sam” Thompson (\$2,000), also made the limit or more, and even their backup, Jack Manning, got \$1,900 for his rather mediocre work with the stick. To round out the club’s expenditures, pitcher Charlie “Pretzels” Getzien made \$2,000, pitcher Larry Twitchell \$1,200, pitcher Billy Smith \$1,750, reserve catcher Tom Gillen \$1,500, reserve catcher Charlie Ganzel \$1,750, and pitcher Pete Conway \$2,000. The salaries of team officials and workers to keep the grounds in shape ran the club another \$6,000 or so, while the rent for the grounds was roughly equal to the sale of scorecards and such during the season. All of these salaries sum to a player payroll of approximately \$41,350 for the season, though the true total is slightly higher, \$46,500, as the team also engaged a few players who did not finish the season with the club. Adding on administration, the team spent in the neighborhood of \$52,500 in 1886.¹⁹

This strategy worked well for 1886, as Detroit played outstanding ball on the field and went 87-36 (.707 winning percentage), narrowly missing the pennant and finishing 2.5 games back of the Chicago White Stockings. It reported home receipts of \$55,000 for the season.²⁰ It appears, therefore, that even the National League team playing in the league’s smallest market could break even or profit, given quality players to attract spectators and management with a business model appropriate to its circumstances. Detroit predicated its success on bringing fans to the park on the road, however, so when the NL announced its change in ticket revenue distribution for 1887, Wolverines ownership went berserk. So much so, the team considered ditching the League and joining the American Association, in its public pronouncements, at least. Given that the Association’s road revenue sharing plan was still more miserly towards visitors than the one the League just adopted, all the bluster appears no more than an attempt to gain

¹⁹ “Pretty Hefty” NA, *The Sporting Life*, December 1, 1886, 1.

²⁰ Ibid.

leverage in their negotiations with the League, but still, this change meant Detroit would have to scrap its entire business plan.

Detroit's protest worked, but for only one season. They did stay with the National League, in part because Chicago's Al Spalding decided to allow Detroit, but only Detroit, to continue operating under the financial rules of 1886 for the coming season. With this guarantee, Detroit's owners kept their team together, and even won the pennant in 1887 by edging the Philadelphia Quakers, but after that had to start dismantling its team because of the team's reduced revenue stream. By 1888, they slipped to fifth in the standings after parting with second baseman Fred Dunlap, and by 1889 things were so bad that they ceased to field a major league team.²¹ Detroit's president Fred Stearns gave an accurate summation of the situation after the 1887 season when he said, "we have a team that entitles us to a percentage all around. Our salary list is \$49,000. Chicago's is \$29,000. While we are the greatest attraction that comes to Chicago, we have made \$10,000 on the season and Chicago has made between \$80,000 and \$90,000."²²

Was this move to the guarantee plan an intentional one, part of a byzantine plot intended primarily to derail the Wolverines? Without getting inside the heads of the other National League owners it is impossible to say with certainty, but at least some circumstantial evidence points in that direction. The Wolverines put together a great team, and their rivals knew it. Their 1887 club featured three players, Brouters, Thompson, and White, in the Hall of Fame for their playing skill (Ned Hanlon is also enshrined in Cooperstown, but for his innovative tactics as

²¹ See the November 24, 1886 issue of *The Sporting Life* for more details on Detroit's dilemma. Several articles in this issue address their grievances over the National League's change of policy regarding ticket revenue. Also, see "What Spalding Says" NA, *The Sporting News*, November 27, 1886, 1; "Stearns on the Situation" NA, *The Sporting News*, November 27, 1886, 1.

²² "Base-Ball Notes" NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, October 30, 1887, 13.

a manager much more than for his abilities as a player, which were respectable but nothing more) as well as several others such as Dave Rowe, Fred Dunlap, Hardy Richardson, and Charlie Bennett who were regarded among the better players in 1880s baseball by contemporaries. This collection of stars rivaled or exceeded what the White Stockings, Quakers, or Giants put on the field any given day.²³

With the Wolverines constituting a significant threat, but a fiscally vulnerable one, other National League teams might realize better opportunities if they pulled Detroit's legs out from under them financially. Doing so through manipulating revenue distribution also had the advantage of seeming fair and neutral by equalizing the visitors' take at all games, which appeared to treat all teams equally. Such a move had the added bonus of being justifiable by the social Darwinist-inspired attitudes of the late nineteenth century, a time when many believed that organisms succeeded or failed solely because of the traits with which nature endowed them. In this view, if a club like Detroit could not support itself on the merits of its home attendance, it deserved to go under, or at least it should slash its payroll, because it was unfit to support its current level of spending. (The Wolverines might counter that they had adapted through their innovative approach to building their roster, but the rest of the National League could again counter that nature, symbolized by the rules of the game, had changed and Detroit was unfit to survive in the new circumstances.) As an example of this mode of thinking, when the American Association took up the percentage or guarantee question in 1887, Cincinnati president Aaron Stern put it bluntly. "I am of the opinion that if a city cannot support its own club it has no business in the Association. . . . I cannot see what right the other clubs have to my receipts."²⁴

²³ For more on Hanlon's managerial innovations, see Jaffe, *Evaluating Baseball's Managers*, 92-95.

²⁴ "Hedging on the Percentage Question" NA, *The Sporting Life*, August 24, 1887, 1.

The problem with such logic, as the reader has doubtless already realized, is that the receipts taken in at the home ballpark were not solely a function of the quality of the home team. Some visitors, like Detroit, drew better than others, based on the quality of their team and how many magnetic, charismatic players it had to attract spectators, and statements such as Sterns' simply ignored this fact.

As for how this destroyed the Detroit club, without this revenue from road games, they could not keep their team together, and the other National League owners knew this. By granting Detroit the exceptions they did for 1887, they could even project the appearance of helping a wounded brother, but like wolves circling injured prey, they realized it was only a matter of time. The Wolverines managed to profit in 1887 with the help given them, coming out about \$10,000 in the black according to the club's president (who also assured Detroit's correspondent for *The Sporting Life* that every team in the National League, even the newly-minted Indianapolis franchise, made a profit in 1887, and a profit greater than Detroit's, at that, a statement also confirmed by Indianapolis management), but after that season, the tide started to turn against them. Every time Detroit had to sell one of its star players, the richer teams were the ones to benefit. Facts bear this out. When the Wolverines started unraveling after the 1888 season forced them into baseball's equivalent of debtors prison, Dan Brouthers went to Boston along with Hardy Richardson and Charlie Bennett, while Sam Thompson journeyed east to Philadelphia. Jack Rowe, Ned Hanlon, and the aging Deacon White, part of the club's second tier of stars, ended up with Pittsburgh, joining Fred Dunlap, who had gone to the Smoky City the year before.²⁵

²⁵ "What Detroit's Stockholders Get" NA, *The Sporting Life*, October 5, 1887, 3.

Despite all these maneuverings, the demise of the Wolverines was still rather sudden. Part of the reason, besides the financial maneuvers already described, was a perfect storm of bad luck. Having won the championship of the world the year before, Detroit cranks expected another big effort from their nine in 1888. That did not happen. Instead, the team went 68-63 and finished in fifth place, putting an enormous damper on fan enthusiasm. (Another piece of bad luck here was that their record should have been much better than it was. The team's Pythagorean record was a full six games better at 74-57, which would have put the Wolverines in third place.²⁶) The worst was when the ball club suffered sixteen consecutive losses in July and August as injuries decimated its ranks. This turned off fans in a major way for the remainder of the season. These injuries cost them slugging outfielder Sam Thompson for all but 56 games, and even some of those he did play in, he could barely throw the ball, an immense liability for the right fielder. Likewise, Hardy Richardson took the field just 58 times at second base, and he was another critical piece of the Wolverine arsenal. Replacements like Count Campau were not very effective, and a slew of unexpected losses resulted. The overall lousy weather of 1888 also played its part, and the result was financial hardship in the City of the Straits.

As a result, team management folded its hand. It is hard to say with certainty looking back, but it appears they panicked unnecessarily. Even if they lost money in 1888, a healthy roster likely would have resulted in a better performance in 1889, and along with jettisoning a couple pricey players, things probably would have been manageable once again. Deacon White

²⁶ A team's Pythagorean record is the record it should have achieved, given its number of runs scored and runs allowed. Over the course of a season, outscoring the opposition by ten runs equates to about one win, on average. In 1888, the Wolverines played 131 games, scored 721 runs, and allowed 629. Being +92 in runs scored should have equaled about nine wins, therefore. A team with equal runs scored to runs allowed should have gone 65-65 in 130 games. Since Detroit was +92 in runs, that should have given them nine more wins, 74 total, in an average season. The fact that they only won 68 means the team suffered from bad luck, for lack of a better word.

was still a good hitter, but was also forty years old. His defense at third base cannot have been sublime by this time, and parting ways with the Deacon alone would have freed up \$3,500. Lady Baldwin made about \$2,000 for pitching in just six games. A decision part ways with those two men alone would have about evened the books, but taking the short view instead of thinking ahead, Detroit management cashed out. The team briefly considered a move into the American Association, thinking that offering fans tickets for a quarter might draw more of them to Recreation Park. However, this may have been simply a cover story as the team considered its future prospects and found them looking rather bleak. “The club has lost money this year. It is thought that with 25-cent games people can be got to the park who will not pay twice that sum, but the real motive of the deal is the certainty that Detroit will be frozen out unless it gracefully retires.”²⁷

Instead of persevering or changing leagues, Wolverine management began auctioning off its men before closing shop. Boston and Pittsburgh were the most frequent shoppers. While some of the men involved had no personal objections to their potential purchasers, this did bring back the question of whether teams should be able to sell their men without consulting them. As Deacon White put it, “I think it would have been better for Mr. Stearns to have consulted the players before he went on his peddling trip. I do not like the idea of being auctioned off like a slave.”²⁸ White was especially leery about any possible sale to Boston, as back in 1877 the team had released him without paying him his full salary.²⁹

The club milked the situation for all it was worth. It sold its top players auction-style, most going to the Gas City or Beantown. It also sold its franchise as a member of the National

²⁷ “Various Base-Ball Talk” NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, October 11, 1888, 3.

²⁸ “The Boston-Detroit Deal” NA, *New York Times*, October 25, 1888, 2.

²⁹ “Notes And Comments” NA, *The Sporting Life*, October 24, 1888, 2.

League, along with the remaining, less desirable players. Cleveland, alienated by its American Association brethren (see chapter sixteen), was ready and willing to change leagues. The club bought the franchise from Detroit and transferred its allegiance back to the National League, where the city began in professional baseball in 1879.³⁰ The city of Detroit, meanwhile, demoted itself to International League status, as a new group of investors sold stock in a new team and opened up an operation in that circuit for 1889.³¹

Once again, as things always seemed to be when Detroit was involved, the League's timing was interesting and possibly conspiratorial. Just one month after the Wolverines decided to close shop, the League adopted the Brush Classification Plan (see chapter sixteen) in an attempt to limit future player salaries. Had Detroit known of the intent to do this back in October, it is quite conceivable its management might have changed its collective mind and decided to remain in the National League with this measure to help contain future costs. Instead, by the time the new plan went public, the team had sold many of its players already, making any such ideas moot.

Despite all the cries of poverty and losing money, however, players must have taken note when the team's ownership revealed the exact state of its finances when closing its affairs. Rather than a cash-strapped franchise that was nearly destitute, the Wolverines were more like the poker player who has had a good day and cashes out while ahead. One Detroit writer asked team president Fred Stearns, "What is the amount of the assessment the stockholders are called on to pay?" He replied, "Assessment! Ha! Not much. We declared a dividend of \$54,000, and there is still more money in bank to be divided." The writer, incredulous and perhaps unsure he heard Stearns correctly, said, "What! A dividend of \$54,000?" Stearns answered again,

³⁰ "The Base Ball Situation" NA, *The Sporting Life*, October 24, 1888, 2.

³¹ "The New Detroit Club" Mac, *The Sporting News*, November 17, 1888, 1.

“Exactly. It is payable June 1, and the holders of the shares, the par value of each being \$50, will receive \$135 each.” If Detroit closed the affairs of its supposedly failing franchise by paying shareholders two and a half times the original price of its stock, it seems legitimate to question whether other clubs also were considerably better off than they stated to the public. Players around major league baseball certainly took note.³²

* * * * *

Readers should not assume that just because baseball’s two major leagues included words in their names like “league” and “association,” with the cooperation such words imply, that the owners of the individual franchises behaved with the group’s well-being in mind. Often, it was the contrary. The National League’s constitution, for instance, allowed for the expulsion of league members if two-thirds of the league approved, and it was always possible to trade favors for votes. As a result, for 1887, the National League’s revenue distribution scheme further enriched the already wealthy at the expense of the rest of the league by forcing out Detroit and forcing it to sell its top players to the highest bidders.

This is part of the reason why there were so many rumors regarding franchise movement in the 1880s. Owners were out to make money for themselves, not necessarily for the good of the game or the league of which they were a member. Sportswriters frequently hurled this charge in the direction of the American Association especially, although League owners occasionally came in for criticism as well. As one Washington, DC writer put it in 1887,

when I attended the League meeting in New York, I saw and heard many things which I have not cared to print, but which, nevertheless, convinced me that there is but little

³² “The Old Detroit Club” MAT, *The Sporting Life*, April 29, 1885, 1.

sentiment among base ball magnates so far as the National game is concerned. They are in it for business reasons and some of my Washington friends would be astonished to know how slender is the thread that binds the Washington Club to the League.³³

Later, the same correspondent wrote, “the League would cheerfully extend the right hand of fellowship to Brooklyn with its present strong team, and it would not be a difficult matter to get a two-thirds vote to drop out the weakest Eastern club.” That meant trouble for the hometown Nationals, because “from a business standpoint no reasonable man will attempt to compare Washington with Brooklyn, and it therefore behooves the Washington management to put a strong team in the field next season if it wants to retain its membership in the League.”³⁴

St. Louis Browns owner Von der Ahe also verified these beliefs in his comments in December of 1887, as he described how, if his Browns had won the World Series that year, they had planned to move to the American Association’s New York market, recently vacated after Brooklyn owner Charles Byrne had bought the entire New York Metropolitans franchise a few months earlier. As Von der Ahe put it,

there is more truth than poetry in the statement. The matter was not only seriously considered but a move of the kind had almost been determined on. As we did not beat the Detroits, however, the plan missed fire. We had talked the matter over and had come to the conclusion that the Browns as Champions of the World if located in New York could clear at least \$100,000 a season. At that rate and counting on them holding their position they could clear \$500,000 in five years. That is about twenty times what they could clear here even under the most favorable circumstances. For that reason we had contemplated their removal to the Metropolis. Under the circumstances and looking at the matter from a purely business standpoint who could blame us for making the move.³⁵

All of this opens the question of whether or not these changes regarding revenue distribution were for the better. In the short run, some of the individual teams gained, like Boston, while others, such as Detroit, were hurt. Taking a longer view, however, economic logic

³³ “From The Capital” Bob Larnier, *The Sporting Life*, December 28, 1887, 5.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ “Nearly Lost Them” NA, *The Sporting News*, December 31, 1887, 1.

suggests that modification of the rules to help the wealthier franchises at the expense of teams like Detroit was probably unwise. Greater inequality of wealth between the franchises only served to lower the level of competitive balance in the league. Wealthier teams had more resources with which to sign talented players in the first place, and with the reserve clause to help them, the wealthier teams also held on to those quality players. As a result, the poorer teams had a tougher time getting their hands on talented players, which meant they had a harder time drawing fans to their grounds without hope of having a winning team. Lousy teams do not draw many spectators, either at home or on the road, and so when these weak teams came to play the stronger ones, attendance in the larger cities declined as well. Eventually, these weaker teams tended to drop out of their leagues, replaced by similarly uncompetitive new entries. The fact that major league baseball's attendance fell off in 1888 and 1889 after peaking in 1887 seems to corroborate this conclusion.³⁶

Observers, especially the hoary veteran sportswriter Henry Chadwick, took note of this trend, already emerging by the winter of 1886-1887, with disapproval. Before the 1887 season began, he discussed the fact that while most teams saw a profit in 1886, not all did, and he did not mince words as to the reason. The blame, Chadwick offered, lay not with the public, or any lack of popularity with the game itself, but instead with poor management and greed that hurt the game's reputation with the public. He quoted the first two articles of the National League's constitution:

³⁶ Remember that without anything resembling a modern farm system of minor league affiliates, small market teams such as Detroit could not rely on trying to develop young players as some major league teams do in the 2010s. Instead, teams had to purchase all new players from a minor league team somewhere, and those purchases cost money that the teams did not always have.

1. To encourage, foster and elevate the game of base ball; to enact and enforce proper rules for the exhibition and conduct of the game, and to make base ball playing respectable and honorable.
2. To protect and promote the mutual interests of professional base ball clubs and professional base ball players.

Likewise, article one in the American Association constitution stated that the Association existed “to perpetuate base ball as the National game of this country, and to surround it with such safeguards as to warrant for the future absolute public confidence in its integrity and methods.” In Chadwick’s eyes, when wealthier teams from larger markets abandoned the less profitable ones, or changed the rules to benefit themselves rather than the group, they failed to live up to these high-minded professions of intent, especially the part about promoting their mutual interests. The same held true regarding the cutthroat efforts to lure teams from one league to another, depending on the whims of the moment.³⁷

Sustaining Chadwick in this matter was his fellow graybeard and walking baseball historian Harry Wright. Considered one of the fathers of the game, Wright saw clearly that each league had an interest in making sure the smaller cities fielded a competitive nine, both to maintain the overall level of competition, and to make sure fans turned out when those teams went on the road. He actually advocated a hybrid of the guarantee and percentage systems, calling for a minimum guarantee of \$150 for all games, and then allowing the visitors a percentage of the gate whenever they drew enough spectators to bring in more than \$150 under the percentage plan. Pushed to pick between the two, however, Wright did not hesitate in his

³⁷ “Chadwick’s Chat” Henry Chadwick, *The Sporting Life*, January 12, 1887, 5.

choice. "I think the percentage system is more fair and just. . . . If Detroit goes to Boston and draws an immense audience give Detroit the benefit of its drawing abilities. If some other club goes to Boston and draws poorly let them have \$150, and so on through. It is decidedly in the interest of the big league cities to have good clubs in cities of smaller population."³⁸

The Sporting Life took up this question as well, and believed it was one of the problems bedeviling the American Association, and that it would do the same to the League if the League insisted on staying with the guarantee plan. The paper's editor, respected baseball observer Francis Richter, believed that the guarantee plan promoted selfishness and shortsightedness among owners, and led to an unbalanced league with only a few competitive teams. Richter had a point here, considering that by 1887 the St. Louis Browns were well on their way to the third of what would be four straight Association championships, with no rival finishing within six games of them and three of the four championships coming by more than ten games. When they finally lost their stranglehold on the championship in 1889, the team to unseat them, the Brooklyn Bridegrooms, was another large market team with deep resources to acquire talent, and even then, the Browns still posted a championship caliber 90-45 record.

This was also the reason that the Association's National League rivals could induce teams like Pittsburgh to leave the Association, tempting them with a better organization. Richter also saw what was going on between the National League and Detroit as an opportunity for the Association, writing, "all roads lead to Detroit now." He hoped that if the Association adopted the percentage plan, the Wolverines, with all their talent and established drawing power, might really consider leaving the League, thus strengthening the Association with its hoards of talented hitters who could bring fans to parks throughout the league. Richter also offered a very prescient

³⁸ "Affairs At Detroit" NA, *The Sporting News*, August 13, 1887, 2.

prediction of what would befall the Association should they refuse to change, a prediction that came true by 1892. He wrote,

the poorer clubs will inevitably be overborne by the power of concentrated capital and frozen out and then the dream of base ball monopolists will be realized, namely, one great League with undisputed arbitrary power, close corporation tendencies, even more galling slavery for the unprotected and refugeless player than now, unmitigated by the salve of big salaries, and—either future disturbing Union Association experiments in the many frozen-out cities, or gradual decadence of base ball for lack of healthy rivalry and competition.³⁹

The National League changed courses again for 1888. At its November meeting it voted to adopt a hybrid system, giving visitors \$150 plus twenty-five percent of the gate.⁴⁰ The reason may well have been that Detroit threatened to do just what Richter predicted. The Wolverines' president, Fred Stearns, said "I told the Association people to be all ready, and in case we were not given our dues in the League we would join them. I made no threat, but was fully prepared to make the jump."⁴¹

* * * * *

While selling tickets to home games was by far the most important source of income for major league teams, another source of revenue, which we should not underestimate simply because they are very rare today, was exhibition games. There were several kinds of exhibitions. Major league teams played minor league clubs or even collegiate and amateur nines in April to prepare for the championship season. They played each other as well, sometimes within their league and at other times against teams from their rival league. Cross-town rivalries, or matches

³⁹ "The Association" Francis Richter, *The Sporting Life*, August 10, 1887, 1.

⁴⁰ "The Men Make Their Point" NA, *New York Times*, November 18, 1887, 2.

⁴¹ "Notes And Comments" NA, *The Sporting Life*, December 7, 1887, 5.

with geographic neighbors, were of this type. The two Philadelphia teams played for city honors in the spring. While St. Louis had two teams, in 1885 and 1886, they also played. Washington and Baltimore was a popular combination, as was New York versus Brooklyn. Cincinnati, Cleveland, and Louisville offered possibilities. Finally, there were postseason exhibitions, including, but not limited to, the champions of the respective leagues, for honors as the best team in the country, region, or city. Any of these types of exhibition games could prove lucrative.

As an example, prior to the 1887 season, the defending champion St. Louis Browns played a pair of games with a trio of western opponents. For just half a dozen exhibition games with Louisville, Indianapolis, and Cincinnati, about 37,000 fans paid to take in the action.⁴² Almost 25,000 people, more than 8,000 per game, turned out for the preseason three-game series between the Browns and White Stockings in 1887 as those two clubs repeated their battle for supremacy in the World Series of the prior year. Between those three games in St. Louis and the matching three games in Chicago, the Browns realized about \$3,500 in profits and the White Stockings about \$4,000.⁴³ In the World Series of 1886, three games in Chicago netted about \$6,500 while the reciprocal games in the Mound City brought in about \$7,400.⁴⁴ When the same St. Louis team battled Detroit for the World Series championship following the 1887 campaign, their series of fifteen games drew 51,455 spectators and the clubs garnered in the neighborhood of \$40,000 combined. This despite the fact the games took place in mid and late October when the weather in cities such as Detroit, Pittsburgh, Boston, and New York (the clubs decided to play a tour of games, rather than a home and home series in 1887) was anything but dependable

⁴² "Around The Bases" NA, *The Sporting News*, April 16, 1887, 5.

⁴³ "From St. Louis" Joe Pritchard, *The Sporting Life*, April 20, 1887, 4; "Notes and Comments" NA, *The Sporting Life*, April 27, 1887, 11.

⁴⁴ "Base Ball" NA, *The Sporting News*, September 10, 1887, 5.

for baseball.⁴⁵ Even the 1888 World Series, handicapped by some rough weather and the superior play of the New York Giants, who disposed of St. Louis rather quickly, resulted in a profit of about \$8,000-9,000 to each team.⁴⁶ When *The Sporting News* broke down the financial results of the New York-St. Louis affair, based on figures from the account books of St. Louis Browns secretary George Munson, revenues were \$21,362 while expenses ran about \$5,000 total, resulting in a profit of \$8,181 to each participant.⁴⁷

Exhibition games did not have to be World Series games to pocket a tidy sum, however. When the two Philadelphia clubs, the Quakers (some already referred to them by their current name, the Phillies, by this time however) and Athletics played their city rivalry games in 1887, they played twelve contests and 57,000 spectators came to watch. Athletics executive Lew Simmons claimed this netted \$16,400 for the two clubs while his manager, Frank Bancroft, claimed his team alone pocketed nearly \$10,000.⁴⁸

These exhibitions often produced considerable revenue if the opponent was a strong drawing card. When the Boston Beaneaters brought their “\$15,000 man,” Mike Kelly, to Baltimore for three matches in April of 1887, about 18,000 denizens of the Monumental City came out to watch. The third game was on the Monday following Easter, and 8,000 fans showed, which one Baltimore sportswriter believed was the largest crowd yet to see a game at Oriole Park. The writer claimed that it was standard procedure for the visitors to get 40-45% of

⁴⁵ “From St. Louis” Joe Pritchard, *The Sporting Life*, November 2, 1887, 5.

⁴⁶ “St. Louis Siftings” Joe Pritchard, *The Sporting Life*, November 7, 1888, 3.

⁴⁷ “The World’s Series” NA, *The Sporting News*, November 10, 1888, 1.

⁴⁸ “Philadelphia News” NA, *The Sporting Life*, April 20, 1887, 10; “Chats With The Ball Men” NA, *The Sporting News*, April 23, 1887, 5; “Chats With The Ball Men” NA, *The Sporting News*, April 30, 1887, 5.

the gate for these games if they were of major league caliber, and estimated that the Beaneaters realized between \$1,800 and \$2,025 profit for the series.⁴⁹

In their attempts to procure more lucre, some teams took the concept of the exhibition series to extremes. Consider the trio of *exhibition* games played in late August and early September 1887. One game was between the New York Giants and Indianapolis Hoosiers on August 31, both of the National League. The Philadelphia Quakers also played intra-league games with both Spalding's White Stockings, on September 2, and the Detroit Wolverines that same year. There appeared to be no legal grounds for such games, as the National League's constitution stated, in section 55, that every game played until the completion of the championship series shall be a game for the championship. This rule appeared an ironclad prohibition against teams scheduling their own exhibition matches outside the championship season schedule. However, the teams involved, along with National League president Nick Young, interpreted "completion of the championship series" to mean that once the two teams had finished playing *each other* in their championship season schedule, they were free to play exhibition games despite the fact that many games still remained with other members of the league.⁵⁰

Exacerbating the problem was that, with nothing on the line, teams understandably saved their top players and put a second-rate nine on the field for these contests, thus bilking the fans with sub par baseball. The result was that "the Giants and Indianapolis club played what was supposed to be an exhibition of ball playing. It was an exhibition, but a lot of school-boys could have done better."⁵¹ Furthermore, "these exhibition games are a fraud and delusion, misleading

⁴⁹ "From Baltimore" TTT, *The Sporting Life*, April 20, 1887, 6.

⁵⁰ "League Exhibition Games" NA, *The Sporting Life*, September 7, 1887, 1.

⁵¹ "An Exhibition Game in New York" NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, September 1, 1887, 3.

and confusing to the public and of no compensating pecuniary benefit to the clubs. Only a year or so ago the Association was criticized for indulging in these catch-penny games and wisely prohibited them. Now we find League clubs falling into the old ruts in their eager chase after the ‘nimble six-pence.’”⁵²

There were some lengths, lamentably, to which players and teams would not go. In September of 1887, St. Louis Browns president Chris Von der Ahe scheduled an exhibition game in West Farms, New York, against the New York Cuban Giants. Although Von der Ahe contracted for the game with the manager of the Cuban Giants, his team never appeared on the grounds. In public, Von der Ahe citing the crippled condition of many of his key players trying to recover from injury as the reason for bowing out of the engagement. In private, however, the cause of the Browns’ refusal was that the Cuban Giants featured African American players. The Browns sent their president a letter, signed by all except first baseman Charlie Comiskey and reserve outfielder and pitcher Ed Knouff, which read, in part, “We, the undersigned members of the St. Louis Base Ball Club, do not agree to play against negroes to-morrow. We will cheerfully play against white people at any time, and think by refusing to play, we are only doing what is right, taking everything into consideration and the shape the team is in at present.” President Von der Ahe was furious about this refusal (although whether it was because he was a more ethnically and racially tolerant man, or because of the loss of projected revenue, went unsaid) but bowed to the wishes of his players on this occasion.⁵³ He tried to smooth over the insult to the Cuban Giants by rescheduling the game for October.⁵⁴

⁵² “League Exhibition Games” NA, *The Sporting Life*, September 7, 1887, 1.

⁵³ “The Browns’ Strike” NA, *The Sporting Life*, September 21, 1887, 4.

⁵⁴ “Notes and Comments” NA, *The Sporting Life*, September 28, 1887, 6. The Cuban Giants inserted the word “Cuban” into their team name in an effort to reduce hostility to the existence of

The Cuban Giants managed to schedule a fair number of games despite their skin color, however, and apparently played well, as *The Sporting Life* reported the club played 161 games in 1887, winning 107, and the team posted similarly exceptional records in other seasons during the 1880s. It did not report, however, the level of competition or the professional status of the opponents, which probably varied greatly depending on who would consent to play them,⁵⁵ but the *Detroit Free Press* did extol the prowess of some of the team's players and its overall performance. It wrote, "The Cuban Giants, of which club Malone, of Detroit, is a member, contains some very fine ball talent, and has proven its prowess by vanquishing the best of League and Association clubs. These men would prove a boon to some of the weak clubs of the League and Association, but if there is one thing the white ball player insists on doing it is drawing the color line very rigidly."⁵⁶ Part of the reason they were so successful is that, unlike minor league teams, no major league teams wanted their top talent, or even their secondary talent, for that matter, so the players had ample experience playing with each other. "The majority of these players have played together in the same nine for the past ten years, hence their great success."⁵⁷

Regarding post-season exhibition games, although there was a World Series between the League and Association champions in the 1880s, other teams played postseason games, too, in an effort to top off their coffers following the championship schedule's conclusion. Consider the October schedule of the Association's Cleveland Blues in 1887. They played a series of five games with the League's Indianapolis Hoosiers, four with the Pittsburgh Alleghenys, and three

a team of black players, hoping observers might regard them as dark-skinned Hispanic people instead.

⁵⁵ "Notes And Comments" NA, *The Sporting Life*, November 9, 1887, 2.

⁵⁶ Reprinted in *The Sporting Life*, "Good Players Kept Out of Big Leagues Through Prejudice" NA, *The Sporting Life*, December 28, 1887, 5.

⁵⁷ "The Outlook for the Cuban Giants" J.M. Bright, *The Sporting Life*, January 4, 1888, 2.

with Cincinnati, as well. Those were just the games against other major league clubs. They also scheduled home games with various minor league and independent nines, including the same Cuban Giants that the St. Louis players found so objectionable. They wanted to schedule the Chicago White Stockings, too, but Chicago was already busy with a postseason schedule of its own, which featured six games with Cincinnati, then match ups with St. Paul and other clubs from the Northwest League.⁵⁸

Another post-season option was a trip west to the California. In 1886, an exhibition team mainly featuring members of the Louisville Colonels had traveled to California for a winter full of games against West Coast nines, and fared well financially. Like sharks smelling blood in the water, other clubs raced to cash in on this modern day version of the California gold rush in the 1887 off-season. No less than four teams journeyed to the Far Slope that winter. The New York Giants played a guaranteed schedule of games with teams from the California League, many of them at San Francisco's Haight Street Grounds, opening on November 24 and playing into February. The Philadelphia Quakers, Chicago White Stockings, and St. Louis Browns also went west, with Philadelphia playing even more exhibition games at Cincinnati, Denver, Las Vegas, Santa Fe, Los Angeles, and San Diego on their way to the Bay Area. The players on this traveling exhibition signed contracts specifying the division of receipts, length of service, and good behavior required (read: no drunkenness) with some of the money reserved in case the players did not live up to their word.⁵⁹

This winter's action in the Golden State was not as profitable as the year before had been, however. Mother Nature must shoulder some of the blame, as one of the players, John Ward, reported frequent rain and the coldest temperatures since 1854. Charley Powers, who traveled to

⁵⁸ "From Cleveland" F.H. Brunell, *The Sporting Life*, October 12, 1887, 3.

⁵⁹ "The Exodus" NA, *The Sporting Life*, October 26, 1887, 1.

California to umpire some of the games, even reported that it was so cold at the San Francisco hotel where he stayed, the water in its pipes froze. More problematic, however, was the fact that four teams tried to take part in the tour. Unlike 1886-1887, when there was just one club taking on the local nines, now there were plenty of choices for Californians who wanted to watch the national game played by major league players. With the novelty gone, and spectator interest diluted, the clubs made a bit of cash, but all admitted the trip was not the financial success they had planned on back in October. Ward believed that one eastern team, playing against a combination of local players and major leaguers from the West, would have drawn much healthier crowds.⁶⁰

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Ticket sales for championship season or exhibition games, although by far the main source of revenue for the teams, were not the only one. As teams still do today, they sold scorecards to the public to enhance their revenue stream. After the 1886 season, rumor had it that the Pittsburgh Alleghenys wanted to print their own scorecards at Recreation Park, so they would be more responsive to daily demand. Apparently, there were times in 1886 when 1,500 scorecards were insufficient, and team management wanted to tap into this source of revenue in the most efficient manner. By 1888, Pittsburgh upped their estimate to selling 100,000 scorecards for the season, and looked to prosper by \$3,500 thereby. The Boston Beaneaters also

⁶⁰ “Ward’s Missive” John Montgomery Ward, *The Sporting Life*, February 8, 1888, 4; “Back From The Coast” Charley Powers, *The Sporting News*, February 11, 1888, 1.

decided to print their own scorecards by 1887.⁶¹ Offering the privilege of peddling scorecards at the grounds netted teams about enough cash to pay the salary of one marginal player for a season, if the \$1,500 that the St. Louis Browns received in 1887 is any indication of the going rate for this concession. Cincinnati manager O.P. Caylor agreed with this figure, stating in 1887, “I fixed its value at \$1,500, and did not underestimate it.”⁶² Selling advertising space at the grounds was another option to boost revenue. The St. Louis Maroons, for instance, estimated that sales of advertising at their Union Grounds would gain them \$2,000 for the 1887 season.⁶³

Besides advertising, teams sold snacks, such as peanuts and candy, rented seat cushions, and sold liquid refreshments on the grounds, although most National League teams pretended to bow to middle class respectability and did not offer alcohol officially or openly. However, as Cleveland sportswriter Frank Brunell stated regarding the prohibition of liquor sales at National League games in 1886, “there were not more than two of the League clubs of 1886 who did not knock the life out of this provision of the League constitution, either by evasion or openly.” Al Reach, one owner of the Philadelphia Quakers, when revealing how much money a team might realize from selling beer at its grounds, claimed to be one of the true believers in morality, stating, “I am for upholding the character of the National game always even if the club should suffer pecuniarily or otherwise. Why, we could get \$5,000 for the privilege of selling liquor on those grounds.”⁶⁴ American Association teams were more likely to sell beer at games without the

⁶¹ “Notes and Comments” NA, *The Sporting Life*, November 24, 1886, 3; “General Sporting” NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, March 12, 1887, 11; “Notes and Comments” NA, *The Sporting Life*, March 28, 1888, 5.

⁶² “From St. Louis” Pritchard, *The Sporting Life*, December 15, 1886, 2; “Club Secrets” Ren Mulford, Jr., *The Sporting Life*, March 9, 1887, 2. Mulford also wrote for the *Cincinnati Times-Star* as its baseball correspondent.

⁶³ “Base Ball” NA, *The Sporting News*, December 4, 1886, 2.

⁶⁴ “The Weak Spot” F.H. Brunell, *The Sporting Life*, April 20, 1887, 5; “Philadelphia News” NA, *The Sporting Life*, April 20, 1887, 10.

charade of pretending they did not; this helped earn the league its nickname of the “Beer and Whiskey League.”

Teams even attempted to make money from their grounds during the off-season, as in the winter of 1886-1887 when several made their grounds available to accommodate tobogganers as a minor craze for that sport swept the northern states. “The toboggan slide at Recreation Park [in Pittsburgh] is doing a land-office business thus far. The ladies, especially, admire the sport.” White Stockings field general Cap Anson did, too. The Chicago papers reported he was a constant presence at the West Side Park toboggan runs all winter long.⁶⁵ Henry Chadwick, that solon of baseball writers, did not believe that tobogganing would pay, however, due to Mother Nature’s unpredictability, but the toboggan slides at Recreation Park in Pittsburgh made money that winter, and the company owning the operation announced plans to return the following winter with a grander operation.⁶⁶ In fact, team secretary A.K. Scandrett contracted with the Fort Wayne Railroad to bring in ten carloads of snow from the West each day when none fell in the Smoky City on its own account, hoping thereby to keep the slide in operation all winter long.⁶⁷ Over in New York, however, *The Sporting Life* correspondent George Stackhouse claimed that the money made from tobogganing there “would not fill a two-pint growler.”⁶⁸

Even though official ticket prices stood at fifty cents for the bleachers and seventy-five for the grandstand in the National League, and twenty-five and fifty for the same locations in the American Association, teams sometimes offered deals to bring in more fans. There were a great

⁶⁵ “From the Smokey City” CMB, *The Sporting Life*, January 12, 1887, 1; “From Cincinnati” Ren Mulford, Jr., February 16, 1887, 4.

⁶⁶ “Chadwick’s Chat” Henry Chadwick, *The Sporting Life*, January 12, 1887, 5; “From The Smoky City” Circle, *The Sporting Life*, March 2, 1887, 1.

⁶⁷ “Pittsburg Pencilings” Circle, *The Sporting Life*, December 7, 1887, 1.

⁶⁸ “New York News” George Stackhouse, *The Sporting Life*, February 29, 1888, 4. George Stackhouse was also a writer for the *New York Tribune* and *New York Morning Journal*.

many schemes involving ticket prices, depending on the location and the season. In Louisville in 1887, for instance, the Colonels charged fifty cents for a grandstand ticket, with prices dropping to thirty-five and twenty-five cents as the cranks moved further away from home plate. If a man brought a female companion, the woman entered the grounds free of charge, unless it was Sunday. Men with more than one female guest, or a lady on her own, paid twenty-five cents for each woman.⁶⁹ According to team president Zach Phelps, about three-quarters of Louisville's patrons opted for seats in the first two classes, and only one-quarter chose the bleaching boards. "Upon one occasion we had 10,000 people present and we sold only 1,900 25-cent tickets."⁷⁰

In 1888, the American Association broke precedent and, after a tight vote at its league meeting in December 1887, decided to try a fifty- and seventy five-cent admission charge for the upcoming season, just like the League did. Brooklyn, St. Louis, and Cleveland favored the change while Louisville, Philadelphia, and Cincinnati (who attempted to get the clubs to compromise at forty cents) at first did not. The fifty-cent tariff supporters eventually carried the day, although as in the National League, Philadelphia had permission to sell tickets at twenty-five cents as long as the NL's Philadelphia Quakers stayed at a quarter for admission. Given the fondness of John Rogers for twenty-five cent tickets, it seemed no change was likely to happen in the near future, but surprisingly, Rogers also decided to get in line with his brother owners in the National League and charge fifty cents beginning in 1888, and so the fifty-cent admission minimum became the standard throughout major league baseball. Zach Phelps justified the move by pointing out that his team, and the American Association generally, was offering the

⁶⁹ "From the Falls City" XXX, *The Sporting Life*, March 30, 1887, 3.

⁷⁰ "From The Falls City" JA, *The Sporting Life*, December 21, 1887, 4.

public greater attractions, in the form of higher quality baseball, than the Association had done in the past.⁷¹

The debate between clubs over twenty-five or fifty cents for a ticket was an interesting one. Simple math indicated that, even if attendance fell off moderately, teams would still be better off financially with the higher rate. Things like scorecard sales and concessions not included in the price of admission would not increase in price, so a decline in patronage would cost teams a bit in this regard, although some teams sold the rights to the concessions to outside contractors, so depending on the team, this might not matter. Yet, only rarely did sportswriters paint the issue as a mathematical one. Certain cities had reputations for being in favor of one price or the other, and these reputations came from, at least in part, the reputation of that city's working people. St. Louis was possibly the most complex in this regard. People argued that during weekday games, the difference in price would not matter much, as better-off cranks tended to patronize weekday games. However, as St. Louis was also a Sunday baseball town, and as Saturday and Sunday were when the working classes of the Mound City came to the ballpark in large numbers, if they chose to stay away because they could not afford pricier tickets, the team might still suffer financially.

Some also believed that upping ticket prices throughout the Association would hurt its efforts to find an eighth member for the 1888 season. When Brooklyn bought the franchise of the New York Metropolitans, the Association needed an eighth member, but prospective cities such as Buffalo and Milwaukee feared that if their teams were weak and tickets also cost fifty cents minimum, so many fans would come to the ballpark disguised as empty seats that their teams would never prosper. "No man will pay that much to see a team made up of the rag-tag

⁷¹ "The Association" Ren Mulford, Jr., *The Sporting Life*, December 14, 1887, 1.

and bob-tail of other clubs defeated, and unless the Association managers open their hearts and give a good team to the city that accepts a franchise the outlook for the League's greatest rival will be gloomier than it now is."⁷²

The Association eventually adopted Kansas City as its eighth member for 1888. All the reasons that the National League had given for booting the Cowboys from its circuit after 1886 seemed irrelevant now. Brooklyn owner Charles Byrne gave his reasons for admitting the Cowboys, or strings of words pretending to be reasons, when he said, "it is a thriving town, and will be a 'go.' A year ago I opposed the admission of Kansas City, for several good and sufficient reasons. Now it is different. They have the right kind of men behind the club, and it will be a success, or I am mightily mistaken."⁷³ He was mightily mistaken. Not only was this new Kansas City team backed by men similar to the group of 1887 when no one wanted them, the new incarnation of the Cowboys lasted just one year longer than the previous one, two years, never winning more than forty percent of its games, although it did bring to baseball one of the game's all-time best hitters, outfielder "Sliding" Billy Hamilton. The club did have strong enough financing, however; when it applied for admission to the American Association, it stated that Fred Heim, of the Heim Brewing Company, was worth between \$125,000 and \$200,000 (in the words of one writer, "he is the happy possessor of a big boodle"⁷⁴) while also claiming forty to fifty other stockholders in the club were worth somewhere between \$50,000 and \$200,000 each.⁷⁵

⁷² "Cincinnati Chips" Ren Mulford, Jr., *The Sporting Life*, January 4, 1888, 2.

⁷³ "What is Thought of the Association's Move in the Metropolis" George Stackhouse, *The Sporting Life*, January 25, 1888, 1.

⁷⁴ "St. Louis Siftings" Joe Pritchard, *The Sporting Life*, January 25, 1888, 2.

⁷⁵ "The Cowboys In" NA, *The Sporting Life*, January 25, 1888, 1.

The practice of charging more for better seats, taken for granted in sports for decades, made perfect sense then just as it does now. Not only did the pricier tickets give access to better seats, often with a roof to protect spectators from the afternoon sun (remember that all games were day games in the 1880s by necessity) but, even in supposedly classless and socially egalitarian America, many fans (and owners, like Spalding) wanted to maintain a difference in price as a mark of social distinction. In the words of Baltimore's Albert Mott, "there are many, in fact the great majority, on the grand stand would rather pay the difference and see some discrimination. They don't want to be squeezed up by a lot of dirty, yelling, misbehaving hoodlums on a hot day, or any other day in fact, and if the management heeds the wishes of its grand stand patrons, it will charge an extra price for that luxury and make it to some degree exclusive."⁷⁶

Management had to be careful here, however. There was a fine line between the rowdy element and the working class, and teams had to be careful not to cross the line and alienate potential supporters. As Charles Byrne of Brooklyn put it,

the right kind of people and the people we want for our patrons will be more attracted to the sport as they see the roughest element excluded per force of prices. Don't misunderstand me—I do not refer to the laboring classes by this latter phrase, for they are the people we want to benefit by furnishing relaxations—a kind of labor-to-refreshment benefit—but we do want to exclude the tough and the rowdy whose presence is degrading to a gentlemanly sport, and has been handicapping its success . . . the man or overgrown boy who audibly swears at the players and umpire, and he is the one who is inciting riots on the grounds. He is always ready to jump into the field to assault the umpire, and is constantly under the impression that his mission is to punch somebody's head. . . . While the high tariff will not entirely eliminate the rowdy element, it will go far towards doing it.⁷⁷

Still, despite the drawbacks and risks detailed here, the Association decided to take the plunge in 1888. Most of the clubs agreed, "The experiment is a risky, but not necessarily a fatal

⁷⁶ "Baltimore Bulletin" TTT, *The Sporting Life*, April 25, 1888, 9.

⁷⁷ "High Tariff" TTT, *The Sporting Life*, May 2, 1888, 1.

one. With the present high salaries, increased incidental expenses, and the superior quality of ball furnished, the 25-cent rate is too low. The margin of profit is too small, and it is for this reason that the local clubs are unable to compete with Chicago, Boston and New York for high-priced star players.”⁷⁸ Calling on the experiences of decades of observing the national game, Henry Chadwick agreed with the move, writing, “from wretched accommodations and rough-looking grounds, the scene has changed to present costly grand stands and finely-prepared fields. . . . All things considered, therefore, the raise in the tariff made by the Association is a proper move, and one made necessary by the increase of expenditure incurred by the clubs for 1888.” Even with the increase, Chadwick maintained, “the exhibition of manly sport presented by our leading professional organizations on their well-ordered ball grounds is now not only the cheapest sport to be had at half a dollar, but the most attractive field entertainment known to public out-door sports.”⁷⁹ (For a fuller description of how this experiment by the Association turned out, see chapter seventeen.)

* * * * *

When it came to the costs of actually running a team, we must remember that player salaries were not the only expense clubs had. Travel to road games and hotel expenses were a factor. In addition, teams needed employees to run operations at the ballpark on game day. The Chicago White Stockings, just to give one example, in the mid-1880s typically employed seven ushers, six policemen, four ticket sellers, four gatekeepers, three groundskeepers, three cushion

⁷⁸ “Home News” NA, *The Sporting Life*, December 21, 1887, 2.

⁷⁹ “Chadwick’s Chat” Henry Chadwick, *The Sporting Life*, December 21, 1887, 3.

renters, six people to sell refreshments, and eight musicians, for a total of forty-one game day employees.⁸⁰

In addition to operating the grounds, renting the home grounds (or constructing your own grounds) and keeping the grounds in playing condition cost money. For example, when its team entered the American Association for 1887, Cleveland paid about \$7,000 to get the stands in shape, put up fences, and so forth, although the team expected to recoup some of these costs through selling advertising space on its fences. Once a team completed these things, however, this cost would not be so high in seasons to come unless it undertook major renovations to make its grounds a more attractive venue.⁸¹ The yearly expense of renting grounds appears to have been much less under ordinary circumstances. When Cincinnati Red Stockings owner Aaron Stern sought to renew his lease on the grounds at League Park in Cincinnati after the 1888 season, he balked when he discovered the asking price was \$6,200 per year for a three-year lease. Stern claimed this was a squeeze, and resented that the owner of the grounds wanted him to pay twice the amount he had paid for the last lease, so from this the normal rent for grounds would be near \$3,000 per season, in Cincinnati at least.⁸²

The location of the grounds was very important. In the 1880s, walking or public transportation was the only way for cranks to get to the ballpark and take in nine innings. Therefore, having your grounds in a major city and located near main streetcar lines was critical. Even a team with a market the size of New York might struggle with fan support if its grounds were undesirably located. The New York Metropolitan met this fate after the 1887 season, in which they tried to play their games at the St. George Cricket Grounds. These grounds were on

⁸⁰ Seymour, *Baseball*, 194.

⁸¹ "From Cleveland" F.H. Brunell, *The Sporting Life*, March 2, 1887, 2.

⁸² "The Queen City Club" FHW, *The Sporting News*, October 20, 1888, 5.

Staten Island, which necessitated transporting fans to the game via ferry. Team ownership hoped to profit by selling ferry tickets and game tickets together, but this inconvenience proved too much for many New Yorkers, and when the team did not play well, the fans did not show up. We can imagine the fear that seized New York Giants owner John Day, then, when he learned that the city planned to remove the fences at the original Polo Grounds before the 1889 season began. This would require him to move operations across the Hudson River to Hoboken, New Jersey, as New York City had no other available grounds for baseball at that time.⁸³ Other sources had them moving their games to Jersey City, but either way, such a move threatened to be a huge step backwards in terms of patronage and revenue, should worst come to worst. Eventually it did, as we will see shortly.⁸⁴

Likewise, even teams that had grounds were on the lookout for better ones. If properly vigilant, a team considered factors such as the growth patterns of its city, future improvements in public transportation, and the like. For example, during the 1888 season, Brooklyn had strong attendance at Washington Park, but often cranks arrived in a disgruntled mood because the streetcar lines were overloaded and many had to walk a fair distance to reach the ballpark. As a result, the following winter the team began casting about for a better location, so it could purchase the land and construct a first-class facility easily accessible to a greater number of Brooklynites.⁸⁵

Another reason teams might search for new or better grounds was to escape the clutches of corrupt city officials requiring bribes to continue play at its current location. One of the most serious examples of bribing municipal officials over baseball comes from, not surprisingly, New

⁸³ “Their New Home” Henry Chadwick, *The Sporting Life*, July 4, 1888, 1.

⁸⁴ “New York News” George Stackhouse, *The Sporting Life*, July 11, 1888, 3.

⁸⁵ “New York News” George Stackhouse, *The Sporting Life*, January 23, 1889, 4.

York City. In 1885, the city's Board of Aldermen was on the verge of passing a resolution to pave a road through the Polo Grounds where the Giants played their games. At the board's request, the team decided to pass along 100 books of season tickets, valued at \$3,000 collectively, to keep the board quiet and table the resolution to build the road. Of this set of 100 season tickets, some went to the board, while others went to "political friends outside the board . . . where they would do the most good."⁸⁶

This enabled the Giants to remain at the Polo Grounds in 1885, but by 1889, they were no longer so fortunate. Despite the fact that the Giants handed out 400 free season tickets to city officials (the approximate value by this time was \$20,800, because the schedule was longer by 1889) during the 1888 season, in February of 1889, the city decided to grade the road through the Polo Grounds, forcing the Giants to play elsewhere.⁸⁷ As one paper wrote, "the New York Club could, it is believed, easily come to some agreement for suitable grounds in New York City, were it willing to surrender some of the club stock, which valuable stock some of Gotham's avaricious rich men, who know a good thing when they see it, have had their greedy eyes upon."⁸⁸ As another wrote, "The delay is embarrassing, and many people affirm is caused simply by the absence of boodle which was expected to pour into the aldermanic chamber from the management of the Polo Grounds. The Giants have no boodle for such purposes."⁸⁹

The team did not surrender any stock, however, or sufficient amounts of boodle, and as a result struggled to find secure accommodations as the 1889 season began. It lost a great deal of money in the process, especially considering that its success on the field, a second straight National League pennant after a dramatic race with the Boston Beaneaters, should have yielded

⁸⁶ "The Polo Grounds Invaded" NA, *The Sporting Life*, February 13, 1889, 6.

⁸⁷ "Notes And Comments" NA, *The Sporting Life*, April 10, 1889, 4.

⁸⁸ No title, NA, *The Sporting Life*, February 27, 1889, 4.

⁸⁹ "New York News" George Stackhouse, *The Sporting Life*, April 10, 1889, 5.

it a financial bonanza.⁹⁰ New York owner John Day, rather than surrender stock or bribes in the form of more season tickets, tried to win the public opinion battle in an effort to preserve his grounds for one more season. He offered to give \$10,000 to charity if the Giants could retain use of the Polo Grounds through October, but this gambit was not enough.⁹¹

The team eventually began the season at the old home of the New York Metropolitan on Staten Island while purchasing land for the construction of a new Polo Grounds. While observers knew that the new, temporary location would cost the team severely at the box office, some managed to see a bright side in terms of the Giants ridding themselves of the parasites in city government. “The number of Polo Grounds deadheads in the past three years has been very large, amounting, perhaps, to 800 season books, and no end of free passes for single games. The removal to Staten Island cuts off the bulk of those, the New York aldermen alone relinquishing about 400. As most of these books were used every day, it will be seen that the saving will be a large one.”⁹²

Also in 1889, officials in Philadelphia tried to put the same squeeze on the Philadelphia Quakers, but Philadelphia owner John Rogers, perhaps thanks to being a member of the legal profession, was several steps ahead of them.

When we secured the grounds do you suppose we did it blindly, without thought of the future? We ascertained at the Survey Bureau that Carlisle street was not on the city plan, and so we were safe to go ahead. For Councils to open the street now an ordinance would have to be introduced to put it on the city plan. Then the matter would have to go into the courts, where the necessity of such an opening would have to be shown, and then, mark you, we would have to be paid every cent of damage the destruction of our grounds would entail.⁹³

⁹⁰ For more on New York’s search for a place to play in 1889, see Pearson, *Base-Ball in 1889*.

⁹¹ No title, NA, *The Sporting Life*, April 10, 1889, 6.

⁹² “New York News” W.I. Harris, *The Sporting Life*, May 8, 1889, 5.

⁹³ “Philadelphia Pointers” NA, *The Sporting Life*, March 27, 1889, 4.

The Washington Nationals worked their own version of this scheme, securing jobs in Uncle Sam's service for members of its nine in exchange for tickets. "There was a time when the Government virtually supported the National Club. When the old Red Stockings, of Cincinnati, champions of the world, were transferred to this city, almost every member of the team was given an appointment in one of the departments, and thus Uncle Sam was allowed to pay the greater proportion of the salaries." Although things in 1887 were not this serious, "even now two or three of the home team are on the Government pay rolls." The Nationals found this arrangement fair because, "many of the high officials are regular attendants at Capital Park and as a majority of them are the holders of complimentary tickets, it is but fair that they should help the management out whenever they can without injuring the public service, especially during the snow ball season." This made one of the team's premier players, Paul Hines, angry because "the Washington management has not treated him fairly in securing employment under the government for other members of the home team and leaving him to hustle during the winter."⁹⁴ Washington management apparently gave out a great number of complimentary tickets, as "a large proportion of the members of the House of Representatives are base ball enthusiasts, and should a call of the House be made while a game of ball is in progress, Chief Clerk Clarke and Sergeant-at-Arms Leedom would not search Capital Park for the absentees, as they are also admirers and regular attendees of the National game."⁹⁵

We can get some understanding of a team's cost for the season from an article written for *The Sporting Life* in 1886 by an unnamed but "well-known" manager. The manager claimed that, "at the salaries now paid to players a club will often carry a salary list of \$30,000." However, "the salary list is by no means the only expense of a club. There is the cost of fitting

⁹⁴ "From The Capital" Bob Lerner, *The Sporting Life*, December 14, 1887, 5.

⁹⁵ "Notes and Comments" NA, *The Sporting Life*, December 21, 1887, 5.

up the grounds, the rent, traveling expenses and club equipments, which will run up the expenses of a club to \$40,000 or \$50,000 for the season.”⁹⁶ If a club needed \$50,000 to break even for the season, National League teams, with an estimated average ticket price of 62.5 cents as described in footnote eight, needed about 80,000 patrons annually; American Association teams, with their lesser admission charge, would need about 133,000. If the lower figure comes closer to the truth, this would indicate a break even number around 64,000 spectators for the League and 107,000 for the Association. Referring back to figure one, most teams had no trouble drawing this many fans in an average season by the late 1880s. Even though salaries did rise a bit each year, pushing up these numbers somewhat by the end of the decade, they remained within reach, given decent management and a reasonably competitive team.

Even in Louisville, one of baseball’s smallest markets, things were not so dire that the franchise tottered on the brink, just waiting for financial misfortune to push it over the edge. The men of the Falls City made money in 1886, though not a great deal of it, as the following figures show.

⁹⁶ “The Base Ball Business” NA, *The Sporting Life*, November 10, 1886, 2.

Table 3 Revenues and Expenses for the Louisville Colonels, 1886 Season⁹⁷

<u>Receipts</u>	<u>Amount</u>
Ticket sales, ballpark	\$31,666.40
Ticket sales, other locations	\$6,078.10
Revenue from road games	\$7,646.20
Season tickets	\$243.00
Members tickets	\$440.00
Rent from the grounds	\$294.45
Ballpark concessions	\$450.00
Player fines	\$335.00
Sales of players	\$440.00
Total Receipts	\$47,593.15
<u>Expenditures</u>	<u>Amount</u>
Salaries	\$23,032.75
Travel expenses	\$14,702.70
Outstanding liabilities	\$1,490.00
Revenue shared with visitors	\$7,021.95
Dividends paid to stockholders	\$586.00
Total Expenditures	\$46,833.40

Furthermore, the team claimed a balance of \$4,435.57 and profits of about \$6,500 for the year, the difference between this number and figure three arising from exhibition games and such. The financial picture might have been even better, but unfortunately the team's late season swoon, in which it lost 20 out of 21 games at one point, greatly diminished fan enthusiasm, which team officials estimated cost them in the neighborhood of \$6,000 additional revenue.⁹⁸ One Louisville sportswriter asserted that, in answer to rumors that the club was a financial loser, "the club has never lost money, and good crowds are the rule. The financial statement is made

⁹⁷ "From Louisville" XXX, *The Sporting Life*, March 2, 1887, 5.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

public every year, and the visiting teams can testify to the fact that the crowds are large when the drawing card is not below par.”⁹⁹ The club’s owner, Zack Phelps, reiterated this midyear in 1887 when rumors flew that his team might be up for sale. He insisted, as did one local paper, the *Louisville Courier Journal*, that the club was making money and would pay a dividend to its stockholders at the conclusion of the season.¹⁰⁰

Phelps and Louisville’s management reiterated this theme in August 1887. With the team playing well, battling their archrivals from Cincinnati for second place behind the St. Louis Browns, the team’s board of directors held a meeting and announced that it would raise salaries for the team’s players in 1888. Furthermore, the board declared its intent to spend additional money to strengthen the nine for the following season, if possible, and said the team was already in the black for the 1887 season. Even if the club lost all its remaining home games to rain, the club still had the revenue to pay its players and all other expenses required. Thus, the team continued to profit despite operating in one of the smallest markets in major league baseball.¹⁰¹

Conditions in the Falls City seemed brighter still when the American Association voted to adopt a hybrid of the guarantee or percentage system for ticket receipts late in the summer of 1887. Believing that a larger guarantee, plus a share of gate receipts, would prove a boon to a team featuring such crowd-attracting players as Pete Browning, Guy Hecker, and Tom Ramsey, the club strengthened its commitment to securing talent in the off-season, dreaming they might even challenge the mighty St. Louis Browns in 1888. Their confidence bolstered by profits over \$12,000 for the season, and looking forward to more in the following campaign thanks to the new financial scheme, the team’s directors even went so far as to imply they might try to

⁹⁹ “From The Falls City” XX, *The Sporting Life*, April 13, 1887, 7.

¹⁰⁰ “Late News” NA, *The Sporting Life*, August 17, 1887, 1; “Caught on the Fly” NA, *The Sporting News*, August 27, 1887, 4.

¹⁰¹ “From The Falls City” XX, *The Sporting Life*, September 7, 1887, 4.

purchase a major talent to strengthen the club. This would be a departure from its traditional operating principles, as in the past, the team had depended on finding talented youngsters or developing unproven players, rather than spending freely on already established ones, due to the financial constraints it faced. Despite these constraints, the team's management took pride in the fact it had never operated in the red, and like Detroit, proved that even a small market team like Louisville could profit in Gilded Age baseball given a proper business model.¹⁰²

It was unfortunate, therefore, that the 1888 season was a horrible one for the Colonels. Some formerly productive players fell off in their batting, the defense often let down pitchers like Tom Ramsey, some players like Pete Browning and Ramsey let down the team with heavy drinking, and the club finished in seventh place that year. Even still, when a writer asked new owner Mordecai Davidson if the club had lost heavily at the turnstiles, he responded in the negative. "It is not true. The club has not had a bad season from a financial standpoint."¹⁰³ Vice president John Botto said the same. "The Louisville Club is all right, don't you forget it. 1888 was not a good year for us, but we did not lose money. We are all right for next season. I have shown my confidence by holding on to my stock, when I have been offered good prices for it."¹⁰⁴ By the time Davidson finished selling two players, Elton "Ice Box" Chamberlain and Hub Collins, late in the season, for a reported \$4,000 each, the Colonels showed a profit of about \$12,000 in 1888. (We cannot determine the exact figure, because Louisville ceased releasing financial statements to the public after Davidson took over management.)¹⁰⁵

Although the Colonels held their own financially up through 1888, what happened in 1889 demonstrates what could happen to a team if it abandoned the appropriate model. For this,

¹⁰² "From The Falls City" JA, *The Sporting Life*, September 21, 1887, 2.

¹⁰³ "Louisville Laconics" JA, *The Sporting Life*, September 26, 1888, 3.

¹⁰⁴ "Louisville Laconics" JA, *The Sporting Life*, November 28, 1888, 3.

¹⁰⁵ "Louisville Laconics" JA, *The Sporting Life*, October 10, 1888, 3.

the team's new owner, Davidson, should take most of the blame. Although not a baseball man, (he once stated about his pitchers, "the trouble is that the average pitcher does not do enough work. They should be put in the box at least every other day.") Davidson took over active operations in Louisville after purchasing shares of stock from Zach Phelps and becoming majority owner. Among his early moves was to part with two of the team's best players, pitcher Chamberlain and second baseman/outfielder Collins, immediately weakening a team that had only went 48-87 for the year even with those two valuable men.¹⁰⁶ (See chapter seventeen for a detailed description of how Davidson's poor decisions led to Louisville's complete breakdown in 1889.)

Information from the 1887 Washington Nationals corroborates these numbers regarding expenses incurred in a typical season. Their writer for *The Sporting News* reported that it would cost the club about \$40,000 to operate and meet all expenses for that season, and that to finish in the black, the team required an average of nearly 2,000 fans at each of its sixty-three scheduled home games, or roughly 125,000 total. Furthermore, the writer hoped that Washington's efforts to strengthen the nine would produce this result or better, because the cranks of the nation's capital would rally behind a winning team. "People do not like to witness a club defeated in one game after another as was the case last season. On the other hand, if a good, strong and active nine is put in the field which will make the other clubs play all they know how, the seats at Capitol Park will be filled at every game."¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ "Louisville Laconics" NA, *The Sporting News*, November 10, 1888, 1. Confusingly, both major sports weekly papers had a column titled "Louisville Laconics" in 1888.

¹⁰⁷ "The Washington Club" Sam, *The Sporting News*, January 29, 1887, 2. Given our estimates, it seems this writer overestimated the number of patrons required for financial solvency. Or, perhaps Washington needed this many total attendees because so many members of the US government possessed complimentary tickets, and the number given, 2,000 per game, recognized that not all of these attendees actually paid for their tickets.

Games against top-notch competition sometimes packed the grounds, and thus the pockets of team owners. New York writer “Layman” reported more than 30,000 spectators for a three-game series between New York and Detroit in the heat of the 1886 race, and believed this number would have been greater had it not been for uncertain weather. Furthermore, he claimed that 113,000 cranks packed the Polo Grounds for the dozen home contests with the Wolverines and White Stockings that year.¹⁰⁸ If correct, this means the Giants pocketed something like \$70,625 for twelve games. If the team carried a payroll of \$30,000 that year, this means that the Giants covered their entire player payroll expenses for the year in just three or four home games.

Because of numbers like this, however often teams cried poverty, not all writers believed that salaries were killing the financial strength of the clubs. In 1886, Louisville’s correspondent for *The Sporting Life* described their rivals in the Smoky City of Pittsburgh with the statement “last season their patronage was so great that they made up former losses and got back the immense amount of money they had paid as bonus for players. They also stood third in the championship race. This season the attendance at their games has been unprecedented, and they will doubtless make more money than any other club in the Association.”¹⁰⁹ There was probably some exaggeration here, however. In actuality, the club made about \$12,000 for the 1886 season, according to attorney A.C. Hoyer, who undertook legal action against the team in January of 1887 on behalf of a minority of the franchise’s shareholders.¹¹⁰ They operated about the same distance in the black the next season as well, totaling receipts of about \$58,000, which ran about \$10,000 ahead of expenses for the year, with one of the club’s directors later admitting

¹⁰⁸ “New York Chat” Layman, *The Sporting Life*, August 18, 1886, 1.

¹⁰⁹ “From the Falls City” Rat, *The Sporting Life*, August 18, 1886, 5.

¹¹⁰ “Some Inside Facts About the Pittsburgs” CMB, *The Sporting Life*, February 2, 1887, 1.

the revenue figure was slightly higher, and that 1887 was the club's most profitable season to date.¹¹¹

On the same day, *The Sporting Life* reported that the Boston Beaneaters would finish 1886 \$50,000 in the black if they maintained their current standard of attendance.¹¹² When, in that off-season, the Beaneaters negotiated the acquisition of King Kelly from Chicago for \$10,000, they offered proof of their financial strength. Not only that, the team envisioned Kelly's acquisition as the key to further profits. One of their Triumvirs, Billings, told the Chicago press "Kelly will pay back most of the outlay for him. Since we made that big deal the whole of Boston has gone mad on base-ball, and, from all indications, our attendance at the opening games will be something greater than was ever seen in Boston before. There is no doubt that we have struck the key-note to success." In addition to the future prosperity Kelly would bring, current circumstances were flush as well. "We have now something like \$90,000 in our treasury. This money we now intend to spend to make our club a success, if such a thing is possible. We want the strongest players in the land, and we will get them if money has anything to do with it."¹¹³ Besides feeling emboldened to offer big money to acquire top players, the Boston club was so flush that it also decided to upgrade its ballpark at the South End Grounds for the 1888 season, tearing down the grandstand and replacing it with a pavilion at a cost of about \$60,000.¹¹⁴

Did acquiring Kelly work as planned, financially speaking? The answer seems an unqualified "yes." Attendance at the South End Grounds reached about 261,000 in 1887,

¹¹¹ "From The Smoky City" Circle, *The Sporting Life*, September 28, 1887, 7; "Pittsburg Pencillings" Circle, *The Sporting Life*, November 9, 1887, 4.

¹¹² "Notes and Comments" NA, *The Sporting Life*, August 18, 1886, 5.

¹¹³ "Base-Ball Brevities" NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, March 16, 1887, 9.

¹¹⁴ "Hub Happenings" Mugwump, *The Sporting Life*, November 9, 1887, 6.

roughly double what it had been in 1886. This increase came despite the fact that the club barely improved at all on the field. It did raise its record from 56-61 to 61-60, but this modest gain still left it in fifth place in the standings at the conclusion of the 1887 season, just as it had been in 1886. Furthermore, as the club acquired no other players of significant national reputation prior to the 1887 campaign, it seems fair to conclude that most of the increased patronage resulted from acquiring Kelly. The team saw an increase of over \$50,000 in gate receipts, largely thanks to the King.¹¹⁵ As we will see later, this prompted them to attempt the same strategy with another premier Chicago performer, pitcher John Clarkson, the following winter, as “the Kelly investment was such a paying one that the Boston magnates are prepared to go down deep into their pockets for Clarkson.”¹¹⁶

Go down deep into their pockets they did. By the beginning of the 1888 season, their estimated payroll stood as follows:

Mike Kelly, right field/catcher, \$4,000

John Morrill, first base/captain/manager, \$3,500

John Clarkson, pitcher, \$3,500

Charlie Radbourn, pitcher, \$3,000

Bill Sowders, pitcher, \$3,000

Kid Madden, pitcher, \$2,800

Dick Conway, pitcher, \$2,800

Sam Wise, shortstop, \$2,500

¹¹⁵ “From The Hub” Mugwump, *The Sporting Life*, September 7, 1887, 5; “Notes and Comments” NA, *The Sporting Life*, September 21, 1887, 5.

¹¹⁶ “Hornung and Wise” NA, *The Sporting News*, February 25, 1888, 1.

Billy Nash, third base, \$2,500

Ezra Sutton, infield, \$2,000

Joe Hornung, left field, \$2,000

Dick Johnston, center field, \$2,000

Pop Tate, catcher, \$2,000

Jack Burdock, second base, \$2,000

Tom O'Rourke, catcher, \$2,000

Tom Brown, outfield, \$1,800

Con Daily, catcher, \$1,800

This sums to \$43,200, “an amount the Boston club can well afford to pay,” especially considering that the prior season’s increase in attendance alone brought in more money than Boston planned to pay its nine in 1888.¹¹⁷

Once the team pulled the trigger on acquiring John Clarkson for 1888, allowing him to team with Mike Kelly at catcher to form the Kelly-Clarkson battery, attendance shot up again, just as planned. As in 1887, the other circumstances were the same. The team’s record improved again, but not magnificently, going from 61-60 to 70-64 as the Beaneaters climbed the standings one notch to fourth place. Also like 1887, they acquired no other new players of immense national stature or popularity. Yet, by mid-September, over 238,000 cranks had passed the turnstiles at the South End Grounds to see Boston play 51 home games. On Decoration Day, 18,429 turned out to see games with Indianapolis, while over 11,000 showed on Bunker Hill Day to see the Chicago White Stockings. More than 11,000 cranks attended the Labor Day contests

¹¹⁷ “The Boston Players” Henry, *The Sporting News*, March 31, 1888, 1.

with Washington as well. “At the present rate the total attendance for the season will reach the enormous figures of 325,000, which will mean receipts of over \$160,000, of which \$40,000 goes to the visiting club, leaving \$120,000 to Boston. Everyone must admit that the public has returned most generously the outlay on the part of the club for players.”¹¹⁸ Even Jim O’Rourke, a member of the rival New York Giants, admitted about the Boston fan base, “they treat their players with kindness and consideration if they do their best, win or loss. New York is a great ball city, but for a fine crowd, well up to the game give me Boston.”¹¹⁹

The Boston club did so well financially in 1888 that Tim Murnane remarked, “if this isn’t more money than any club took in at their own grounds in one season I am badly mistaken.” Given the rate at which Boston fans filled their team’s coffers, they might have expected the management to shower a bit of the largesse on the nine in 1889. Given Arthur Soden’s previous actions, however, they should have known better. “The triumvirs say they will pay very little advance money this fall, and will not increase one man’s salary.” The owners did buy several new players, as it turned out, but did not offer much increase in salary to the men already in the fold.¹²⁰

Undaunted by the modest on-field results of the last two seasons in the player purchasing game, but clearly pleased by the financial results, Soden and company decided to make even bigger moves preparatory to the 1889 campaign. This time, their plan was to raid the roster of the Detroit Wolverines as the Wolverines auctioned off their men and quit the National League. The Beaneaters made a huge haul. They lassoed catcher Charlie Bennett, a doubly useful move as it allowed King Kelly to avoid catching as often and go back to the outfield where he could

¹¹⁸ “The Boston Crowds” JHW, *The Sporting News*, September 15, 1888, 1.

¹¹⁹ “The Boston’s Reception” NA, *The Sporting News*, September 15, 1888, 1.

¹²⁰ “Hub Happenings” T.H. Murnane, *The Sporting Life*, October 3, 1888, 7.

play in almost every game. Dan Brouthers came on board at first base, providing a monster upgrade over John Morrill, as Brouthers lit up National League pitching to the tune of a 165 OPS+, which dwarfed the mark of 70 that Morrill achieved after moving to Washington. Joining Morrill in the capital city was shortstop Sam Wise, no longer necessary after the purchase of Hardy Richardson to play second base, which allowed Boston to move last year's late season infield acquisition, Joe Quinn, into Wise's spot. Finally, Boston netted Charley Ganzel, an all-around substitute, giving them a capable reserve at catcher and the outfield.

Still, even with these additions, Boston's effort to buy a championship failed in 1889, but just barely. Their record jumped to 83-45, and they finished a single game behind the still-formidable New York Giants. More than 295,000 cranks jammed into the South End Grounds to watch the Beaneaters, despite some lousy September weather, with a high of over 13,000 to see one game with New York. The Triumvirs cleared more than \$100,000 in profits after seeing to all of their expenses.¹²¹

While other National League clubs did not quite reach this level of revenue, certain cities did almost as well. Some estimated that Chicago cleared \$50,000 in profit for the 1886 season. The Chicago *Daily Tribune* believed even this total too low, writing, "The earnings of the Chicago club last season are reported on good authority to have been \$62,000."¹²² Likewise, near the end of the 1887 season, the *Daily Tribune* wrote, "they say the Chicago club made \$62,000 last year and New York nearly \$100,000. This year it is said Chicago is making more money than it did last year, and I know Boston is making more than Chicago, and New York more than either."¹²³ Another veteran baseball observer declared that, for the Chicago White

¹²¹ "Boston Bulletin" Mugwump, *The Sporting Life*, September 25, 1889, 4.

¹²² "Diamond Dust" NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, March 6, 1887, 16.

¹²³ "The Ball-Players League" NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, September 20, 1887, 3.

Stockings in 1887, “at a low estimate the Chicagos have cleared over \$90,000 this season.”¹²⁴

Over in the American Association, the Cincinnati Red Stockings pocketed about \$35,000 thanks to their strong showing in 1887, according to their owner.¹²⁵

* * * * *

Figure one also reminds us that in 1880s baseball, as today, the size of a team’s market made a substantial difference in yearly attendance. The 1890 census lists New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, Brooklyn, and St. Louis, in that order, as the five largest cities in the country. A casual glance at Table One shows that these same cities typically ranked among the attendance leaders in any given season. Even cities near the bottom of the list for average attendance were not automatically in trouble, however. Louisville, despite having roughly one-tenth the population of New York City, still attracted enough spectators to keep up financially, as we have seen. They claimed a profit for 1886, and their board of directors voted to declare a twenty percent dividend on the team’s stock, which raised the total dividends to fifty percent of the stock price since the team’s arrival in the American Association in 1883.¹²⁶ At least one player, John Kerins, invested in his own future by buying Louisville stock in November of that year.¹²⁷

Even the League’s newest member, the Kansas City Cowboys, claimed it was making money in 1886 despite the fact their club stood in seventh place for most of the season and played in a relatively small market. Their president, J.J. Heim, told *The Sporting Life*, in response to a question regarding what the Cowboys would do in 1887, “We have a good thing,

¹²⁴ “Points From An Old-Timer” Charles Foley, *The Sporting Life*, October 26, 1887, 2.

¹²⁵ “Falls City Gossip” JA, *The Sporting Life*, November 16, 1887, 5.

¹²⁶ “The Falls City Team” NA, *The Sporting News*, November 20, 1886, 2.

¹²⁷ “The Louisville Team” RWL, *The Sporting News*, November 13, 1886, 3.

and are making money instead of losing it, and the talk of our quitting is the rankest nonsense. . . . If there are two vacancies in the League next year it will be caused by St. Louis and Washington dropping out, and Kansas City will not figure in the matter at all.”¹²⁸ In early November, president Heim also vowed to strengthen the nine in the future, saying “we will have time to look over the field and find some good men, and as money is no object, you can state that the Cowboys will be strengthened until we get a team that will make the Eastern clubs hustle.”¹²⁹ Team ownership confirmed its commitment a few weeks later, stating that the club’s manager, Dave Rowe, was about to “depart for the East in search of players, and will secure them at any price. We have placed no limit upon him, so he can negotiate at his own option; but what we desire is good men, and you can bet we’ll have them.”¹³⁰

Despite the owners’ confidence in the team’s future, the rest of the National League’s owners did not agree with Heim. At the League’s winter meeting at Chicago’s Tremont Hotel in November, they voted to expel the Cowboys from the National League and replace them with Pittsburgh. From the League’s perspective, it was a sound move financially. Pittsburgh had nearly three times the population of Kansas City from which to entice fans to the ballpark, and required much less travel to reach for the eastern clubs in the League as well, the railroad trip from New York to Kansas City being approximately thirty-five hours. However, the fact that the other owners expelled the Cowboys against their wishes, after welcoming Kansas City in their time of need the year before, merits an adjective somewhere between ruthless and dishonorable, depending on how charitable the reader desires to be.¹³¹ Angered, the Kansas City owners vowed to fight back, saying that they would “hold their franchise and players if they have to

¹²⁸ “Kansas City to Stick” NA, *The Sporting Life*, August 25, 1886, 1.

¹²⁹ “Heim and McKim Talk” Goldie, *The Sporting News*, August 30, 1886, 1.

¹³⁰ “The Cowboys” LJK, *The Sporting Life*, November 17, 1886, 1.

¹³¹ “The Maroons Victory” NA, *The Sporting News*, November 20, 1886, 1.

invoke the aid of the courts to do so.”¹³² Furthermore, “the League has opened war against us and I guess the probabilities are that we will now show them the fight is only just begun. We will not be forced out of the League. We will stay in if we want and we will go out if it suits us to, and we won’t be driven out inch by inch by those fellows that are trying to manipulate things to suit themselves.”¹³³ All the bluster came to naught in the end, however, and eventually Kansas City applied to join the American Association in place of the just-departed Pittsburgh franchise. The Association’s owners rejected the Cowboys’ application at their November meeting, despite Kansas City’s offer to pay for all railroad travel west of St. Louis, and a \$7,000 bonus to the Association to sweeten the deal. Instead, the Association chose to reintroduce the city of Cleveland to major league status.¹³⁴

Kansas City did all it could, fighting the good fight until the very end. Its ownership, whose pockets were deep indeed (Heim was “a wealthy brewer who will not stop at expense”¹³⁵), actually tried to buy the franchise of the St. Louis Maroons in February of 1887 for a figure in the \$15,000 neighborhood. Heim not only intended to strengthen his nine by transferring the St. Louis players onto his own roster; he also tried to hold his spot in the League at the same time by reducing the number of teams in the National League to eight. Officials from the Cowboy City even tried to turn the tables on the too-far-to-travel argument, as president E.E. Menges stated, “damn it all, man, it is no further than Kansas City will have to travel.” In his meeting with Spalding, John Day, and Nick Young in February, Menges even offered to pay any railroad fares for the other franchises west of the Mississippi River in order to offset complaints about travel

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ “A Sensation” Remlap, *The Sporting Life*, November 24, 1886, 1.

¹³⁴ “Cleveland Got There” NA, *The Sporting News*, November 27, 1886, 1; “It is Cleveland” O.P. Caylor, *The Sporting Life*, December 1, 1886, 1.

¹³⁵ “In The Arena Of Sports” NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, March 6, 1887, 16.

costs.¹³⁶ It was all in vain. When the National League held its spring meeting, it accepted the Indianapolis franchise into the League, paid off Kansas City and St. Louis, then began disposing of the players still under contract to the league but now without a team.¹³⁷

Concerning railroad costs, an interesting event entered into the calculations of baseball men during the winter of 1887. On February 4 of that year, the United States Congress passed the Interstate Commerce Act. Meant to regulate the sometimes perceived, sometimes actual monopolistic tendencies of the nation's giant railroad corporations, one of the business practices the Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC) did away with was the practice of rebating, whereby the railroads charged different rates to different customers depending on volume shipped, location, and so forth. It seems that baseball teams were among the beneficiaries of this practice of rebating, the railroads recognizing that an affiliation with baseball provided much positive advertising publicity, and so some baseball observers feared that the ICC might drive up their transportation costs if it put an end to rebating. Some railroads actually put tin baseball flags on their cars in an effort to garner the public's good will. All, that is, except for the "small-potato" president of one Baltimore line, who refused the Orioles this privilege unless compensated for it.¹³⁸

It did not take long, either, before teams starting blaming the new ICC regulations for curtailing their travel schedules. The Buffalo club intended to open their 1887 season with an exhibition series at Louisville, but cancelled, citing the increase in expected costs from the Interstate Commerce Bill, according to team manager Jack Chapman. Another observer,

¹³⁶ "From Chicago" Harry Palmer, *The Sporting Life*, February 23, 1887, 5; "Burnham And His Bluff" NA, *The Sporting News*, February 26, 1887, 1.

¹³⁷ "Screech, Gay Bird, Screech!" NA, *The Sporting News*, March 12, 1887, 1.

¹³⁸ "From Detroit" MAT, *The Sporting Life*, March 2, 1887, 4; "Notes and Comments" NA, *The Sporting Life*, April 6, 1887, 5.

Louisville owner Zack Phelps, also believed the increased costs would be ruinous, but apparently well-versed in the regulatory history of Gilded Age America, he predicted railroad magnates would find clever ways to evade the ICC's new rules. Phelps himself admitted to holding contracts for reduced rates with "several" roads for the 1887 season, an advantage he claimed no other team in the American Association could boast of,¹³⁹ as he "had an intimation that it would be done and secured railroad contracts for the entire season."¹⁴⁰ A Chicago sportswriter estimated traveling costs would double, and that this might curtail the ability of some clubs to spend money on premier talent.¹⁴¹ Washington, meanwhile, had trouble scheduling a full slate of exhibition games for 1887, because some teams they hoped to play canceled due to higher railroad rates, forcing them to warm up for the championship season by taking on such juggernauts as the Williams College Club.¹⁴²

Another option, quickly developed by the American Association, was to devolve the new costs onto the players. At its spring meeting the Association passed a resolution taxing each player fifty cents per day while on the road to meet the perceived increase in expenses. The National League had had such a rule for years, even before the ICC, but the Association lost no time in copying its elder brother once a suitable reason presented itself.¹⁴³ Although the change would not occur until 1888, as the leagues drew up their contracts for 1887 before Congress acted to create the ICC, some writers, such as Cleveland's Frank Brunell, lost no time in labeling this a poor policy. "This clause is not only picayune, it is useless. The player knows it, and

¹³⁹ "From Louisville" XXX, *The Sporting Life*, March 2, 1887, 5; "From The Falls City" XXX, *The Sporting Life*, March 30, 1886, 3.

¹⁴⁰ "From The Falls City" JA, *The Sporting Life*, December 21, 1887, 4.

¹⁴¹ "In The Arena Of Sports" NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, March 6, 1887, 16.

¹⁴² "The Washington Club" NA, *The Sporting News*, March 26, 1887, 1.

¹⁴³ "A Blow At The Dead-Heads" NA, *The Sporting News*, March 12, 1887, 1.

losing \$40 or so from his salary by it, insists on making clubs pay him \$100 or so more.”¹⁴⁴ O.P. Caylor agreed with Brunell and took him one further, stating the new policy was “silly, unbusiness-like, and will not save the club a dollar. Every player who makes a contract for next year will have that 50 cents per diem—about \$40—on his mind, and will put his figures about \$200 higher in consequence to offset it.”¹⁴⁵ Players for the Louisville Colonels, meeting at pitcher Guy Hecker’s baseball headquarters, made plans to resist the new tax immediately. “A number of players were discussing the rule at Hecker’s the other day, and they decided to resist it. It is understood that the men have seen a lawyer to learn what the consequences of their opposition will be.”¹⁴⁶

With dire predictions falling from the lips of every manager and team official in the game, it seems, how draconian was the new regulation in fact? According to Brunell, it was a matter of perspective. He believed it would cost each club about \$2,000 per season, or approximately a four or five percent increase in operating expenses. As he put it, “two thousand dollars is not a big sum . . . unless a club is a loser” but he did believe this new legislation might form the basis of a geographical redistribution of teams, so that there would be one league consisting only of eastern teams, and another of western ones. He thought a geographic redistribution of the teams would offset these new costs and even put a little extra into the pockets of the newly realigned teams.¹⁴⁷ Other writers began floating similar schemes. Another popular one called for the combination of the two leagues into one league with twelve franchises, six in the East and six in the West.¹⁴⁸ O.P. Caylor figured about the same as Brunell, in terms of

¹⁴⁴ “The Association” F.H. Brunell, *The Sporting Life*, March 16, 1887, 1.

¹⁴⁵ “Caylor’s Screeed” O.P. Caylor, *The Sporting Life*, March 16, 1887, 5.

¹⁴⁶ “To Appeal To The Law” XXX, *The Sporting Life*, March 16, 1887, 6.

¹⁴⁷ “From Cleveland” F.H. Brunell, *The Sporting Life*, April 6, 1887, 4.

¹⁴⁸ “The Rumors of a Base-Ball Consolidation” NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, May 20, 1887, 3.

added cost to the clubs. “I believe no club in the Association travels over 11,000 miles in a season of scheduled championship games. At the rate of three cents a mile, standard rate, this would make every club pay for every man in its team \$330 railroad fare during the season, an increase of about \$130 a man over that paid in former years.” Multiplied by a generous fifteen traveling players (teams did not always travel with their entire roster on road trips, to pare down their travel costs) this meant a cost increase of \$1,950 for the season. “I have seen clubs lose more than \$1,950 in one day just because they failed to provide enough tarpaulin, at a cost of about \$200, to keep the diamond dry during a rain storm.”¹⁴⁹

In the end, this whole situation turned out to be much ado about next to nothing. In the true spirit of the regulatory atmosphere of the Gilded Age, it was less than one year before baseball’s executives turned the tables back in their favor. In late March of 1888, National League president Nick Young deputized Washington’s correspondent for *The Sporting Life*, Bob Larner, to visit the United States Senate in an effort to remove this financial handicap. The story, as related by Larner, demonstrates just how farcical attempts at government regulation could be in the 1880s.

Larner began his pilgrimage in the office of Maryland senator Arthur Gorman. The senator may not have had much interest in actually legislating, being absent for 41.3% of the roll call votes taken during his four terms in the Senate¹⁵⁰, but he was a man whom “all base ballists know and recognize as their friend. In addition to being a member of the Commerce Committee, he is deeply interested in the success of the National game. I found that he was perfectly familiar with the question I had on hand.” Gorman informed Larner that baseball teams should have no

¹⁴⁹ “Caylor’s Comment” O.P. Caylor, *The Sporting Life*, December 14, 1887, 4.

¹⁵⁰ Statistic taken from https://www.govtrack.us/congress/members/arthur_gorman/404684, accessed December 1, 2014.

trouble securing reduced rates from the railroads if the railroads agreed to it, as the commission sought only to protect the public against extortion and unreasonable rates, not manage the railroads. Larner closed his account of the audience with Gorman by reminding his readers that, “the Senator is also a director of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad Company, which should give additional force to his remarks on the subject.”¹⁵¹

From there, baseball’s emissary proceeded to the offices of the Interstate Commerce Commission itself, which confirmed Gorman’s views. Commissioner Aldace Walker informed his petitioner that, “this subject rests entirely with the railroads.” In essence, the Commission only investigated if someone made a complaint that the railroads had engaged in an unfair practice. As long as no one complained, there were no grounds for an investigation, and the matter rested with the railroad corporations. The Commission simply needed to make sure that railroad rates were “reasonable and just,” and to prevent “undue and unreasonable preferences.”¹⁵²

* * * * *

While most franchises seem to have prospered during the later 1880s, not all did. Politics and competition help explain why. Consider the case of Henry Lucas, owner of the National League’s St. Louis Maroons franchise. The Maroons joined the NL in 1885 after Lucas’s abortive attempt to found the Union Association and compete with the NL and AA in 1884. At the conclusion of the Union War, as part of the peace settlement Lucas brought his St. Louis club into the League. When he sold his interest in the Maroons to his brother-in-law in August of

¹⁵¹ “Railroad Fares” Bob Larner, *The Sporting Life*, April 4, 1888, 1.

¹⁵² Ibid.

1886, he told *The Sporting News* he had lost \$10,000 the previous year, and that only the sale of Fred Dunlap to the Detroit Wolverines had allowed him to break even for the current season.¹⁵³

Unlike his National League counterparts in, say, Boston or Chicago, Lucas could point to several reasons why his club had not fared well at the turnstiles.¹⁵⁴ For one thing, he had to compete with another franchise in his city, and a highly successful one at that, the St. Louis Browns. In addition, the Browns, as members of the Association, charged twenty-five cents for bleacher admissions. Due to National League policy, Lucas could not. One would expect that, given a choice between the Maroons, who in 1885 finished eighth out of eight while charging fifty cents minimum for tickets, and the Browns, who easily won the American Association that year while charging twenty-five cents, fans in the Mound City would opt for the Browns. They did, too many of them, anyway, and Lucas ended up \$10,000 poorer as a result. As one St. Louis writer put it, “a city the size of St. Louis cannot support two clubs. The Browns have obtained a strong hold on public favor, and until they play poor ball and lose their grip it will be impossible to establish another club in St. Louis, and establish it upon a paying basis.”¹⁵⁵

Lucas tried to get the National League to approve his team to play home games on Sunday, looking to recoup some of his losses by playing ball in front of weekend crowds (he estimated that playing Sunday games, either regular or exhibition, would bring in anything between \$5,000 and \$25,000, depending on how many games the team could arrange¹⁵⁶), but the League again responded in the negative. Sabbatarianism was still a force to reckon with in the 1880s in many cities, as we will see in the next chapter. The National League did relent on the

¹⁵³ “From St. Louis” Pritchard, *The Sporting Life*, February 9, 1887, 5.

¹⁵⁴ Turnstiles first appeared at baseball games in 1876. James, *The New Bill James Historical Baseball Abstract*, 16.

¹⁵⁵ “From St. Louis” Pritchard, *The Sporting Life*, February 9, 1887, 5.

¹⁵⁶ “From St. Louis” Pritchard, *The Sporting Life*, December 1, 1886, 2; “Base Ball” NA, *The Sporting News*, December 4, 1886, 2.

ticket price issue for 1886, but by then it was a lost cause.¹⁵⁷ The Maroons rose to sixth in the NL, but only because the other new teams in the circuit, Kansas City and Washington, were even less talented than they were, while the Browns cruised to another Association championship.

There may be no smoking gun to verify it, but the circumstantial evidence is rather suspicious that the NL used Lucas and his Maroons. The league embraced him when it needed a replacement for the departing Cleveland Blues after the 1884 season, but subsequently refused Lucas the tools he needed to build a competitive and financially stable team. The National League kept the Maroons around for 1886 because Buffalo and Providence left the league in the off-season and they needed any team they could get to keep the league at eight teams, and offered the twenty-five cent ticket concession to keep St. Louis in the fold. Following 1886, however, with first Pittsburgh and then Indianapolis ready to enter the National League, it let St. Louis go. The Maroons made a final plea for Sunday baseball in late August, 1886, at a National League meeting, but only they and the Kansas City voted in the affirmative, and at the end of the season the Maroons disbanded and passed into history.¹⁵⁸

Why would the National League act in such a fashion towards one of its own members? After all, everyone knew that franchise instability hurt the league in sundry ways. Whenever an old club dropped out of the league and a new one took its place, the new team was invariably weak, as it had not had the chance to sign players of major league quality over the past several seasons as older league members had. Timing also loomed large as far as when in the off-season the new club gained admission to the League. For instance, in the winter of 1887, as Indianapolis and Pittsburgh joined at the expense of Kansas City and the Maroons, the transition was easy for the Alleghenys. They brought their team intact from the American Association.

¹⁵⁷ "Lucas and Maroons" NA, *The Sporting News*, August 23, 1886, 1.

¹⁵⁸ "Denny and Glasscock" NA, *The Sporting News*, August 30, 1886, 1.

Not so with Indianapolis. As late as March, only about eight weeks before the championship season began, they did not know yet if they would even be in the National League, as the existing franchises dickered over whether to admit them or stay with St. Louis. This gave the new franchise, when it finally gained official National League status, less than two months to sign players, properly prepare their grounds, and take all other steps necessary to fielding a major league baseball team. As other teams had already engaged the vast majority of quality players by that time, the Hoosiers could only sift through the scraps left by the rest of major league baseball when putting together their nine, and hope that the existing teams might release a player or two they could use.

Predictably, the initial season was very tough for these new entries, as typically they struggled to win forty percent of their games. In addition, these new clubs needed several seasons, in most cases, to find talented players and sign them, so it was not easy for them to achieve parity with the established teams. This hurt the entire league financially, as losing teams struggled to find fan support, either at home or on the road. Baseball observers had known this for years—as far back as 1875. That year, the last season before the National League came into existence, the Boston club of the National Association (baseball’s major league from 1871 to 1875) was so dominant that few fans watched them play because the games were not entertaining. In 1875, the Red Stockings posted a 71-8 record and won all 37 of their home games. In an average game, they outscored the opposition by six runs, and twenty times they won by ten runs or more. Despite Boston’s brilliant play, however, “so one sided were the games that the club lost money.”¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁹ “The Boston Boys” Tim Murnane, *The Sporting News*, January 22, 1887, 3.

More recently, there was the Union Association's one season of 1884 to make this same point. The St. Louis Maroons won 94 games against only 19 losses in 1884, with no other team in the league posting more than 69 wins, and this hurt the league's ability to draw spectators to its games. The St. Louis Browns, during their run of glory from 1885 to 1888 in which they won four consecutive American Association pennants, experienced the same phenomenon. Because the race for the pennant was so lopsided, and they distanced themselves easily from most of their competition by midseason, spectator turnout declined as the season went along due to lack of competition to create interest in the outcome. This seems to be why, along with fears of alcohol abuse by some of those involved, St. Louis management started selling some of its crack players to other teams in the winter of 1887-1888. As team owner Von der Ahe put it, "No, I am not weakening my team intentionally, but the playing strength of all the teams has got to be made more uniform. We will let Welch, Gleason, Caruthers and Bushong go, but will fill their places with good men. It don't pay, you know, to have a club so far superior to all the other clubs in the Association. There is lots of glory in it, but no money."¹⁶⁰

Clearly, one incentive to the National League's behavior was that fewer strong teams meant a better chance for the older franchises to win the league in any given season. On the financial side, the answer seems to be the rule change in place prior to the 1886 season regarding the reserved contracts of players. Recall that this change said that players were not under reserve to their actual team, but that the league itself held all the reserved contracts. This meant that, should an existing club disband, the other teams of the league would have first crack at all the players now without a team to play for. Therefore, whenever the National League gave the boot to an existing team and replaced it with a new one, it meant a chance for the remaining teams,

¹⁶⁰ "New York Mention" George Stackhouse, *The Sporting Life*, November 30, 1887, 4.

like vultures picking at a carcass, to bolster their own rosters without paying other teams anything in return, either cash to buy a player or another player in a trade. Owners Al Spalding of Chicago, John Day of New York, and National League secretary Nick Young comprised the committee handling the contracts of all players whose teams disbanded or withdrew from the league. This committee had the power to dispose of the homeless players “as it sees fit.”¹⁶¹ Apparently, the teams figured that whatever might be lost in attendance by going this route, they could replace that loss through their savings from not needing to buy quality players that they wanted. Whatever scraps remained when the big dogs finished eating would go to the league’s newest member.

Whenever rumors started circulating that a team might disband, the sporting press flew into speculation about where the orphaned players with reserved contracts would go. Just one example comes from the rumored breakup of the League’s St. Louis Maroons in early 1887. “There will be a fight over the distribution of the Maroon players. Chicago wants Glasscock, so does Detroit; Jerry Denny will go to New York, Boyle to Philadelphia, Healy and Graves to Washington, and the remaining players, with those of Kansas City, will probably be left for the new Indianapolis Club.” Detroit’s manager Watkins stated, “If the Maroons disband Glasscock must go to the Wolverines or there will be a row.” His competitor in the potential tug-of-war for “Pebble Jack,” Al Spalding, retorted, “Glasscock comes to Chicago and Detroit can have anything or everything that is left so far as Chicago is concerned.”¹⁶²

¹⁶¹ “The Maroon Chestnut” NA, *The Sporting News*, January 22, 1887, 1.

¹⁶² “A New Manager for the Maroons” Harry Palmer, *The Sporting Life*, January 19, 1887, 1. It appears that Glasscock got his nickname from his habit of picking up small stones on the infield and tossing them away in order to decrease the chance of the ball striking one and taking a bad hop. Cincinnati sportswriter Harry Weldon gave him his moniker as a result. Another mention of Glasscock referred to him as a “pebble juggler.” “From St. Louis” Joe Pritchard, *The Sporting Life*, February 2, 1887, 4.

When such rumors started circulating, some teams would try to get the jump on their opponents by making offers to the soon-to-disband team to acquire players before the team even broke up. In the above case with the St. Louis Maroons, the Boston Beaneaters offered Maroon ownership \$7,500 for shortstop Jack Glasscock (overlooking, it seems, Glasscock's January 26 arrest and lockup on charges of drunken, disorderly conduct at the Wheeling, West Virginia opera house, during which he made things "very lively" for the officers attempting to corral him), the New York Giants were willing to part with \$5,000 for third baseman Jerry Denny, and Detroit \$3,000 for pitcher Henry Boyle, while pitchers Egyptian Healy and John Kirby "are wanted by half a dozen clubs, who would all give good prices for them." In addition, Chicago "would pay a big price" for Denny or catcher George Myers, while the Washington Senators were after outfielders Emmett Seery and Jack McGeachey to boost their anemic offense.¹⁶³

The Senators needed to upgrade their offense, because they were one team that admitted to losses in 1886. Recall that they were a last-minute entry into the National League for 1886, and only after major league teams deprived them of a quartet of important players whom the Nationals hoped to bring into the League with them (see chapter three), so they were operating at a distinct disadvantage compared to their more established opponents. It is no great surprise, then, that they operated in the red in their inaugural League season. The club's directors were not discouraged regarding the team's future, however. "The report of the treasurer shows that the club comes out about \$10,000 behind the gross outlay. The directors are not discouraged at this showing, as they realized that they would be under unusually heavy expense during the first year by reason of the expenditure for new grounds and the advances necessary to secure

¹⁶³ "That Old Chestnut" NA, *The Sporting News*, January 29, 1887, 1; "Glasscock and Miller Fight" NA, *The Sporting News*, January 29, 1887, 1. It appears that Egyptian Healy gained his nickname because he hailed from Cairo, Illinois. His other nickname was "Long John."

players.”¹⁶⁴ When a sportswriter asked him if the season was a financial success, one club director, Billy Broughton, stated, “Yes, even more so than we at first expected, and at the ending it was a pleasant surprise to us to see our bank-balance in such a healthy condition. When we entered the League we had to hustle to get our grounds in order and get a team together and this cut quite a figure in our cash book. . . . Yet to-day we are in a better condition than we expected to be.”¹⁶⁵ The team’s directors felt good enough about the financial future of the club that in the 1887 off-season “it was unanimously agreed to give Manager Gaffney carte blanche in the matter of securing players for the purpose of strengthening the team.”¹⁶⁶

When the National League held its spring meeting and finally did get around to distributing the orphaned players of St. Louis and Kansas City, it simply began assigning these players as it saw fit. Washington gained the trio of third baseman Jim Donnelly, second baseman Al Myers, and pitcher “Grasshopper” Jim Whitney from Kansas City at a cost of \$2,500. They also acquired a first baseman named Billy O’Brien that year, although he was not a refugee from the disbanding ball clubs. The new Indianapolis team paid \$1,000 for catcher Mert Hackett and shortstop Charlie Bassett, also from the Cowboys. The New York Metropolitan scooped up outfield Paul “Shorty” Radford for the bargain rate of \$500, while Kansas City’s other core players, catcher Fatty Briody, first baseman Mox McQuerey, pitcher Stump Wiedman, pitcher Silver King, and outfielder Jim Lillie, became the property of the National League, as they were “reserved by the league in case some of the other clubs need their services.” The fact that such maneuvers prevented these men from finding a new team, and thus prevented them from pursuing their livelihood for the coming season, even though plenty of teams around the country

¹⁶⁴ “Notes and Comments” NA, *The Sporting Life*, November 10, 1886, 2.

¹⁶⁵ “From the Capital” WUD, *The Sporting Life*, November 10, 1886, 3.

¹⁶⁶ “Ten Thousand Out” NA, *The Sporting News*, November 13, 1886, 3.

would have signed them gladly and paid them respectable salaries, received little comment.

Wiedman ended up with the Detroit Wolverines when they had members of their pitching staff come down with sore arms and needed an extra man, while McQuerey suffered a demotion in status, finally signing with the Hamilton, Ontario team of the International League.

As for the St. Louis players now without a team, their two jewels, Glasscock and third baseman Jerry Denny, transferred to Indianapolis, on the condition the Hoosiers actually kept them rather than turning around and selling them. Considering the level of demand for their services (at the meeting, various teams bid up to \$18,000 to acquire the pair) both men must have been angered when they found their salaries for 1887 would be about \$2,000 each. *The Sporting Life* even admitted that, “if they were with any of the other teams they would be drawing double this amount.” The paper also revealed that Indianapolis had a reputation among the players for stinginess. “Mr. Newberger said that he did not propose to pay any of his men over \$2,000. Glasscock got \$3,000 last season, and there are reasons to believe that he, Denny, and Boyle would not sign for the amount stated. It was rumored that the brotherhood of professional baseball players would take some action in the matter if the demands of the men are not complied with.”¹⁶⁷

Dave Rowe, who both managed and played for Kansas City in 1886, thought he had a good read on why the National League admitted Indianapolis while kicking his Cowboys to the curb. “It was simply the greed of the Eastern managers that led to it. They wanted Glasscock, Denny, and one or two others, and when they couldn’t get them they shut us out and took in Indianapolis in the expectation that she will drop out at the end of the year and they will then be able to get the players they want.” Concerning Indianapolis and its desire not to pay its new

¹⁶⁷ “Screech, Gay Bird, Screech” NA, *The Sporting News*, March 12, 1887, 1.

players the going rate for their talents, Rowe said, “Newberger has declared that he will not pay any player more than the \$2,000 limit. I told him that kind of talk was nonsense and that it was foolish to expect that he could get men like Glasscock, Denny, Boyle, and Myers to play for limit salaries.”¹⁶⁸

Others agreed with Rowe’s assessment of the situation. In their eyes, the only reason the League’s owners allowed the coveted St. Louis players to transfer to Indianapolis was that, with four highly desirable players and eight teams trying to acquire them, no one could stand to see their rivals get their hands on a marquee player and risk not getting one themselves. They had no interest in strengthening the new club to make it more competitive and a better draw at their home grounds; rather, they fully expected Indianapolis to go under after one season due to lack of funds. As a result, the League included the restriction that Indianapolis could not sell any of the players for one season, so that the desirable players would be available once again prior to 1888.¹⁶⁹

When asked whether the National League’s deliberations had transferred him to the Hoosiers as well, Rowe pointed out one of the benefits of being a playing manager. “I am not reserved, and the league has no control over me . . . I will play wherever it suits me.”¹⁷⁰ Rowe ended up taking a year off from major league baseball, playing and managing the Lincoln club in the Western League, before returning to the game in 1888 for one last hurrah when Kansas City regained major league status in the American Association.¹⁷¹

Trying to instill confidence in their new acquisitions, the Hoosiers made Glasscock the team captain, hoping that this title would alleviate the risk of his becoming a disgruntled

¹⁶⁸ “An Interesting Talk With Dave Rowe” NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, March 13, 1887, 22.

¹⁶⁹ “Around The Bases” NA, *The Sporting News*, March 19, 1887, 5.

¹⁷⁰ “An Interesting Talk With Dave Rowe” NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, March 13, 1887, 22.

¹⁷¹ “Caught On Again” NA, *The Sporting Life*, April 6, 1887, 1.

malcontent.¹⁷² The money offered was not the only thing Glasscock and Henry Boyle were worried about, however. Boyle questioned the National League's wisdom in admitting the Hoosiers in the first place. "I see by telegraph that Indianapolis has not the necessary money with which to carry her club through the season. We are however expected to go there without regard to the club's financial standing. . . . We may not be there a month before the club breaks up and then we will be transferred again like so many niggers." Boyle also lamented that events resulted in his moving against his wishes, saying, "I have an offer from Detroit at a good salary, and other players are as well off in this respect as I am, but we must all go to Indianapolis and take our chances. I have had some correspondence with Glasscock and we have about concluded to bring our case before the brotherhood."¹⁷³ In St. Louis, where these two men toiled before their forced move to Indianapolis, some in the sporting press upheld their complaints. Both were hard working players without any history of kicking over salary, and *The Sporting News* did not believe they were getting a square deal, especially Glasscock, "the greatest infielder in America," who "has not feathered his own nest, nor looked as well after his own purse as he might have done. . . . But for his arbitrary transfer to Indianapolis he would receive nearly twice as much as this [\$3,000] from any other club in the League."¹⁷⁴ Many of the new Indianapolis players, fearful that the team really did lack the financial backing to last the 1887 campaign, demanded personal contracts with the owners of the club, so they would not be left stranded if the worst case scenario unfolded.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷² "Happy Indianapolis" AGO, *The Sporting Life*, March 16, 1887, 4. AGO was short for A.G. Ovens.

¹⁷³ "Around The Bases" NA, *The Sporting News*, March 19, 1887, 5.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ "Getting Into Line" Joe Pritchard, *The Sporting Life*, March 30, 1887, 1.

The actions of the Indianapolis management did nothing to quiet the fears and suspicions of its team's new players. In fact, quite the opposite. Louis Newberger took over operations of the team in securing contracts with the club's newly acquired talent, and alienated about half the team's roster immediately. To those players who had already inked pacts with the Maroons, he told them Indianapolis would offer the same terms. To the rest of the team, however, he wired, "Report for duty at once; salary \$1,200, with \$50 advance money. We want to show the boys we are liberal." This left the players in receipt of Newberger's telegram "gasping for more wind" and "not only disappointed, but fighting mad," leading one to query "But what can you expect from a Jim Crow town like Indianapolis?"¹⁷⁶

The insulted players wasted no time in kicking against the team's insulting terms. Henry Boyle, the pitcher coveted by several clubs, postponed his marriage until he could sort out the situation. Joe Pritchard, the St. Louis sportswriter, spoke with some of the players offered \$1,200, and anticipated some colorful reactions from the rest. For instance, outfielder Jack McGeachy hoped for \$2,000, but would "talk Scotch-Irish pretty lively when he receives the proposition." Pitcher "Egyptian" John Healy wrote to Pritchard, "The gall, the awful gall of some people . . . I'll pick up rags in Cairo [Illinois] for a living before I'll go to Indianapolis for \$1,200. I don't like the town to begin with, but I might learn to like it if the salary was even reasonable." The Egyptian announced plans to work in his brother's drugstore rather than labor for Newberger's peanuts. Although only nineteen years old in 1886, Healy had led the team in wins and innings pitched, among other things, and clearly, he felt the Hoosiers owed him a few more ducats.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁶ "From St. Louis" Joe Pritchard, *The Sporting Life*, March 30, 1887, 2.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

His mound mate, John Kirby, felt about the same. “Twelve hundred is a small salary, and Mr. Newberger can just count me out. I’ll not play ball unless they raise the ‘ante,’ and the ‘limit,’ too, for that matter. The nerve of some people is great.” Reserve Dick Mappes echoed Kirby’s sentiments as well. “Tell me where the Hoosiers got so much unadulterated cheek. Twelve hundred dollars for a season’s work and live on snow balls and fried liver all winter. No, thank you, none of that for me. If Newberger & Co. can’t pay us boys a decent salary why don’t they give a town a show that has got the money, backbone and the people?” One former employer of these players, Bill Stromberg of St. Louis, even chimed in, saying, “I feel confident that the club will not last three months.”¹⁷⁸

Boyle’s anger is understandable, and not just because of the interruption to his matrimonial plans. He also told Pritchard

I signed with St. Louis for less than I would have signed elsewhere, the reason being that I felt under obligation to the people here for the manner in which they treated me last season when I was disabled. My salary went on just the same as if I had been working. I appreciated the kindness shown by Mr. Schmelz and the others connected with the club, and when Mr. Stromberg asked me to sign for a little less than \$2,500, I had not the heart nor the cheek to say no, after the treatment I had received at their hands. And Indianapolis is to reap the benefit of other peoples kind actions. Just put me down as dead set against the town.¹⁷⁹

Indianapolis sportswriters, of course, did all they could to dispel the rumors about the team disbanding and the negative talk about the club’s stinginess. Indianapolis had signed all its players by mid-April, not bad considering the tight window they had to work with after gaining admittance to the league. Their correspondent for *The Sporting Life* at least claimed that the men were in fine spirits and pleased with the city, and that the city responded in kind. At least fifteen business establishments, many of them cigar retailers, contracted with a local telegraph company

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

for inning-by-inning updates on scores when the club was away from home, and even for exhibition games “the bulletins displayed attract crowds that block the sidewalks.”¹⁸⁰

It appears the Indianapolis people were correct in the end. When the Hoosiers traveled west to St. Louis for some exhibition play, the former Maroons amongst them spoke with Pritchard again, and sang a new tune. Now, he received comments such as, “I have played in several clubs since I first started out as a professional, and I can truthfully say that I was never treated better in my life than I have been by the Indianapolis people.” One of the early doubters, this unnamed player quickly came around once he had the chance to settle in. The stories about the team cutting salaries to the bone were “bosh,” and he closed by remarking, “just say the gang are all well satisfied, and put it as strong as you like.”¹⁸¹

That is not to say, however, that the predictions about Indianapolis’s lack of potential as a baseball town were wrong, because within two season the team was in danger of financial insolvency and only managed to play out the 1889 season without going under because of some reshuffling of its backers to infuse more cash into a failing enterprise. For the 1887 and 1888 campaigns, the club had total receipts of \$184,128.41, against total disbursements of \$183,946.89. The receipts, however, included over \$52,025 of loans from banks and other guarantors, of which the club had paid back only \$32,775 by the time it underwent its reorganization, leaving the team with a debt of \$19,250 as the 1889 season neared.¹⁸² Indianapolis clearly was in serious trouble, and so it surprised no one when the National League began hunting for a replacement for 1890. All eyes looked to Cincinnati or Brooklyn, as chapter seventeen describes in full detail.

¹⁸⁰ “Happy Indianapolis” AGO, *The Sporting Life*, April 13, 1887, 1.

¹⁸¹ “From St. Louis” Joe Pritchard, *The Sporting Life*, April 13, 1887, 9.

¹⁸² “Not All Velvet” NA, *The Sporting Life*, February 6, 1889, 5.

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In baseball, as in the Gilded Age business world in the US, there was always the dream of monopoly. Like an oasis in the desert, it shimmered in the distance, enticing baseball's magnates onward with the promise of never-ending profits, if they could but reach the promised land. Al Spalding certainly dreamed of the day when the National League would either absorb or plow under its competitor, the American Association. With one league, the owners hoped they could have the best of all worlds. With just one major league organization, there would be no more quarrels over territory, no competition with a rival league in the nation's largest cities.

Baseball's magnates could standardize and universalize their preferred fifty-cent ticket plan, and spectators would have no choice if they wanted to see major league baseball. With fewer teams, each one could strengthen its own nine, alleviating the common problem of trying to draw fans to see weak teams with few star players as drawing cards. Furthermore, if there were fewer teams but more quality players for each team (supply of quality players was high), then bidding wars over the good players were less likely (demand for individual players was low) and all teams could fatten their bottom line by decreasing their labor costs.

A few facts stood in the way, however. As this chapter demonstrates, demand for baseball among cities was high. Baseball would pay in more than eight cities. As long as both the National League and the American Association fielded a lineup of cities where most turned a yearly profit, there was no good reason for either league to fold or sell out to the other. Some entertained the idea of combining leagues in such a way as to produce a single league with more than eight teams, but this also presented problems. Conventional wisdom was that a league

required geographical balance, with the same number of cities both east and west of the Appalachian Mountains. (In the geography of Gilded Age baseball, Pittsburgh was a western city.) This is why, between 1886 and 1887, for example, when the National League dropped two of its western franchises, Kansas City and St. Louis, they needed two western cities to replace them, eventually luring Pittsburgh into the NL from the American Association and offering Indianapolis a new major league franchise.

A league with more than eight teams created other problems, too. Foremost among these was maintaining interest from top to bottom in the league. A league, of whatever size, has some competitive teams vying for the championship in any given year, and some weaker teams that clearly have no realistic chance at a championship after midseason or so. The interest level of fans is bound to wane in the latter group of cities, and sooner rather than later if the teams fail to compete several years in a row. If a league had too many teams in this second, noncompetitive, category, that meant an awful lot of days when weaker teams met stronger ones, thus depressing overall attendance due to decreased fan excitement. As with league geography, experience and conventional wisdom indicated that eight teams was the ideal size to cope with this potential problem. True, there would always be a few bottom feeders, but not too many, and eight teams allowed enough variety of opponents that fan interest would not grow stale from seeing the same teams come to town all year long.

A third drawback, although probably not as important as league geography and maintaining competitive balance, was that just one league allowed no possibility for postseason or interleague play. Postseason games like the World Series, given proper promotion and cooperative weather, brought in money for the contestants. Interleague exhibition games also could be lucrative, whether those games featured rivals from the same city, as in Philadelphia, or

rivals between teams that placed highly in their respective leagues the season before. Teams could still play exhibitions against clubs from the minor leagues, but these games usually lacked the luster of a match up between, say, New York and Brooklyn.

A final issue to consider was that of promoting the game nationwide. The more cities that boasted a major league baseball team, the greater fan interest in baseball generally. The idea of having permanent, professional baseball leagues was only in its second decade in the 1880s, and while all baseball people knew the game was very popular nationally, it was equally clear that significant room for growth existed. According to Bill James, the average American of the 1880s probably attended a baseball game every twenty-seven years, or about twice in a lifetime. For the 1890s, the number was once every thirty years, as the nation's population expanded but the number of professional baseball teams shrank.¹⁸³ Clearly, baseball had the potential to do better.

This dream of a baseball monopoly came true by 1892. In the late 1880s, however, it remained just a dream. As the 1880s ended, the salary debate raged on in baseball. The players remained convinced that teams were making huge profits while the men who played the game received relative peanuts in return. Teams such as Chicago sold their top talent for huge sums, while the players looked on and wondered where their share of the sale money was going. They saw the immense crowds in Boston and Brooklyn and believed that if those cities would just share a bit of their profits with smaller towns such as Indianapolis and Kansas City, all the complaints about noncompetitive small market franchises being unable to pay their men competitive salaries would be a thing of the past. When they finally organized the Players' League in 1890, the members of the Brotherhood tried to rectify some of these seeming abuses.

¹⁸³ James, *The New Bill James Historical Baseball Abstract*, 39, 57.

The magnates of the National League and American Association, on the other hand, did not see things in the same light. Their collective desire to maintain their prerogatives as team owners, as well as their desire to maximize profits and control labor, made them largely unreceptive to the pleas of the BPBP, especially during the critical 1889 season. Unable to come to a mutually acceptable compromise on these important issues, the National League added fuel to the fire instead when it refused to meet the Brotherhood after the BPBP requested a conference in 1889. By the end of that season, all that the situation required was a spark to ignite a general conflagration.

Chapter 12

The Sunday Baseball Question

At first glance, it might seem strange to encounter a chapter on religion's impact on Gilded Age baseball. Publicly at least, players in this era almost never mentioned religion. In this post-Darwin age, they did not attribute their success to divine help or blessings, at least not in the newspapers, nor did baseball scribes write about "God-given talent." Teams did not ask for divine sanction before undertaking some kind of action. In the public realm, there was a lot of commentary regarding superstition, but almost none about religion.

Yet religion shaped baseball in this era in some important, albeit negative, ways, in the sense that religion often placed limitations on what teams could or could not do. The most prevalent religion in the US, then as now, was Christianity, and Christian leaders often sought to impose their morality upon the public. On many occasions, baseball teams had to respond to these moral crusades to uphold what Christian leaders deemed the best interests of society. However, public morality, as with the other issues previously described such as drinking, fitness and training, gambling, or violence, in and of itself was of little interest to baseball's moguls. Like these other issues, they cared about the money at stake and how decisions regarding Sunday baseball might hurt them in their wallets.

Of the two major leagues, this influenced events in the American Association much more than the National League. The National League played no games on Sundays, but the

Association did. As part of the Association's reputation as the league catering more to the working class, its owners believed it was important to play on the Sabbath so that working class audiences who had to be at jobs five or six days of the week could at least come and see a game of baseball once a week. Sunday baseball was extremely lucrative for the Association; with lower ticket prices than the National League, Association teams had to draw more fans to keep up financially, and so they could hardly afford to automatically abandon play one day each week just for the sake of pleasing the religious sensibilities of America's leisured class. Many times Association owners ignored the temptations of transferring operations to the National League, citing that they would have to give up Sunday baseball to do so. Minor leagues could go either way on the Sunday baseball question, but it seems most chose to follow the Association's lead for the same financial reasons.

The determination to play Sunday baseball, however, often brought teams into conflict with public morality laws. In 1886, the Queens County sheriff's department put a stop to Sunday baseball games at five different ballparks on September 5, including one between the Brooklyn Grays and the Philadelphia Athletics that it interrupted in the sixth inning.¹ The next year, the Grays played another Sunday game on the sly, drawing in 8,000 fans for a Sunday exhibition game with an amateur Boston nine. (If they drew 8,000 customers to an exhibition weekend game, one wonders how many might turn out to see them square off against major league competition.) Also playing the day of the Brooklyn-Boston game were Newark and the Cuban Giants of New York. Once again, the Queens County sheriff attempted to impose his authority and cancel this game, but the crowd of 2,000-3,000 would have none of it. "The crowd, however, had come out to see ball played, so with a howl of rage they stood up as one man and

¹ "Baseball on Sunday" NA, *New York Times*, September 6, 1886, 5.

then began to clamber over the seats toward the Sheriff. Cries of ‘slug him’ and ‘lynch him’ were heard from all sides, proceeding from those on the outskirts of the crowd.” Although the sheriff gave a final order for the game to cease, he then left the grounds, and “the players resumed their positions, the crowd fell back, and the interrupted work was taken up.”²

The threat of violence seemed ever-present whenever the Queens County sheriff appeared to halt Sunday games. The next year he tried again, with fifteen deputies this time, at Atlantic Park in Brooklyn, but “Captain Kavanaugh and his fifteen deputies were surrounded by the crowd, and for a time it looked as if there would be trouble. Some of the crowd urged the players to proceed with the game despite the presence of the officers, and others picked up stones threatening the officers’ lives.” The sheriff prevailed this time, however, as the officers drove back the crowd and brought the game to a halt.³

That was not the end of Sunday baseball in Brooklyn in 1887, however. There were other, wiser solutions besides intimidating law enforcement if a club wanted to play some Sunday baseball. Teams employed bribery, as well. Noted sportswriter and former New York Metropolitans manager O.P. Caylor described how it worked in his column for *The Sporting Life* in 1888. When describing the value of Sunday baseball at Brooklyn’s grounds, Caylor stated, “One Sunday every seat was occupied and the field pretty well surrounded, so that I know just about what those crowds averaged in hard cash, and it wasn’t nearly so much as was generally believed.” The reason the take fell short of expectations was “twenty per cent of the gross went to the owners of the grounds, and I don’t know how much to the Sheriff of the county. You see

² “Sunday Ball Playing” NA, *New York Times*, April 11, 1886, 2.

³ “No Sunday Games” NA, *The Sporting News*, April 16, 1887, 1.

the Sheriff stopped those games in the spring and then let ‘em loose with a string fastened onto the cash box.”⁴

Almost by accident, Caylor described another instance of this in an 1887 essay about the American Association’s spring meeting. One decision made at this meeting was to limit the practice of teams offering free passes to their games, capping the total at twenty-five. Anyone who issued more than this limit faced a \$500 fine. Caylor thought this bad policy, and gave some examples justifying his opposition. The press required free admission, or the team would receive negative coverage in print. With no radio or television, of course, print was the only source of information for the public besides word of mouth, so this was a serious matter indeed. There was also the fact that the Association’s constitution clearly stated that each team had control of its own grounds and affairs. The interesting point came, however, when he wrote about the owner of his former employer, Cincinnati. “Mr. Stern has already issued twenty-eight press tickets—three more than the restricted number. That is a \$1,500 fine on A.S.—first crack. Besides if he doesn’t give a few out to the city officials there will be a raid made on Sunday games. How will Louisville make twenty-five passes go around in the distribution to councilmen? It’s a tough problem.”⁵

A writer in Caylor’s former home of Cincinnati, Ren Mulford, Jr., agreed. “There is one thing certain and that is that if the Cincinnati’s gates are not thrown open to the Councilmen and Aldermen there will be a revival feeling among the city fathers that Sunday base ball is injurious to the moral good of the city.” Mulford went on and asserted, “That twenty-five-free-tickets limit rule will be hard to enforce against the pressure of municipal thumb-screws that would at

⁴ “Caylor’s Comment” O.P. Caylor, *The Sporting Life*, February 8, 1888, 3.

⁵ “Caylor’s Screed” O.P. Caylor, *The Sporting Life*, March 16, 1887, 5.

once be applied by blackmailers under the mask of those acting for the public good.”⁶ Caylor and Mulford were quite correct, as events soon demonstrated. Early in the 1888 season, Cincinnati team officials denied some city aldermen free admission to their grounds. As a result, “at yesterday’s meeting Morgan J. Lewis presented an ordinance to make base ball playing a penal offense on Sundays. . . . Not only that, but the threat has been made to condemn the park for the purpose of extending a West End street. No call for such a course has been made by the public . . . it is but truth to declare that it smacks of official blackmail.”⁷ Caylor believed that teams honored the rule only in the breach anyway, later writing, “When I took the Mets to Philadelphia to play the Athletics on halves, I found that about every fifth fellow who entered had a pass. The same state of things existed elsewhere, and particularly on the Athletic grounds.”⁸

Regarding the potential cancellation of Sunday baseball and the American Association, in 1887 Louisville’s management went on high alert when the Kentucky General Assembly began making noise about banning Sunday baseball in its state for 1888. This caused one Louisville writer to describe the high state of agitation amongst the city’s clergy, as “the Ministerial Association passed a resolution condemning base ball on Sunday, and one minister preached a red-hot sermon against it.” This commotion was peculiar, perhaps even hypocritical, because on Sundays, “the best people in the city attend the games. The leading lawyers, doctors, merchants and bankers all go, and many of the ministers can be seen there. The attendance of ladies has always been very large, and has much to do with making base ball so popular.” The writer also stated the potential financial costs to the team. “I hear that the step is quite seriously

⁶ “From Cincinnati” Ren Mulford, Jr., *The Sporting Life*, April 6, 1887, 2.

⁷ “A Squeeze” Ren Mulford, Jr., *The Sporting Life*, May 16, 1888, 1.

⁸ “Caylor’s Comment” O.P. Caylor, *The Sporting Life*, December 28, 1887, 2.

contemplated, and the club officials will have to make a pretty fight at the State capital. They certainly could not afford to dispense with the Sunday games. . . . The average attendance at the later is between 4,000 and 5,000, and a little calculation will show that a large portion of the club's revenues come from that source.”⁹

In effect, teams had three options when faced with threats to Sunday games. They could give in and not play, but this would result in financial loss, which was not acceptable. They might move their operations to where Sunday morality laws did not apply, somewhere outside the city limits or in a neighboring town where local leaders were more favorably disposed. Finally, they could bribe their way out of the situation. The failure to pursue one of these three strategies, perhaps, was the problem in Queens County. As the *Chicago Daily Tribune* pointed out in its description of the 1887 police raid on Sunday baseball, “the Sheriff did his duty nobly in preventing the base-ball men from desecrating the Sabbath day, but he was a trifle lax in respect to the individuals who manipulated the sweat-boards on the public thoroughfare near the grounds. All sorts of little games were in full operation, but so long as it was not base-ball they seemed to be all right.”¹⁰ Perhaps Al Spalding had a good idea in Chicago. Even though the White Stockings were in the National League and so did not play Sunday baseball, as an extra precaution he gave out complimentary tickets to eight Windy City ministers in 1887 because “he liked their presence.”¹¹

⁹ “From The Falls City” JA, *The Sporting Life*, November 2, 1887, 3.

¹⁰ “Base-Ball” NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, April 20, 1887, 3. A sweat-board was a game where the house drops three dice into a bowl or cup with no bottom. The game board is a cloth numbered one through six, and the bettors who put their money on the numbers that come up on the dice win double their bet. The house has the advantage because sometimes the same number comes up on more than one of the dice on the same role.

¹¹ “Notes and Comments” NA, *The Sporting Life*, September 28, 1887, 6.

The Nashville nine in the Southern League did not escape so lightly as the folks in Queens County when they violated a Sunday baseball state law in 1887. Instead of just calling off the game and sending everyone involved home, a Nashville Grand Jury indicted both teams on the grounds on May 2, Nashville and Savannah, along with the officers and directors of the Nashville Baseball Association, for playing on Sunday. In Tennessee, an 1885 law made this sin punishable by a fine ranging from twenty-five to fifty dollars, and so the clubs had to pay up. The same week, the Illinois state legislature passed a similar statute by a vote of eighty-five to forty.¹²

In Ohio, the newly formed Cleveland club of the American Association had a similar problem with that city's Law and Order League, which wanted to shut down Sunday baseball in the city. The Law and Order League succeeded in denying the Blues the use of the grounds at Association Park for Sunday games for most of 1887. Rather than bribery or ruffianism, however, the Blues sought a couple of different ways around the law. One, as mentioned earlier, was to look for another place to play on Sunday that was outside city limits. This presented problems for 1887, as "the Cedar Avenue Driving Park, or Glenville Race Track, will be used, probably the former. But neither are in suitable trim and would disgust a crowd." Therefore, Cleveland sportswriter Frank Brunell hoped that "next season, if all goes well, a suburban Sunday ground will be established that can be reached by one of the lines of railroad in fifteen minutes."¹³ They did play at the Cedar Avenue Driving Park one day in August, and despite

¹² "Nashville Players Indicted" NA, *The Sporting News*, May 7, 1887, 1; "No Sunday Games" NA, *The Sporting News*, May 7, 1887, 1.

¹³ "From Cleveland" F.H. Brunell, *The Sporting Life*, August 24, 1887, 2.

unseasonable rains and the state of the grounds, drew 2,400 spectators. A local Baptist preacher tried to halt the proceedings, but the police did not interfere in this case.¹⁴

The local ministers in Cleveland eventually combined forces and contested this desecration. “In the meantime, Jos. C. Batchelor, an amateur saint, who lives near the park, swore out a warrant for Stricker’s arrest and he surrendered and gave bond with President Robison as surety.” The arrest of Cub Stricker, the team’s captain, necessitated Cleveland’s other tactic, which was to challenge the ban’s legality in the courts, with Stricker’s arrest serving as a test case. Stricker did not win, however, and ended up parting with ten dollars plus court costs. Cleveland management vowed to mount an effort to repeal this injurious ban on Sunday ball playing at the next session of the Ohio legislature.¹⁵ By early 1888, however, the team reconsidered mounting the lobbying drive, perhaps feeling the fight was not worth the hassle, cost, or negative publicity. “It is not probable at this time that the Cleveland Club will ever attempt to play Sunday games. The temper of the town is against it, and, unless the legislative bar is removed, no experiment is likely to be made.”¹⁶

As mentioned earlier, minor league teams faced this dilemma of whether to play on Sundays as well, and as their financial situation tended to be even more tenuous than that of major league teams, the very existence of the team might hinge on the outcome. The management of the Sioux City club in the Western Association tried the same measure that Cleveland did when local churchmen tried to prevent it from playing Sunday ball in 1889. The clerics formed a Sunday League and invited businessmen to join them, although few did because “they were too busy with their own affairs.” Regardless, the men wrote a “declaration of war”

¹⁴ “From Cleveland” F.H. Brunell, *The Sporting Life*, August 31, 1887, 4.

¹⁵ Ibid.; “Notes Of The Game” NA, *New York Times*, August 26, 1887, 3.

¹⁶ “Chips From Cleveland” Buckeye, *The Sporting News*, February 4, 1888, 4.

against Sunday ball. Team management considered asking the Western Association to change its schedule, but then decided that if the worst should occur, they could cross the Missouri River to Nebraska and play in South Sioux City, where the city fathers, “offered to fit up a ground and treat the boys handsomely if they will play their Sunday games there.”¹⁷ Perhaps this dissuaded the Sunday Leaguers, or perhaps the general apathy of the people of Sioux City was responsible, but either way, “the preachers found that a good many people who are good citizens seven days in the week were of the opinion that it was not much of a sin to watch a game of base ball Sunday, and the talk of determined opposition has about all died out.”¹⁸

One of the most interesting stories regarding opposition to Sunday baseball came from Johnstown, Pennsylvania. In the spring of 1887, the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) threw its weight behind a measure to ban the city from organizing a ball club and playing games at the Franklin Park grounds. The reason, it seems, is that various saloons in Johnstown had bulletin boards where they posted the scores of games both national and local, a common practice at the time. The WCTU reasoned that because baseball was popular, and the impressionable young men of the city wanted to know the scores of games, when saloons posted scores they encouraged said young men to patronize their drinking establishments, and thus contributed to immorality and dissipation amongst the gentlemen of the city. The sporting population of Johnstown was disappointed with this turn of events, because Franklin Park was the only grounds large enough for baseball in the city, and this would essentially end baseball there for the 1887 season. As it turned out, however, the WCTU was unable to convince the

¹⁷ “Sioux City’s Sunday Question” NA, *The Sporting Life*, February 13, 1889, 1.

¹⁸ “Will Play Sundays” NA, *The Sporting Life*, February 27, 1889, 1.

Street Railway Company, the owner of the grounds, that playing baseball on Sunday threatened to debauch the youth of Johnstown, and the club organized and began play as planned.¹⁹

Curious as the events in Johnstown might have been, the most unusual story regarding sabbatarianism comes from Manistee, Michigan, in 1889. Local authorities there arrested a traveling team composed of women ballplayers who tried to play an exhibition game on Sunday. This led one paper to remark, “That town says it can stand dog fights and prize fights, but when it comes to letting girls play ball on the Sabbath they just won’t have it.”²⁰

The biggest threat of all to Sunday baseball came in 1889, when an April decision by the Kansas City Court of Appeals declared that Sunday games in the state of Missouri were unlawful. This was serious indeed, as two of the American Association’s members, St. Louis and Kansas City, resided in that state, and both depended heavily on Sunday games to keep their exchequers in decent shape. There was also the fact that the American Association had already set its season schedule by that time, and its championship season games were supposed to start only one week after the court handed down its decision. The Association’s leaders did not panic immediately, however, as everyone realized that the appeals process would probably take one year at least, and so Sunday baseball continued in Missouri during the 1889 season.²¹

Although there are many cases of teams attempting to evade restrictions on Sunday baseball, at least a few people thought that refraining from play was a good idea. The National League, as we have seen, barred Sunday games as part of its attempt to appeal to the more “respectable” class of patrons in National League cities. Some players disliked the practice, as well, and this might be especially problematic if a player was in the American Association,

¹⁹ “Bad For Johnstown” NA, *The Sporting Life*, April 20, 1887, 11; “Johnstown All Right” NA, *The Sporting Life*, April 27, 1887, 7.

²⁰ “Notes And Comments” NA, *The Sporting Life*, August 7, 1889, 4.

²¹ “Sunday Base Ball” NA, *The Sporting Life*, April 24, 1889, 1.

where Sunday ball was a staple. One was pitcher Scott Stratton, of Louisville. Before the 1889 season began, he held off from signing with the Colonels because he wanted a special contract clause exempting him from pitching on Sundays. A Sunday school teacher, Stratton volunteered to pitch more often on weekdays to make up for his Sunday absence.²² He stated, “if he should return to playing on Sunday his influence would be ruined and he would lose his own self-respect.” Although Louisville cranks “had never heard anything to equal it,” Stratton was able to carry his point in conversations with team owner Mordecai Davidson. The owner said, “I do not want to force him to play against his conscience, and I am glad he has manliness enough to speak out before he signs. Ball playing is a business and a respectable one and I like to see men of character in it.”²³ He eventually signed for \$1,600 and a promise to pitch more weekday games to make up for observing a day of rest on Sunday.²⁴

These stories were rare, however. Few within the game believed in outlawing Sunday baseball outright, although if teams did so voluntarily or an entire league decided to interrupt play, like in the National League, that was acceptable. O.P. Caylor, for one, thought that Sunday baseball was a bad idea, and urged the American Association to drop it, but he never condoned using the law to force teams to lay off on Sundays. For most Association owners, however, the remunerative potential of Sunday baseball was just too great for them to let go. This is why, in one very important sense, sabbatarianism contributed to the demise of the entire American Association.

The two Association teams that constantly flirted with switching leagues in the late 1880s were Brooklyn and Cincinnati. These two teams, along with St. Louis and perhaps Philadelphia,

²² “Louisville Laconics” JA, *The Sporting Life*, March 6, 1889, 1.

²³ “Louisville Laconics” Colonel, *The Sporting News*, March 9, 1889, 3.

²⁴ “Louisville Laconics” JA, *The Sporting Life*, April 10, 1889, 3.

were the most successful and most financially stable entries in the Association. Both also faced legal challenges to Sunday baseball by the close of the 1889 season. Faced with the likely loss of Sunday ball, both decided to make the move and join baseball's senior circuit preparatory to the 1890 campaign (see chapter eighteen for more details). Without these two stable franchises, the American Association's clout in baseball affairs diminished notably, and the loss of these two teams made an enormous contribution to the Association's demise two years later. In a very real sense, religion helped destroy the two-league structure of major league baseball and contributed to the advent of a one-league monopoly by 1892. It also contributed to the drop in player salaries and weak level of competitive balance that came with monopoly. These events might have happened anyway, but the Sabbatarianism of the late nineteenth century also contributed, and made them much more likely to take place.

Chapter 13

Mascots and Racism

Almost all sports fans are superstitious. They always have been, and probably always will be. Lucky shirts, hats, socks, foods, or habits are as much a part of watching baseball as the bat and the ball. The same is true of many players. They too can be wildly superstitious, to the point of absurdity. Players in 1880s baseball were no exception. To cite one example, veteran pitcher Pud Galvin, when signing to play for Pittsburgh in 1889, was the thirteenth man on the club to sign for that season. He was supposed to sign his new contract on November 13, but fearing too much ill luck, waited a day just to be sure.¹ Noted catcher Doc Bushong had a lucky mustache. “When I shave my upper lip, it always makes my eyes discharge more or less water, and a man can’t see in such a condition. The day that I had my finger broken in Louisville by a pitched ball I had no mustache. It had been taken off the day before, and I truly believe that this alone was the cause of the accident.”² Also looking to find luck, each year in the later 1880s, the New York Giants opened up their exhibition schedule prior to the season by playing a local college nine, the Manhattan Jaspers. “The Giants seem to think that the Jaspers possess mascotic influences, and hence always open the season with those plucky youngsters as their opponents.”³

¹ “Notes And Comments” NA, *The Sporting Life*, November 28, 1888, 5.

² Nemeck, *The Beer and Whiskey League*, 100.

³ “New York News” George Stackhouse, *The Sporting Life*, March 27, 1889, 3.

As this quote suggests, one of the most frequent forms that the quest for good luck took in Gilded Age baseball was finding the team one or more mascots. In the 1880s, however, mascot did not mean the team name. The Detroit mascot was not a live wolverine, nor did Louisville bring an actual colonel to their grounds for good fortune. Nor was the mascot an amorphous and brightly colored blob, a la the Phillie Phanatic of modern times, or a creature portrayed by a person in a stuffed suit, such as the Mariner Moose, who entertains the spectators during games and travels to schools for guest appearances during the off-season. Instead, mascots in 1880s baseball tended to be living creatures, usually people but occasionally other animals, which had some distinguishing feature that seemed to bring luck.

An important thing to remember about mascots was that, typically, a team could not plan what or who their mascot would be ahead of time. It was more likely that a player would notice something unusual, the team would win that day, and a mascot was born in the process. There were a few exceptions to this, certainly, such as the story of Clarence Duval mentioned in chapter seventeen and expanded here. For the most part, however, finding a mascot was a matter of chance. A final point is also relevant when it comes to mascots. Because mascots gained their lucky status because of characteristics that players deemed unusual or exotic, this opened the door for racism to show its face in baseball all too often.

The story of Clarence Duval's experiences as the Chicago mascot is more complete than most, because he traveled around the world on Al Spalding's 1888-1889 tour (see chapter sixteen). Having served as a Chicago mascot at times during the 1888 season, he deserted the team for a position with Johnson and Slavin's Minstrel Company while in Philadelphia. By mere chance, however, the company crossed paths with Spalding's tourists as the two teams played an exhibition game in Omaha in late October of 1888. Tom Burns, third baseman for the White

Stockings, happened to notice Duval first, crying out, “there’s the little coon. Come on Clarence, hurry up. That’s Clarence Duval, the mascot we had with us down East.” Duval clambered into Burns’ carriage, the “little African, black as the ace of spades, and clothed in some very dizzy hand me-downs,” stating he had just lost his position in the traveling company because the manager, Miss Jarbeau, intentionally left town without him. “She done treat me meaner a poah dog, and turned me loose dis mawnin’ widout a cent and nuffin to eat.”⁴ Duval was familiar to the All-American team as well, John Ward writing, “every base-ball patron in the East will remember the little black ‘coon’ who swung the baton and marched the Chicagos onto the field.”⁵ (Despite this comment and use of the word “coon,” it does not appear that Ward was truly a racist. In 1887, he tried to persuade Giants ownership to sign George Stovey, an African American who had a reputation as an excellent pitcher.)⁶

After some of the Chicago players encouraged him to join them, Duval next led a procession of the players, tossing his baton “with a series of movements and tactics that would have made the leader of any military band in the country famous for life. The spectators were evidently astonished at first, for they were very quiet, then as the approaching ball players drew nearer with the little African cavorting about in front of them, the crowd broke forth in a hearty burst of applause.” Following this, Duval had a brief interview with Chicago’s captain, Anson, in which Anson reminded Duval the White Stockings had blacklisted him as their mascot after he deserted them in Philadelphia and ran away in a set of clothes the team purchased for him. Anson was not one to espouse racial tolerance. He reportedly said, “I’m dead sore on you. . . .

⁴ “The Great Trip” Harry Palmer, *The Sporting Life*, November 7, 1888, 4.

⁵ “Across The Continent” John Montgomery Ward, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, November 11, 1888, 25.

⁶ Lee Lowenfish, *The Imperfect Diamond: A History of Baseball’s Labor Wars* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2010), 28.

We want nothing to do with you. See?” Duval responded, “I reckon I don’t deserve nuffin’ bettah, cap’n, but I’s done had a mighty hard time ob it already.” Next, Duval reportedly went off and cried over his curt dismissal. Other White Stockings players showed more pity than their captain had, however, and allowed Duval to stick around.⁷

When Al Spalding rejoined the team a little farther down the line at Hastings, Nebraska, he gave Duval an interview, and “decided immediately to take the little chap with the party. He was made to sign an iron-clad contract by which he agrees to be thrown over-board, keel-hauled, drawn and quartered or suffer any other penalty in case he attempts to desert the club a second time.” This led Anson to test his mascot’s commitment. “It won’t surprise me if you leave us at San Francisco. . . . I believe you would desert us *now* for Jarbeau, if she asked you to.” Duval answered, “If I do, you can break my neck, Massa Anson. I ain’t no such niggah, Massa Anson.” Chicago writer Harry Palmer, who accompanied the expedition to the antipodes as its official scribe, wrote, “Without a doubt he is a great little nig. He can dance in a style that would turn a professional song and dance man green with envy. His little nut is filled with funny negro songs and sayings, while his drum major act is as novel as it is inimitable.”⁸

As Duval had to sign a regular National League contract (it was approved and officially promulgated by the League’s president, Nick Young), and 1889 was the year the National League implemented the Brush Classification Plan, this posed the question of if and where Young would classify Duval. Obviously, Young did not do so, but that did not stop *The Sporting Life* from jesting, “the interesting question now is: Was the mascot classified, and, if so, in what class was he placed? Considering that the mascot foolishness has evidently not yet died out,

⁷ “The Great Trip” Harry Palmer, *The Sporting Life*, November 7, 1888, 4.

⁸ Ibid.

these are interesting questions whose answer will be awaited with breathless interest by a horde of actual and would-be mascots.”⁹

Duval had both good times and hard times while steaming around the world. He had the opportunity to perform his act and lead the royal band of the King of Hawaii when the tourists arrived there. He participated in the procession as it moved towards the royal palace, past a “curb crowded with bare-footed and open-mouthed Kanakas, Chinamen, half castes and whites mingled in picturesque confusion. Horsemen clattered up the roads to see the cavalcade. Windows and doors in the low-browed houses bulged with dusky humanity.”¹⁰

The young man had to earn his keep on the way to the antipodes, however, unlike the rest of the party. One of the correspondents accompanying the players reported, “Clarence Duval, the ebony-hued mascot, considers himself the most abused individual in the combination. The purser has set him to work for his board in the butcher shop, and the black little baton-twirler is in high dudgeon.”¹¹ Nor did Anson’s resentment of his presence abate. When plowing the waves of the Indian Ocean on their way to Sri Lanka, the players noticed a shark swimming alongside of the ship, and they informed the captain and made an effort to catch the creature. “Anson offered to solve the question of bait by offering Clarence Duval, the little ebony-hued mascot of the Chicagos, as a tidbit for the shark, but Clarence made such strenuous objections that the plan was abandoned. In lieu of the pickaninny a small bit of fat pork was fastened on the hook, and it was sent far astern.” We can only hope Anson’s comment was in jest, but the fact that a jest took such a form is certainly in keeping with the big Iowan’s character. As for the

⁹ No title, NA, *The Sporting Life*, February 6, 1889, 2.

¹⁰ “The Great Trip” Harry Palmer, *The Sporting Life*, December 26, 1888, 4.

¹¹ “Notes Of The Trip And Travelers” S. Goodfriend, *Chicago Daily Inter Ocean*, December 30, 1888, 1.

shark, the crew caught it, pulled it in, killed it, and, the curiosity of the players satisfied, cast it back into the ocean.¹²

Duval fared a bit better in one respect when the teams left Australia and headed towards India. Despite Anson's offer to use him as bait, the ship's German crew apparently treated him much better. The ship captain allowed Duval to enjoy his music box,

and the little darkey turned the crank for two hours while he yelled with laughter at the odd airs it played. His coonship, by the way, is traveling 'first-class' on the *Salier*. On the *Alameda* he was made to do light chores of different kinds to pay for his passage, but here the German waiters attend to his wants as though he were an Indian prince. Indeed, two of them got into a scrap last evening over a dispute as to who should serve Mr. Duval, and the captain has made one of the poor beggars 'walk the bridge' to-night by way of penalty.¹³

These developments cheered Duval sufficiently that he introduced the ballplayers to the game craps while en route to Sri Lanka, which kept many of the players entertained and helped to pass the time on deck. It also helped satisfy their taste for gambling, which many of the players did constantly. Because he was the mascot, however, the party could blame Duval if it experienced bad luck. When the thermometer rose too high for their tastes, the men blamed their mascot, forcing him to take a saltwater bath in order to break Mother Nature's hot streak.¹⁴ This torment, as it turned out, caused the end of Duval's association with the White Stockings. Once the team returned to the US, Duval and the White Stockings parted ways, as Spalding released the young man from his Chicago contract and gave him ten dollars to see him on his way. Duval did not forgive the two main perpetrators, Mark Baldwin and Tom Daly, for the way they treated him, and this soured him on mascoting with the White Stockings from that point forward.¹⁵

¹² "The Grand Laugh" NA, *The Sporting News*, February 2, 1889, 3.

¹³ "At Sea" Harry Palmer, *The Sporting Life*, March 6, 1889, 2.

¹⁴ "The Great Trip" Harry Palmer, *The Sporting Life*, March 13, 1889, 2.

¹⁵ No title, NA, *The Sporting Life*, June 19, 1889, 2.

It might have been a relief to the young man, but Duval had competition as a mascot before the trip was over. When the players landed on Ceylon (Sri Lanka) to play ball for the people there, there happened to be another American ship in port, the *Essex*. On conversing with the crew, pitcher Ed Crane met up with a sailor who, like himself, was from South Boston, and had played ball before heading out to sea. As a gesture of friendship, the man gave Crane a monkey to serve as mascot for the Giants and aid them in their defense of their pennant in 1889. Crane's monkey was not the same monkey that attacked Mark Baldwin in chapter six, however. Baldwin also purchased a monkey as a pet, but it was much larger and more resistant to Baldwin's training techniques than Crane's creature, which apparently was quite tame. Crane also appears to have been one of the more unprejudiced men on the trip. One time, when the crewmen stoking the coal furnaces below deck threw out a young Singhalese, on account of his skin color, who their captain had hired to help them, Crane first soothed the young man by supplying a bottle of beer, then applied a choking grip to one of the offending stokers, and threatened the rest so severely that they gave the youngster no trouble from that point forward.¹⁶

Duval, meanwhile, was happy just to make it alive from Colombo to Suez. On the voyage to Egypt, a few of the travelers, led by the tourists' top prankster, Jim Fogarty, began the rumor that their ship was under attack from pirates (the German ship had fired off two cannon blasts in honor of German Emperor Wilhelm's birthday) and before everyone realized it was a mere joke, Duval, "the affrighted coon . . . made a dash for the trunk and hid himself effectually from view."¹⁷

It is useful, at this point, to dissect Duval's experience in major league baseball for what it shows about racism generally in the Gilded Age. One of the most obvious is the way that

¹⁶ "Crane's Kindliness" Harry Palmer, *The Sporting Life*, March 13, 1889, 2.

¹⁷ "The Game At Colombo" S. Goodfriend, *Chicago Daily Inter Ocean*, March 10, 1889, 17.

newspapers rarely quoted black people in correct English. Given the status of many blacks as farmers and manual laborers, and the puny sums of money many states spent on education for African Americans, it is true that as a group, they may not have always used perfect grammar. This is also true, however, of millions of recent European immigrants to the United States, and sports newspapers always printed their statements in grammatically correct English. It is also important to examine what they said, along with how newspapers portrayed them as saying it. The statements attributed to Duval also display the excessive amount of deference that black people were expected to show to whites whenever they met in public. Calling whites “massa,” “captain,” or various other respectful titles was part of a public performance that African Americans had to keep up to please whites.

This portrayal of language had other purposes, such as making blacks appear childish. This served to confirm the need for white society’s paternalistic treatment of African Americans in the eyes of white Americans, which helped justify denying African Americans the right to vote, hold public office, serve on juries, be members of police forces, gain admission to white colleges, and so forth. The situation went even deeper than that, however. In addition to appearing child-like, black people had to seem *happy* with their inferior position. When the writers describing Clarence Duval’s behavior mentioned things like the “plantation” songs and dances he knew, or wrote about his baton twirling routine, this was to show how pleased he was with his present condition, in his simple-minded and childish way.

There is also the fact that, frequently, one of the only public roles African Americans could assume was one in which they entertained whites, often through debasing themselves to appear childish yet happy. Granted, in Duval’s case, he really was a child. Most mention of him on the Spalding tour, however, referred to some combination of his marching in parades, his role

as the butt of jokes played on him by the tourists, as in the Cairo rail station described in chapter sixteen, or the ways in which the tourists used him for entertainment by proposing him as shark bait or scaring him with rumors of pirates. Even Duval's other occupation, as an extra in a minstrel show, fits this mold. (For another prominent example of debasing the humanity of black people for public entertainment, the reader should look up the story of Ota Benga's incarceration in the Bronx Zoo in September, 1906.)

There is also the fact that Duval was the only member of the tour who had to work to earn his passage. It is hard to imagine John Ward or Cap Anson washing dishes after a meal, but Duval had to do so. It is true he had very few responsibilities on the tour, but as Spalding invited him to go and signed him to a regular National League contract, he arguably could have expected equal treatment to the other tourists, rather than having to earn his keep.

All these events serve as reminders of how deeply engrained racism was in American society at this time. The fact that, in print at least, none of the tourists or journalists objected to Duval's treatment speaks volumes about what was acceptable behavior towards African Americans at this time in US history. Combined with the other examples of racism on the Spalding tour discussed in chapter sixteen, this demonstrates some of the ways that society's views of African Americans manifested themselves in baseball during the Gilded Age.

* * * * *

The practice of teams adopting a mascot as a good luck charm was common in the 1880s, and some players were always vigilant for signs of one. For instance, John Kerins, a player who enjoyed a decent seven-year career in the American Association and later umpired, was a big fan

of mascots, once securing Willie Pollard, “a bright-faced boy of African descent,” to accompany his club, the Louisville Colonels, for the 1887 season.¹⁸ The White Stockings had at least one human mascot prior to Duval, a six-year-old named Willie Hahn, who once broke his arm at the ballpark but, when a doctor arrived, refused anesthesia before having the fracture set, despite the concerned pleas of the “weak females” in attendance.¹⁹ Some supporters of the team took to Hahn, it seems, because at the end of the 1886 season they rewarded him with pictures of himself with various players, including his unofficial guardian, Ned Williamson, “whom Willie thinks is the king of all ball players.” As Chicago catcher Silver Flint put it, “Williamson is Willie’s beau ideal of all that is good and kind and companionable on earth, and the little chap’s greatest ambition is to be a ‘crack shortstop like Ed.’”²⁰ Chicago’s correspondent for *The Sporting News* even penned some painfully mediocre verse in honor of Hahn and his “god-father,” Williamson.

“Williamson and the Chicago’s Mascot”

He rules the roost

Though he is

The youngest chick of the brood

It’s a Fourth of July unloosed

To interfere with his mood.

He belongs to the gang—

That’s to say:

The gang all belong to him;

¹⁸ “The Louisville Team,” NA, *The Sporting News*, November 27, 1886, 6.

¹⁹ “A Plucky Would-be Base Ballist” NA, *The Sporting Life*, November 11, 1885, 1.

²⁰ “From Chicago” Remlap, *The Sporting Life*, November 10, 1886, 2; “Chats With The Ball Men” NA, *The Sporting News*, April 23, 1887, 5.

They'd do that for which they might hang
To humor His Majesty's whim.

Hahn performed many other deeds to bring the team luck, earning the admiration of his older teammates in the process. He accompanied Chicago to Detroit for a key series in the 1886 pennant race. He told his team, "you fellows tend to the Big Four, and I'll do their mascot." When Detroit played its final series in Chicago that year, the Wolverines brought a huge Newfoundland dog to counter Hahn's powers. During one game, Hahn snuck over to the Detroit bench and captured the animal, leading it triumphantly to the Chicago side of the field. Now missing their canine good luck charm, Detroit improvised a final effort to produce a lucky talisman, planting a stake with a rooster's head impaled on it near their bench. This was not nearly enough to stop Hahn, however, as he swooped in to steal this totem as well when Detroit took the field in the seventh inning and the action on the field distracted everyone's attention.²¹

Given Hahn's prestige and talents, the White Stockings found themselves in the enviable position of turning down further mascot applicants. In 1887, owner Al Spalding received an application for engagement as a mascot from J.J. Smith of Kansas City, asking Spalding to state his terms and salary for the position. He also mentioned he was a "colored Gentleman." Clearly, this man had no chance for employment with the White Stockings, according to the reporter relaying the story, although his skin color was not the main reason, given how many other teams did employ young African Americans for luck. The problem, rather, was that the team already had Hahn, and that Smith had already served Kansas City, a team that limped to a 30-91 record

²¹ "Williamson and the Chicago's Mascot" NA, *The Sporting News*, February 19, 1887, 1.

with Smith on its side. “The record of the club under the mascot-age of Mr. Smith is enough to kill all the mascots ever born.”²²

Rather than engage Smith, the White Stockings showed their full faith in Willie Hahn by signing him to a regular National League contract for 1887. This included a clause introduced by Al Spalding forcing all White Stockings to pledge sobriety for the upcoming season. According to one of the team’s executives, Sam Morton, when he told Hahn the news, “you should have seen the little fellow open his eyes when I read the clause calling for the absolute abstinence from all malt or spirituous liquors during the term of his engagement. He believes himself now a regular member of the Chicago team. We are making a regular uniform for him and it will be a facsimile of those worn by the other members of the Chicago club.”²³

For the 1886 season, the St. Louis Browns employed one of their players as their mascot. This was right fielder Hugh Nicol, also known as Little Nick (he stood five-foot, four-inches tall), whom they picked up from the Chicago White Stockings prior to their 1883 campaign. “Little Nick is the luckiest man in the country, and is certainly the Browns’ mascot. When the little gentleman gets on first base—well, look out for a tally. He is a great favorite at home as well as abroad.”²⁴ Little Nick was certainly one of the most aggressive base stealers baseball has ever seen, even if people have forgotten him. Playing for the Cincinnati Red Stockings in 1887, he stole 138 bases in 125 games, allowing him to score 122 times despite only getting 102 hits that year. This came a mere one year after a bout with malaria that left him unable to finish the 1886 season.

²² “He Wrote Just a Little Too Much” NA, *The Sporting Life*, April 13, 1887, 1.

²³ “Chats With The Ball Men” NA, *The Sporting News*, April 23, 1887, 5.

²⁴ “From the Mound City” JCP, *The Sporting Life*, April 21, 1886, 3.

Later, a writer asked him to explain his technique for stealing bases, and Nicol's response is interesting because it shows that already, by the mid-1880s, skillful players employed techniques for stealing bases recognizable today. Nicol said, "I set my left spikes and get a spring in that foot. At the first and faintest motion to pitch I fire myself away from that left foot and make a gain of five feet anyhow, and then it's a sprint for second." When arriving at the base, Nicol continued, "most players begin to slide too soon. . . . Always, just the instant before making the dip, I look to see how the ball is coming. If it's coming high I take the belly-buster in front of the baseman, for nine out of ten of them swing back with the ball, and I ain't there." However, "if it's coming low I go behind them and twist out with my right toe and left knee." For close plays where he was likely to be thrown out "I've got all my legs and arms to kick up a big dust, so the umpire can't see how the thing is, and my story is as good as the second baseman's when the cloud clears away, don't you see?"²⁵

Hugh Nicol's status as a good luck talisman was so great that *The Sporting News* felt compelled to report the fact when the Browns lost his services to Cincinnati before the 1887 season. "Cincinnati has secured the best and only mascot in the world. Ever since the day Little Nic joined the Browns good luck has followed them. Good luck deserted the Chicagos when he left them. It is to be hoped good luck will not with him leave the Browns."²⁶ As it turned out, the Browns need not have feared. They won the American Association pennant easily, finishing fourteen games ahead of Nicol's second place Cincinnati Red Stockings. They started slowly out of the gate that year, however, and the press immediately speculated that Nicol's departure was the reason.²⁷ As for the Chicago team running out of luck without Nicol, the club did go

²⁵ "Nic's Methods" Hugh Nicol, *The Sporting Life*, January 4, 1888, 5.

²⁶ "Caught on the Fly" NA, *The Sporting News*, November 20, 1886, 5.

²⁷ "Notes and Comments" NA, *The Sporting Life*, April 27, 1887, 11.

two years, 1883 and 1884, without a pennant, but then won championships the next two seasons after that.

This does not mean there was nothing to Nicol's reputation, however, as his supporters could point to the fact that in 1886, before his arrival, Cincinnati was a mediocre 65-73, and improved dramatically to 81-54 the next year with Nicol on their side. Almost every time the sporting press mentioned Nicol, the papers inserted some comment regarding the good fortune that surrounded him. Cincinnati owner Aaron Stern was so infatuated with Nicol's lucky attributes and style of play that he once said, "I was very lucky in securing him. An offer of \$5,000 would be no temptation for his release. He could not be purchased."²⁸ Fortune did seem to favor Nicol, regardless of the odds. In December of 1887, he went to an opera, entered a drawing for a silver water pitcher valued at \$25, and ended up with the winning ticket.²⁹ Similarly, while in California playing during that same winter, fortune smiled on him yet again, as he won a gold watch in a raffle.³⁰

Absent Nicol, the Browns cast about for a new mascot, and by 1888, thought they had found one in the person of Rudy (no known relation to Willie) Hahn. If ever there was a mascot dedicated to helping his nine win at all costs and sacrifices, it was Rudy Hahn. A St. Louis native, "Rudy Hahn is seventeen years of age and a great lover of the game. Rudy would be a player but he has only one finger on his left hand. He lost the other three in a St. Louis box factory three years ago while fooling with a buzz saw." Although he sometimes worked to support himself in St. Louis, once the 1888 season began, "he quit work and followed the St. Louis Club to Kansas City in the latter part of April. He came home to St. Louis with the club,

²⁸ "From St. Louis" Joe Pritchard, *The Sporting Life*, April 13, 1887, 9.

²⁹ "Notes and Comments" NA, *The Sporting Life*, December 21, 1887, 5.

³⁰ "Cincinnati Chips" Ren Mulford, Jr., *The Sporting Life*, February 8, 1888, 2.

but was with the Browns when they went to Cincinnati. He journeyed to Baltimore, but did not go to Cleveland because he thought the champions could get along without a mascot there.” Aware of the team’s travel schedule after the Baltimore series, “Rudy worked his way from Baltimore to Philadelphia. He arrived there five days before the Browns. He scraped up an acquaintance with Johnny Ryan, the ball tosser, who superintends the Athletic grounds, and did odd jobs for him in exchange for his board and lodging.” When he turned up to greet the Browns in New York at the Grand Central Hotel, the players heartily welcomed him and inquired how he arrived. “Oh, I’m all right. I came over with the club last night. I rode between the seats and the conductor did not see me.”³¹

When the team learned of Rudy Hahn’s hazardous mode of railroad travel, someone asked him how he continually managed to hitch rides on the railroads without the conductors detecting him and throwing him off the train. He responded that, “If he is discovered he discloses his identity and he says very few conductors will put a ‘mascot’ off their train. They are superstitious, too.” The team did its best to make sure Hahn got food from the hotel where they boarded while on the road, and when President Von der Ahe discovered how Rudy Hahn had helped his nine, and how much the men valued his services, Von der Ahe purchased a new suit of clothes for him. While Von der Ahe was not personally superstitious, Cincinnati owner Aaron Stern was, as he once barred Hahn from Cincinnati’s grounds at League Park after the Browns defeated his team the previous day.³²

President Von der Ahe might not have been superstitious, but many of his men were. So much so, that in 1888 they even had a backup mascot to reinforce the powers of Rudy Hahn, the seven-year-old son of third baseman Arlie Latham. Even though “only seven years old he walks,

³¹ “The Boss President” NA, *The Sporting News*, June 9, 1888, 1.

³² Ibid.

trots, and jumps around just like his father. He came on the field in Tuesday's game in full Brown Stocking uniform and looking like a genuine mascot. He has been with the Browns ever since."³³ The lad, named Cliff, was quite effective in his mascotting, as the Browns won almost three-quarters of their games in September and October before clinching the pennant during the last week of the season. "The Browns have lost but these games since little Cliff set himself up in the luck-bringing business."³⁴

Besides Hugh Nicol, other players might gain the reputation of a mascot simply by being in the right place at the right time. Joe Gunson was one such player. Playing in various minor leagues between 1885 and 1887, spending the last season with Topeka in the Western League, good fortune seemed to follow him. "Gunson, of Topeka, is home again. He seems to be a mascot, having played for the last three seasons in pennant winning clubs. Pennant aspirant clubs for 1888 take notice."³⁵ Gunson's talent was probably not the reason for all these championships, however, given that in 874 major league at bats he compiled a miniature OPS+ of 47, so perhaps there was something to the mascot theory.

The same might be true of newspaper reporters. *The Sporting Life* reported, "Ed Anthony, of the *Commercial-Gazette*, is making the trip with the Cincinnati. The boys have voted him a decided mascot, unlike Ban Johnson, of the same paper, who made the first trip and proved a hoodoo."³⁶ Even public officials might gain mascot standing. "Secretary Rush, of the Department of Agriculture, is a frequent attendant at the games in Washington, and is also, by the way, a regular mascot, as he had not up to this week seen the Senators beaten." Given that

³³ "The Browns' Mascot" NA, *The Sporting News*, September 15, 1888, 1.

³⁴ "Notes And Comments" NA, *The Sporting Life*, October 10, 1888, 4.

³⁵ "Philadelphia News" NA, *The Sporting Life*, October 19, 1887, 6.

³⁶ "Notes And Comments" NA, *The Sporting Life*, July 31, 1889, 4.

the Nationals were the worst team in the National League by a full eighteen wins, the secretary was indeed a powerful good luck charm.³⁷

During the 1886 season, New York Giants manager Jim Mutrie also called for his team to adopt a new mascot, after a Gotham dogcatcher had corralled the yellow dog named Jack the team had counted on for good luck in 1885. His rumored choice was “a pretty little girl dressed in white and maroon.”³⁸ This young lady would replace Jack and the club’s other mascot from 1885, a “colored boy” discovered by catcher Buck Ewing, who was “admitted to the Polo Grounds every day free of charge to satisfy the superstitious whims of the players.” Among other things, this young man would rub the arm of pitcher Mickey Welch in order to secure good fortune on the diamond.³⁹ Instead of a young woman, however, in 1886 the Giants ended up going with “Master Preston,” a five-year-old boy “who knows the rules of the game as well as the players . . . the little fellow practiced before the game, and during the contest he was perhaps the most interested person on the ground.” When the club played a series of poor games in September, some patrons, and some of the players, too, attributed the team’s weak effort to Preston’s absence. They were so concerned that second baseman Joe Gerhardt convinced Preston to join them again for a game on September 18. “His appearance was greeted with cheers by the spectators and hailed with delight by the players. Whether or not the presence of the mascot had any effect on the nine is not quite clear; but at any rate they played the best game since their return from the West.”⁴⁰

³⁷ “Notes And Comments” NA, *The Sporting Life*, August 7, 1889, 4.

³⁸ “Caught on the Fly” NA, *The Sporting News*, August 30, 1886, 5.

³⁹ “Baseball News” NA, *New York Times*, August 3, 1885, 5.

⁴⁰ “Games of Baseball” NA, *New York Times*, June 19, 1886, 3; “The Mascot Did It” NA, *New York Times*, September 18, 1886, 2.

When the Giants won a pennant in 1888 after several years of near misses, many surmised that their mascots were the reason. In July, the team gained Fred Boldt as a good luck charm, a fourteen-year-old boy with dedication like unto that of Rudy Hahn. Early in the season, he tried to convince the Giants to adopt him, going so far as to ride on top of the team's carriage to a game in Chicago, despite the fact that "he was so persistent and cheery and pointed in his remarks that he was ordered to make himself scarce. Eventually it required the end of a bat to drive him off." Undaunted, when the Giants returned to Chicago later that year, he appeared on the grounds, and the team won two straight games from the formidable White Stockings. "That settled it. He was taken in tow at once by Ewing, Welch, Gore, and O'Rourke. They smuggled him on board the train and got him as far as Crestline, Ohio. They paid his fare to Pittsburg from there."

After he was discovered and tossed off the train between Pittsburg and the team's next stop in Philadelphia, the Giants decided to test how lucky Boldt really was. "He said he was bound to get to New York and would do it somehow, so the boys let him go to see if he really had the pluck and the luck that entitled him to be a true Mascot. A lad that couldn't beat the railroad wasn't of any account as a Mascot. . . . His last words were 'Boys, I'll join you at Philadelphia.'" In the meantime, the Giants lost a game, so when Boldt appeared at the Continental Hotel in Philadelphia, "the Giants welcomed him with open arms." The team also clothed him and cleaned him up, fortunately, as Boldt had no parents and had been homeless in Chicago. "They have brought him to New York and are at present taking care of him. Aside from the mascot part of it, the Giants have done the boy a good turn."⁴¹ Boldt's story had a strange ending, however, as it appears that in August he borrowed some clothes from one Giant,

⁴¹ "The New York Mascot" Gotham, *The Sporting News*, July 28, 1888, 1.

ran up a large bill at a lunch counter, then disappeared with a pair of Ledell Titcomb's shoes.⁴² It did not take the Giants long to find a replacement, however. By September, they turned to Dow Appleton, "the freshest kid on earth," after Boston inexplicably parted ways with him. Appleton was "picked up by the Giants in Detroit and is now a full-fledged attaché of the Polo Grounds."⁴³

In 1886, the Detroit Wolverines had had an African American batboy, Billy Malone, but he left the team to join one in Pittsburgh composed of black players as a player himself.⁴⁴ By the next year, Malone's skill on the diamond had earned national recognition because of his work with the New York Cuban Giants, with one Detroit sportswriter relating, "Billy Malone, Detroit's fine colored ball player, who has just ended a successful season with the Cuban Giants, has returned to Detroit. Malone used to be the mascot of the Wolverines."⁴⁵ Nor was Malone the only former mascot to graduate to semi-stardom with the Cuban Giants. In 1888, a man named Seldon joined him on the team. Seldon used to live and mascot in Boston, and "people who patronized the Boston games at the South End several seasons ago will remember a bright-faced colored boy who was called Boston's mascot, and whose special duty it was to carry the bats to and from the batsman's position, a task that he performed faithfully." By 1888, however, "instead of carrying bats, or posing as a mascot, he has developed into a skillful professional pitcher, and he twirls the sphere for the famous colored team known as the Cuban Giants."⁴⁶

Sometimes a team felt compelled to "keep up with the Joneses" and secure a charm of their own to counteract the good luck bestowed by an opponent's mascot. In June of 1886, the Chicago White Stockings and the Detroit Wolverines were engaged in a heated race for the

⁴² "Notes And Comments" NA, *The Sporting Life*, August 29, 1888, 2.

⁴³ "Notes And Comments" NA, *The Sporting Life*, October 3, 1888, 2.

⁴⁴ "Notes and Comments" NA, *The Sporting Life*, December 8, 1886, 3.

⁴⁵ "The World's Champions" MAT, *The Sporting Life*, November 9, 1887, 6.

⁴⁶ "Caught On The Fly" NA, *The Sporting News*, May 5, 1888, 5.

National League pennant. Excitement in the City of the Straits ran so high that 10,000 cranks arrived at Detroit's Recreation Park for the game, necessitating a rope fence in the outfield to accommodate the extra spectators. This huge turnout overloaded the Woodward Avenue and Brush Street streetcar lines and, in the process, the extra seating shortened the fences so drastically that any ball flying or rolling into the crowd counted as a ground-rule double, thus eliminating any triples or home runs that day. This was common in these days of non-enclosed ballparks with wooden grandstands. As the White Stockings, complete with mascot Willie Hahn and a large broom emblazoned with the motto "Record Breakers," emerged from their carriages to take the field, Detroit proudly countered with their own broom, declaring "Record Makers, the Big Four, and Fine Men," and their counterweight to Hahn, "young Charlie Gallagher, a Sixth Ward boy, who was adorned with the uniform of the home team. He is said to have been born with teeth, and is guaranteed to possess all the magic charms of a genuine mascot."⁴⁷

As this last line indicates, sometimes baseball players considered physical abnormalities of one kind or another a source of luck. When the Boston Beaneaters engaged in a titanic struggle with the New York Giants for National League pennant honors in 1889, they hoped they could finish strong down the stretch when a fan sent a package to one of their players. When the man, Joe Quinn, opened the parcel, it was simply a well-used child's shoe. Slightly puzzled, Quinn then noticed the note attached to the lucky shoe, which read, "This is a dead sure winner. Take it along, for the shoe was worn by a hunchback." After a quick council, the Beaneaters of course decided the shoe must accompany them to the ballpark.⁴⁸

Although these examples suggest that children or teenagers were the most common choice for mascots, this was not a requirement. Besides the examples of Hugh Nicol in

⁴⁷ "Chicago Wins The Game" NA, *New York Times*, June 20, 1886, 2.

⁴⁸ "Notes And Comments" NA, *The Sporting Life*, October 2, 1889, 7.

Cincinnati and J.J. Smith in Kansas City, adults sometimes carried the requisite luck for mascot-dom. For example, the Cincinnati Reds, while much improved in 1887 over the prior year, did hit a streak of bad luck in August when they lost seven games out of ten early in the month. With even the likes of Hugh Nicol unable to reverse their misfortunes, owner Aaron Stern's solution was to find a man who had never seen the Red Stockings lose a game. Learning of this fact, an African American barber located Stearns and, unfortunately portrayed in the broken English with which many newspapers stereotyped African Americans in the 1880s, said to him, "Misa Stern, I never seed the Reds licked yet." Stern asked what the "knight of the razor" made in a day, discovered it was two dollars, and told the man he would pay him two dollars plus free admission to be the team's good luck charm. Cincinnati writer Ren Mulford, Jr., described the man's career as mascot with a story that might be funny for what it tells us about player superstitions, if not for the fact the story is drenched in all the racist views of the time.

Imagine a little coon as black as the ace of spades, who smokes all the cigarette stumps he can pick up, and carries a blacking kit ornamented with a chestnut bell, and you can imagine in your mind's eye a picture of the Cincinnati's new mascot. He turned up last Saturday, and was knocked off the score board by a foul ball. After that incident the Reds made the only run of the game. Yesterday, after eight innings had been played and nothing netted . . . 'Little Nick' took that mascot and smeared his face with whitewash. After the artistic finish he looked like a Fiji cannibal with his war paint on. Then Nic rubbed that pickaninny's woolly pate, while the crowd on the bleaching boards yelled with delight. That broke the hoodoo.⁴⁹

Some mascots accompanied their team on the road, so that the nine would not be at a luck disadvantage when traveling. Indianapolis engaged a man named Romeo Johnson as their mascot in 1887, and Johnson traveled with the club for an August and September road trip. Unfortunately, the team lost nearly all of the games (they were 13-50 on the road that season overall) and it was in the midst of an especially poor stretch of play, netting just two victories

⁴⁹ "From Cincinnati" Ren Mulford, Jr., *The Sporting Life*, August 31, 1887, 3.

between August 28 and September 18. Many cranks in Indianapolis put the blame on Johnson, rather than the fact that the team was in its first season in the National League and had few quality players. Highlighting the risks of being an unsuccessful mascot, when the club finally returned to Indianapolis in September, some were out for Johnson's blood. "Healey, Moffett and McGeachy and Romeo Johnson, the latter the club's mascot, have reached home, coming from Pittsburg in squads and by different routes . . . Johnson to elude a mob organized to emphasize the popular feeling and preclude the possibility of his ever again serving in that capacity." The poor man was so frightened that he "did not appear upon the streets until this afternoon late, and then under the protection of a few unwavering friends." Johnson said, "He received no less than one hundred telegrams from Indianapolis people asking him in all the known dialects to come home and give the club a chance to win, some of them advising him to make way with himself." He tried to shift the blame for all the losses sustained by the Hoosiers, claiming that the team was playing to its capabilities, and staying sober to boot, but it had just run up against a streak of bad luck where the other clubs performed just a little better than it had.⁵⁰ Johnson stayed with Indianapolis after 1887, but wisely retired from mascotting. Instead, he became the team's official scorer.⁵¹

Just as adults might serve as a team's mascot, animals could as well. In addition to the canine mascots described already, the New York Metropolitan had a donkey in 1887. The Mets loved this creature so much that when it "wandered out on the Staten Island grounds . . . a policeman drove him away . . . Manager Caylor fell off the players' bench in despair."⁵²

Regarding Caylor and his strong belief in luck, "He believed good things followed when he saw

⁵⁰ "From Indianapolis" AGO, *The Sporting Life*, September 14, 1887, 1.

⁵¹ "Bancroft All Right" Lew, *The Sporting News*, March 30, 1889, 4.

⁵² "Notes And Comments" NA, *The Sporting Life*, September 14, 1887, 5.

a wagonload of empty barrels passing outside the ball park and only bad things could happen if he saw a cross-eyed man or the number “6” entered in the scorebook. To change his luck, he would wear his hat backward or move to a different seat on the bench or, if the situation was especially desperate, keep score on the back of a letter from his wife.”⁵³

Both New York-area teams that remained by 1889, the Giants and Brooklyn Bridegrooms, continued the mascot trend in their quest for their respective pennants, and both went with animals. We have already learned that New York pitcher Ed Crane obtained a good luck monkey while in Sri Lanka, and the creature apparently did make it alive back to the United States.⁵⁴ However, as April neared, Crane had not returned to the United States yet, and the team was unwilling to forego the help of a mascot. Therefore, just to be on the safe side, “the Giants have a fighting chicken for their mascot, their old owl mascot having given up the ghost.”⁵⁵

The Giants had an exhibition series with Brooklyn scheduled for April of 1889, and Brooklyn had come up with a creature of their own. While one Bridegroom stated, regarding the power of mascots, “we don’t believe anything like that,” he was unwilling to put his money where his mouth was, also adding, “but as other clubs have got them we might as well have them.” Some on the team feared going mascot-less might have been the reason for their failure to overtake the St. Louis Browns for the pennant in 1888, so in 1889, they were taking no chances. “The club laid very little stress on the mascot last year, but propose to have a full-fledged luck-bringer this year. The mascot is a little puny monkey which arrived at the park yesterday . . . comfortable quarters have been made for the mascot, and woe to the man who offends his Long-Tailed Majesty. George Smith, the clever short stop, has been appointed lord

⁵³ Nemeč, *The Beer and Whiskey League*, 135.

⁵⁴ “Home Again” George Stackhouse, *The Sporting Life*, April 10, 1889, 1.

⁵⁵ “New York News” George Stackhouse, *The Sporting Life*, April 3, 1889, 5.

chamberlain to his monkeyship.” When the author wrote about comfortable quarters, he meant it. Not only would the monkey wear a Brooklyn uniform, “a handsome little chain is to be provided, too, until the animal becomes more docile. He will be chained to the players’ bench during the progress of the games. When he becomes accustomed to his surroundings he will probably be allowed to roam around the park at his own sweet will.”⁵⁶

The monkey did not last very long, although as it turned out, Brooklyn’s play improved without their luck-bringing primate. The Bridegrooms let their mascot go due to its bad manners, and the monkey only confirmed the justice of their decision when it broke out of its new home and painted the town in June. “A mascot monkey . . . startled the city a few days ago by breaking loose and tackling several saloons, in each of which he was royally welcomed, the result of which was that he got boiling drunk and was in the humor to smash things. The monk is a confirmed ‘lush.’”⁵⁷

In rare cases, a mascot need not even be animate. On their way south for an exhibition tour in February 1888, the Cincinnati Reds revealed their mascot from the prior season to sportswriter Ren Mulford, Jr. It was a guitar. As Kid Baldwin said, “on one of our trips last year John [first baseman John Reilly] took this and we did well. Next time he took a banjo and we lost everything except our pants. Say you can bet we left the banjo home and stuck to the guitar after that. On that third trip we only lost three games out of fifteen, I believe. I took charge of the guitar, for I’d carry a trunk if it would help us win!”⁵⁸

These types of objects might bring bad luck, as well, no matter how tenuous their connection to baseball. The 1889 season was a roller coaster for Cleveland. As high as second

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ “Brooklyn Brevities” J.F. Donnolly, *The Sporting Life*, June 19, 1889, 5.

⁵⁸ “The Reds’ Trip” Ren Mulford, Jr., *The Sporting Life*, February 22, 1888, 3.

place early in the season, battling with National League powerhouses New York and Boston, in July and August they hit a really bad stretch, winning but ten times in forty games. Add to this the clear fact that an unusual number of their losses were by only one run, and it was obvious something unnatural must explain their continual defeats. They decided the culprit must be an old toboggan run that operated on the grounds the preceding winter. After all, a toboggan slide was one expression used in baseball to describe when a team slumped and was losing too many games, so an actual toboggan slide surely meant bad luck. “This accounts for it. The influence of the old toboggan is fatal. The past record of the grounds is hoodooing the present occupants. Strange no one thought of this before. Won’t some one please throw ashes on the slide or work some potent charm to break the spell? A toboggan slide on a base ball grounds is a sure hoodoo in the fullest sense of the word.”⁵⁹

It was a rare and brave team that disdained mascots altogether. Following their failure to edge Chicago in the 1886 pennant race, the Detroit Wolverines gave up the mascot game the following season. It must have surprised many observers, therefore, when the team won the National League pennant and then triumphed in the World Series over the St. Louis Browns. Perhaps the Browns’ luck finally ran out without having Hugh Nicol around, but the Wolverines decision to eschew the luck of a mascot earned comment in the press. “The Detroits never owned a mascot. They do not believe in luck. According to their theory nothing wins in baseball but condition, hard hitting and perfect fielding. And they are right.”⁶⁰

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⁵⁹ “Cleveland’s Plaint” Commodore, *The Sporting Life*, September 4, 1889, 7.

⁶⁰ No title, NA, *The Sporting News*, October 22, 1887, 4.

All these examples of mascots were supposed to bring good luck. Whether they did is not as important as the fact that people believed that they did, and acted accordingly. Was it possible, therefore, to bring bad luck on someone else? To curse them, so to speak? Surprisingly, little evidence for this possibility seems to exist. At least, sportswriters of the Gilded Age rarely mentioned any instances where a player or team deliberately sought to sabotage the efforts of another club by channeling occult powers. The closest example was when Boston Beaneaters manager Jim Hart, at least supposedly, hatched a plan to hire a platoon of cross-eyed men to attend games at the New Polo Grounds in New York. Hart's club was in a close pennant race with the Giants in 1889, and he hoped to bring down bad luck on the Giants by hexing them in this fashion. Giants manager Jim Mutrie got word of the scheme, however, and instructed his ballplayers to cross their fingers whenever possible in order to ward off the hoodoo. "Mutrie has also been observed expectorating over his left shoulder of late, and thinks of purchasing several white horses and have them roam over the grounds whenever a game is not in progress."⁶¹ This seems the only effort of its kind, however, if it was even a legitimate story. Players might play dirty or play rough, and attempt to injure or handicap their opponents in that manner. They might also psychologically intimidate their foes through taunts and insults, but players typically kept their efforts to hurt the performance of others to a mundane level.

This is not to say, however, that people associated with 1880s baseball did not believe in bad luck, because they certainly did. Among the most frequent examples of this was when certain teams had a knack for beating other teams regardless of the circumstances. Especially if the successful team was a poor one, and the team they consistently defeated was nominally superior to them. Another situation in which teams used bad luck to explain their failures was if

⁶¹ "Hoodoos And Mascots" NA, *The Sporting News*, July 20, 1889, 5.

the team was losing games despite otherwise decent play. If the club was hitting, pitching, and fielding respectably, but losing anyway, some would chalk up the losses to simple bad luck. (This is one thing that has not really changed between the 1880s and today. In the 2010s, instead of bad luck, observers will say that a team lacked clutch hitting, but it is really the same thing.) The final instance in which teams could be unlucky was when it came to injuries. If a club had an unusually large number of men out of action all at the same time, or if a particularly important player had to miss critical games while recuperating, this was another form of ill fortune.

The blanket term used to describe bad luck was to call a team or a player a “Jonah.” One team might be a Jonah to another, or a batter who performed especially well against a certain pitcher was that pitcher’s Jonah. For instance, early in the 1889 season, the powerful Brooklyn Bridegrooms struggled in a few games against the American Association’s newest member, the Columbus Solons. Columbus captain Dave Orr explained the situation by stating, “Well, we’re they’re Jonah—their hoodoos.”⁶² Likewise, a pitcher who consistently defeated one opponent was a Jonah for that opponent, as Pittsburgh’s Ed Morris was to the New York Giants in 1888. “Morris, who this year was a veritable ‘Jonah’ to Mutrie’s pets, uses a slow drop ball every time he faces them.”⁶³ Fortunately for the jinxed team, however, an opponent could lose their Jonah status. In 1888, the Pittsburgh Alleghenys had good luck against both Chicago and Indianapolis, earning the Jonah label. By the next season, however, “Pittsburg is a Jonah no more. It has fallen. Last year they were hoodoos to Chicago, Indianapolis, and John Clarkson, and this year they no longer wear the proud title.”⁶⁴

⁶² “Columbus Chatter” F.W. Arnold, *The Sporting Life*, June 5, 1889, 1.

⁶³ “Notes And Comments” NA, *The Sporting Life*, October 24, 1888, 2.

⁶⁴ “Pittsburg Pencillings” Circle, *The Sporting Life*, June 5, 1889, 5.

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Whether the luck they brought was good or bad, mascots were an important part of Gilded Age baseball. Almost every team tried one at some point, and certain teams like the New York Giants always had at least one, and sometimes more than one, at any given time. Because mascots were such a constant presence in baseball, we can generalize a bit about their meaning and importance. In some respects, they were just nods in the direction of superstition, and essentially harmless. Whether or not Doc Bushong sported a mustache, or the Cincinnati Reds traveled with a guitar or a banjo, is not particularly important in the larger scheme of things. The treatment of African Americans or handicapped people as mascots, however, is rather more important. This treatment was just one facet of the prejudice or stigma attached to these groups in Gilded Age America. The reason they possessed “lucky” characteristics was that they were outsiders to what most people considered normal. This status as an outsider is what gave people in these groups their supposed powers to influence events on the field. With the exception of the player-mascots like Hugh Nicol, it was rare that people considered “normal” could earn mascot status.

This serves to remind us that even in baseball, the prejudices of US society were never too far from the surface. In addition to barring black people from playing in major league baseball to begin with, teams and players also demeaned black people at times by relegating them to the status of mascots, somewhat like jesters entertaining courtiers during the Middle Ages. Then, they would cast aside these mascots should their luck happen to run out at the wrong time. The same was true, as we have seen, for people like Rudy Hahn with unusual

physical characteristics. They too stood out because of their appearance, and rather than show compassion for such people, baseball teams employed them to add public entertainment instead.

There was also the callous way in which baseball teams and players treated animals. Whether it was killing sharks just to see what they looked like, or bringing monkeys to the ballpark until the players got tired of them, this type of treatment of animals was also characteristic of the age. The second half of the nineteenth century saw a tremendous increase in the rate at which animal species went extinct, or nearly extinct, as Americans either killed them or destroyed their habitat in the name of industrial progress. Whether it meant killing bison to use their hides for leather, slaughtering birds up and down the East Coast to put them on women's hats, or poisoning wolves and prairie dogs so they would not interfere with cattle ranching, this era witnessed a sharp decline in the number of animal species present in the United States. Baseball players were not immune from the tendency to see animals as simply critters or varmints that existed for the benefit of humans, rather than unique creations that at least deserved the right to exist. Granted, they were a little too busy playing baseball to do too much damage to animal populations personally, but their behavior reflected the values of American society in this regard.

This tendency to see animals as profit or as existing for the sake of human convenience was also, if we reflect on it a moment, little different from how the owners of baseball teams saw their players. Owners did not kill players who lost their skill, of course, but did discard them when they no longer deemed the players' services necessary. Most owners did see players as mere instruments to boost profits, just as industrialists viewed bison or ranchers viewed cattle. The fate of the individual player mattered as little as the fate of individual animals; their collective value is what ownership cared about.

Chapter 14

The Winter of 1887-1888

As winter followed Detroit's championship over St. Louis in the Fall Classic of 1887, some new developments took hold that increased the financial strain under which major league baseball teams claimed to operate. The attempt at a salary limit was dead. The players, influenced by their perceptions of how much money their teams had made during the just-concluded season, continued pressing for greater pay.

While this is true, generally speaking, there are specific reasons why things were more complicated. One was that all major league teams, in their efforts to find new players, found themselves paying larger and larger sums to acquire those new players. This meant that not only were total costs rising, but the wealthier teams could better afford to pursue new blood, adding to their overall talent advantage. In turn, this caused their holdover players to ask for more money. When a team paid \$2,000 or \$3,000 to acquire a new, untried player, veterans took note. Those veterans believed they should be able to command at least that much money, if not more.

When this happened, some franchises found themselves in a tough spot. If costs rose too much, they approached a limit beyond which a team such as Louisville could not go in its efforts to field a competitive team. So the smaller market teams said in public, at least. The players, as a body, were not convinced of this, and their disagreement raises an interesting point about whether the interests of the players really were identical to the interests of the owners on salary

questions. From the perspective of ownership, reasonable profits were necessary in order to make sure that franchises stayed in the league from one season to the next, and that major league baseball, as an institution, gained stability and permanent status as a paying investment.

The players did not have the same concerns. Given the finite length of their playing careers, financially speaking their goal was to get as much money as possible for their services while those services remained marketable. Just as the employee of a business is not concerned what becomes of his or her employer once he or she receives a final paycheck, baseball players with no financial interest in their team had no great incentive to behave with the game's long-term stability in mind. As a result, the salary disputes and roster moves of this winter reveal no organized opposition to a particular action on management's part, but simply a rational decision made by major league players to do what was in their collective financial interests.

Using the term winter to describe the off-season maneuverings in Gilded Age baseball is a little misleading, because in the 1880s the competition for new players to fortify rosters generally began in October. Preparatory to the 1888 season, the rules allowed teams to sign new players starting October 20. Rumors, however, did not have to wait until October 20. Late in the 1887 campaign, talk circulated that the Pittsburgh Alleghenys offered the Chicago White Stockings \$10,000 (after the Kelly deal the previous year, it seems that anything sensational enough to compare to that had to have a rumored value of \$10,000, and again, according to the rumor mill, the club later raised its offer to \$15,000¹) for their captain and first baseman, Cap Anson. Given that the big Iowan was Al Spalding's right hand man, as well as a stockholder in the Chicago club, this seemed more fanciful than hopeful on Pittsburgh's part. Perhaps Pittsburgh figured it never hurt to ask.

¹ "Pittsburgh Club News" NA, *The Sporting Life*, October 26, 1887, 1.

That did not mean, however, that other key White Stocking players were untouchable. Boston, hoping to repeat what the purchase of Mike Kelly did for its bottom line in 1887, was in the market for a new pitcher to team with the still formidable Charles Radbourn and up-and-coming young left-hander Kid Madden in the pitcher's box for 1888. There was no finer pitcher in the game than Chicago's John Clarkson, and the Triumvirs cast their covetous gaze westward once again as the 1887 season reached its final days.² They hoped to move quickly, perhaps because word reached them that the Cincinnati Red Stockings were also after the great pitcher. Rumor had it Cincinnati was willing to pay the White Stockings \$7,000 for Clarkson's release.³ Sadly for the Red Stockings, Clarkson poured cold water on their hopes late in the month when he declared his intent to play for an Eastern team in 1888. He was born in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and said he wanted to make his home near relations in the East and help his father in business, although, seeing that players had trotted out the "going into business" line so frequently as to make it cliché, no one much believed that part by now.⁴ Clarkson left no doubt, however, that he would play somewhere else in the coming year. "Yes, I am on the market, but don't know where I shall bring up. I am anxious to get away from Chicago."⁵

Meanwhile Clarkson's employer, Al Spalding, seemed to be signing every promising minor league player in sight, perhaps preparing for a major move by the Brotherhood, or for the loss of some of his old standbys, or both. The story of how he signed pitcher Gus Krock, from Oshkosh of the Northwestern League, illustrates how competitive the winter hunt for new blood could be. One day in early November, Spalding was in his office talking with the Detroit

² "Clarkson And Chicago" NA, *The Sporting News*, October 1, 1887, 4.

³ "A Hunt For Playes" NA, *The Sporting News*, October 22, 1887, 4.

⁴ "The Latest From Clarkson" NA, *The Sporting Life*, October 26, 1887, 1; "Diamond Dust" NA, *St. Louis Daily Globe-Democrat*, October 28, 1887, 8.

⁵ "Delighted Detroit" MAT, *The Sporting Life*, October 26, 1887, 5.

Wolverines' manager, W.H. Watkins, about the signing of players. The word was out that Watkins was also after Krock, and that he had dispatched an agent to Milwaukee to search the town "with a fine tooth comb" in order to find Krock and sign him to an agreement. As the two men sat talking, Krock just happened to poke his head into Spalding's office in the hope of negotiating a White Stockings contract for 1888. Luckily for Spalding, Watkins was facing away from the door, so Spalding excused himself and immediately hustled the young pitcher down the hall and away from his office. Threatening Krock with death (figuratively, we hope) if he were to say anything, Spalding led him through the mail room, hid him in a corner, piled shipping boxes and a bicycle on top of the bewildered player, and warned him not to move a muscle until Spalding returned. A short time later Spalding did, and inked Krock to a pact on the spot. This goes to show the level of exertion clubs would go to in order to acquire a prospect of Krock's magnitude, as baseball observers described Krock as "a giant in size, with fearful speed in delivery and really excellent command of the ball. Although big, his is said to be even more active than Anson and to be a steady and reliable batsman."⁶

For the rest of 1887, vague rumors circulated on occasion that Clarkson would go elsewhere for 1888, and while Spalding did his best to squelch the rumors, they never quite died altogether. In January of 1888, Detroit's ex-president Fred Stearns cranked the rumor mill back into motion, stating, "Clarkson may go to Boston this year. I know that Spalding will release him . . . Clarkson is not the valuable man he used to be, and Spalding will sell him if any club will offer what he is worth, or rather what Spalding thinks he is worth."⁷ Later, Clarkson himself became more particular, stating it was Boston or the business world for 1888. He claimed to have no beef with Chicago, and no ill will towards Al Spalding or Cap Anson, merely that he

⁶ "Chicago News" Harry Palmer, *The Sporting Life*, November 16, 1887, 4.

⁷ "Stearns on Clarkson" NA, *The Sporting News*, January 7, 1887, 1.

disliked moving from his home to Chicago for half of every year, away from family and friends.⁸ He also added some complexity to the situation by saying, “he is the sole owner of his skills as a ball player, and if any pecuniary consideration is necessary to obtain Chicago’s consent to the release, he should come in for his share of the money so paid. He believes that the full sum given should come to him, but is willing to allow the club from which he is released 50 per cent of the ‘purchase’ money.”⁹ There was another rumor concerning Clarkson making the rounds at this time, claiming he had secured the services of a fellow Massachusetts resident, former Civil War general, Congressman, supporter of the freedmen, and current lawyer Benjamin F. Butler, to aid him in his attempt to escape from Spalding’s clutches, but this appeared to be unfounded.¹⁰

As they sensed the possibilities of a deal once again in February, the Triumvirs poured on the charm in their efforts to woo Clarkson. After a meeting with Boston management, Clarkson said, “my dealings with the Boston management have been anything but unpleasant. I am prepared to defend them from the aspersions which are constantly being hurled at them by newspaper writers who never saw either one of the gentlemen.”¹¹ Interestingly, Spalding continued to downplay the entire situation to such an extent that one wonders if he really believed any of it. He said, in answer to a letter from Clarkson, “of course the inference was that he wanted to play in Boston, but he has never said the Boston people wanted him, nor have they ever said to me that they would engage him if his release could be obtained.”¹² As late as March he appeared unconvinced that Clarkson was in earnest, or at least he let the public believe he was

⁸ “Hub Happenings” Mugwump, *The Sporting Life*, January 18, 1888, 2.

⁹ “The Great Pitchers” TIM, *The Sporting News*, February 4, 1888, 1. TIM was Boston sportswriter Tim Murnane.

¹⁰ “Washington Whispers” Bob Lerner, *The Sporting Life*, February 8, 1888, 3. The freedmen were the slaves emancipated during (via the Emancipation Proclamation) and after the Civil War (by the Thirteenth Amendment).

¹¹ “The Boston Players” TIM, *The Sporting News*, February 4, 1888, 1.

¹² “President Spalding” NA, *The Sporting News*, February 4, 1888, 4.

unconvinced. As Clarkson put it, “Mr. Spalding seemed to think it was a huge joke when I asked him to name a price for my release, as I was ready to pay a good sum for it. He thought I was joking, but I wasn’t, and I shall not weaken, either.”¹³

The intermittent three-way negotiations between Clarkson, Spalding, and the Boston management reached their final stages starting with the National League’s spring meeting in New York City. Clarkson attended the meeting and, in a talk with Spalding, refused to budge, telling him, “It’s no use talking, Mr. Spalding, I won’t play in Chicago next season under any conditions.” The Chicago magnate countered by stating, “John, I can’t let you go. You know how the Chicago people felt when I let so many strong players go last summer. They won’t stand another transaction of that sort, especially when it comes to parting with you, who are a great favorite in the city.” Unmoved, Clarkson answered, “Mr. Spalding, it’s not a matter of salary with me at all, and you can not name any price that would be an inducement for me to play in Chicago next season, not even if it were largely in excess of the one I now receive.”¹⁴

This may have finally gotten Spalding’s attention. When Boston writer William Sullivan asked him what he planned to do with Clarkson, the purveyor of sporting goods told Sullivan, “I hate to let John go. I shall have to go back to Chicago and think it over. I think John is perfectly honest in all he says. But I don’t see how I can let him go. Yes; I know they need him in Boston, but so do I need him in Chicago. John is a great pitcher and I know it as well as anybody. If I let him go there will be a howl in Chicago.”¹⁵

Spalding eventually opened up negotiations with Soden all the same, hoping to salvage something and avoid total defeat. “Soden came to me and asked me if I would release John, but

¹³ “Hub Happenings” Mugwump, *The Sporting Life*, March 14, 1888, 2.

¹⁴ “A Stormy Meeting” NA, *The Sporting News*, March 10, 1888, 5.

¹⁵ “Hub Happenings” Mugwump, *The Sporting Life*, March 14, 1888, 2.

the amount of release money he offered was so far below anything I would consider that I closed the interview in short order.”¹⁶ Spalding made another move for Clarkson. “I told him I would pay him a salary which would satisfy him. He replied that it was not a question of salary. I then said I would much prefer to have him return at a higher salary than to receive \$10,000 for his release.” With Clarkson refusing to budge and Boston trying to lowball him, Spalding let out that he was also entertaining offers from other clubs for the ace right-hander.¹⁷ One report had it that, instead of a straight sale to Boston, that Chicago would receive Charlie Radbourn and some cash in exchange. Another had Clarkson going to Philadelphia for the best pitcher the Quakers had to offer, Charlie Ferguson, in return.¹⁸

The agony of both the cranks and team officials in Boston of whether they would get their man continued into the very last days of March, but finally, the Triumvirs got their prize. Always the master of spin, all that Spalding could say was, “we had the championship before Clarkson pitched for us, and we can win it again without him. I don’t know anything about what he intends to do, and I don’t care. We have five good pitchers in Van Haltren, Krock, Sprague, Brynan, Clark, and Baldwin, and that’s enough.” Spalding was upset enough that the reporter taking his statement did not even bother to mention that Spalding had just listed six pitchers rather than five. Thus, the peerless right-handed pitched for the Beaneaters in 1888. Soden and his fellow Triumvirs certainly worked Clarkson enough to get their money’s worth on the field, even if he did cost them \$10,000 in purchase money and another \$4,000 in salary for 1888. Clarkson went on to start 54 games that year (in a 140-game schedule) and 72 in 1889, more than

¹⁶ “Chicago Chat” Harry Palmer, *The Sporting Life*, March 14, 1888, 4.

¹⁷ “Is Clarkson Going To Sign” NA, *The Sporting News*, March 17, 1888, 1.

¹⁸ “The White Stockings” Eli, *The Sporting News*, March 17, 1888, 1.

half of Boston's contests.¹⁹ When Clarkson finally inscribed his name on a Boston contract for 1888, fans in the Hub were ecstatic. "At the hotels, theatres, and clubs the topic of conversation among admirers of the National game was the lucky stroke of the Boston management. . . . Nothing since the signing of Mike Kelly has created such a sensation in base-ball circles in this city."²⁰ Soden, Billings, and Conant must have been ecstatic as well, envisioning both more wins on the field and more coins ringing in the cash box.

* * * * *

Charles Byrne, president of the Brooklyn Grays (soon renamed the Bridegrooms when several of the team's players married over the winter), had bigger plans than merely acquiring one single player. In the first week of October, he completed negotiations to buy the entire New York Metropolitans organization, franchise, players, and all, from Staten Island entrepreneur Erastus Wiman. Wiman had purchased the New York franchise from John Day's Metropolitan Entertainment Company and then relocated its home grounds to the St. George Cricket Grounds on Staten Island for 1887, hoping that he could increase his profits by transporting fans to the games by ferries that he owned, and then selling the fans tickets. The plan never panned out, however, as the location and difficulty of getting to the grounds turned off many potential fans, and the poor record of the Metropolitans (44-89, seventh in the American Association) did, too. Byrne, then, simply bought everything, added the players from New York's team that he wanted

¹⁹ "Clarkson And Chicago" NA, *The Sporting Life*, April 4, 1888, 1; "Settled At Last" Mugwump, *The Sporting Life*, April 11, 1888, 1.

²⁰ "Base-Ball Notes" NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, April 8, 1888, 2.

to his reserve list, and began trying to sell the releases of the rest. Acting as trustee for a syndicate of buyers, he paid \$25,000 to Wiman and his associates.²¹

It was an expensive, but effective, way for Byrne to improve his club. After going 60-74 in 1887 and finishing in sixth place, the team improved to 88-52 in 1888 and took second place in the American Association. The reader need not worry over Wiman's financial situation, however. Despite the monetary losses he suffered on his baseball team, Wiman's connections with the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad provided him with cash considerations for the next ninety-nine years. He also saw some returns for all people using the Staten Island ferry during the prior two years. This is why he located operations there in the first place, and allowed him to recoup his baseball losses and come out more or less even in the end.²²

This left the American Association with a big problem. Not only had it just lost its team in the nation's largest city and biggest market; it now had just seven teams, and the league required an even number to play its schedule for 1888. That winter, the Association scoured the American landscape for an eighth entry. Would another team emerge in New York? That would be best, but no one seemed ready to step forward in Gotham and buy the franchise back from Byrne. The spotlight then shifted to other cities in New York State and nearby areas, with Buffalo, Rochester, and Newark entering the discussion. Did these cities have enough population, and therefore enough potential patrons, to support a major league club, given that salaries and expenses seemed to rise significantly each year? The general conclusion was that they did not.²³

²¹ "C.H. Byrne Buys the Mets' Franchise" NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, October 9, 1887, 13.

²² "A Big Surprise" NA, *The Sporting Life*, October 12, 1887, 1.

²³ This is somewhat surprising given that Buffalo stood eleventh in country in population according to the 1890 census, at 255,664 people, while Newark was seventeenth at 181,830. Either of these cities had a greater population than three other locations that currently or had

There was also the possibility of bringing Kansas City back to major league status, as fans there had supported their nine in decent fashion during the Cowboy City's short-lived experience in the National League in 1886, but this possibility presented a geographic problem. Replacing New York with Kansas City would give the Association five teams in the West against three in the East, necessitating a western team, probably Cleveland, be grouped with the eastern teams for traveling purposes, which would increase expenses for the Forest City club to unacceptable levels. The same held true with the Association's other preferred western choice, Milwaukee. The American Association spent the better part of the 1887-1888 off-season trying to solve this conundrum.

Eventually, Kansas City gained the vacant membership spot. It had both advantages and disadvantages. The local population was in the neighborhood of 225,000 people, and according to Louisville owner Zach Phelps, the team drew great crowds for weekend games especially. "Every Saturday they have a half holiday and everybody turns out. It is a splendid Saturday and Sunday town and the people are very fond of base ball. The club they had there last year cleared \$5,000 [playing in the minor league Western League] and of course they expect to do much better this year." Cowboys management also promised to help other Association members offset their travel costs out onto the Great Plains by covering traveling expenses west of St. Louis. In return, the other Association moguls guaranteed Kansas City that if the owners decided against Kansas City's membership at the end of the season, the Association would buy back all the team's players in order to provide the Cowboys some financial security.²⁴

recently enjoyed major league status, those being Kansas City, Louisville, and Indianapolis. It seems that baseball observers remembered that when Buffalo last had a major league team, in 1885, the club had not drawn well.

²⁴ "Louisville Laconics" JA, *The Sporting Life*, February 1, 1888, 4.

There were further complications, however, as Kansas City was also the home of a Western League Kansas City franchise, owned by Ed Menges, who did not propose to go quietly while the Association stormed his ramparts. After getting the boot by the National League after the 1886 season, Menges headed up a group to put a Kansas City team in the Western League, and the team had done fine against the likes of Denver and Omaha. Menges believed he would outdraw the Association Cowboys and make the Association regret challenging him, partly due to the Association's decision to charge fifty cents for tickets in the upcoming season. "You'll find, though, that my Western Association club will win more games and have a much better attendance. You know as well as I do that this is a twenty-five-cent admission town, and if my men play ball as is expected, the American Association club will be sick of their bargain ere three months have elapsed."²⁵

Not only did Menges bank on having a more attractive and contending team, he had the advantage of location for his grounds. "I'll have the finest grounds in the country, which can be reached from the heart of the city by two cables and are only a three-block walk from another horse car and cable line. I tell you quick transportation, fine grounds and a winning team will catch base ball lovers in the this city, and I am laying my wires accordingly." Menges believed this would outweigh the Association's clear advantage of big name, nationally known talent and allow him to prosper despite the fierce competition for patronage.²⁶ When the case finally made its way to baseball's Board of Arbitration, the Board did not know what to make of the mess, and finally recommended that the two clubs fight out their battle in the legal system.²⁷ This pending legal battle did not stop the two teams, however, from arranging a spring exhibition series with

²⁵ "The Association Baby" LJK, *The Sporting Life*, February 8, 1888, 2.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ "The League Meeting" NA, *The Sporting News*, March 10, 1888, 5.

each other in hopes of raking in some extra dough. Given the high profile of the dispute between the rival organizations, “liberal patronage is expected” and both teams were so confident of victory that they decided the winner of the series would pocket all the gate receipts.²⁸

It appeared that the two teams might never play any exhibition games, however. The American Association, invoking the clause in the National Agreement guaranteeing that no club could operate within five miles of a major league team, tried to prevent the Western Association team from playing ball at all. This move, while expected, was not exactly fair to Menges and his organization, considering that they had already played in Kansas City for a full year, and if the Association were successful in its legal case, they would have to disband their team or move it elsewhere. Menges and associates felt, therefore, that they had a good chance in court, based on the claim that this deprived them of their property. Realizing how much money was on the line, however, the two clubs eventually played a series of five exhibition games. They decided there was no need to miss the extra boodle while the courts took up the case.²⁹

It was also in the winter of 1887-88 that the marvelous team assembled by Detroit in 1887 began breaking up. The calendars had hardly turned to November before the team decided to release highly regarded second baseman Fred Dunlap to the Pittsburgh Alleghenys for \$5,500. Reports differed on whether Detroit was looking to reduce its payroll or if there might be a bit of bad blood between Dunlap and other Wolverines (denied by the second baseman), but Detroit president Fred Stearns told the press that if he sold Dunlap, he would do so to a weaker team to equalize the league’s playing strength and not allow his chief rivals to upgrade their talent at his expense.³⁰ It appears that the Wolverines did consider Dunlap a bit of a malcontent, regarding

²⁸ “The Rival Cowboys” Klein, *The Sporting Life*, March 14, 1888, 1.

²⁹ “The Rival Cowboy Teams Play Together” NA, *The Sporting Life*, April 18, 1888, 1.

³⁰ “Another Big Deal” MAT, *The Sporting Life*, November 9, 1887, 1.

him as “a disturbing element . . . a born agitator, and very keen” who also “showed too grasping a spirit,” leading one Detroit sportswriter to claim that while “I regard Dunny as a marvelous ball player and found him an agreeable fellow,” in the eyes of Detroit management “he is not accused of any specific serious offense, but was simply not regarded as a desirable man for any club.”³¹

Dunlap did his best to block the deal, however, claiming that if he were to go to Pittsburgh, he wanted half of the sale price or else he would not go willingly to the Smoky City.³² Stearns’ response was a canny one. He decided to release Dunlap outright, after getting agreement from all other teams in the National League not to negotiate with him, so that only Pittsburgh could sign the second baseman. It seems Stearns determined that if Dunlap wanted half the price paid for his release, Stearns must find a way to deny his request, obviously fearing that future players would emulate the Sure Shot and demand a share of the boodle for themselves. “I believe in treating players generously, but when they attempt to gouge us, why they won’t make much by it. Dunlap won’t get half of the release money, because none will be paid.”³³

Despite this setback, Dunlap had not exhausted his maneuvers. He went to Pittsburgh and met with team president Nimick to inform Nimick of his decision to play ball in the Smoky City in 1888. Nimick, delighted at the news, asked what salary Dunlap requested. The Allegheny executive surely knew the Sure Shot would not come cheap, given that he had garnered \$4,500 with Detroit the previous year. At least according to some accounts, Nimick was floored, literally, when Dunlap said, “I have decided to play with Pittsburg next season,

³¹ “Detroit Dotlets” MAT, *The Sporting Life*, February 8, 1888, 4.

³² “Dunlap and Stearns” NA, *The Sporting News*, November 26, 1887, 1.

³³ “Dunlap to Be Released” NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, December 20, 1887, 3.

provided I get \$7,000 for doing so.”³⁴ (Sadly, Nimick’s wife had the same experience when an explosion of illuminating gas at her home almost killed her the same week.³⁵) Dunlap also had an ace in the hole to evade Stearns’ simple release strategy. His contract with the Wolverines was a personal services contract, so should Pittsburgh not accommodate his desires, he planned to insist that Detroit honor the second year of his two-year personal contract with the club.³⁶ The second baseman also continued his propaganda offensive in the press. When asked about his reputation as a troublemaker, he stated, “some people say I am a disorganizer. That is a lie. I will leave it to any player in the Detroit team if I ever had an angry word with any of them.”³⁷ In the end, Dunlap got the best of things. He went to Pittsburgh for the 1888 season, with a contract said to cover two years and pay \$5,000 annually, and got \$2,000 of the money paid for his release as well.³⁸ Nimick, however, disputed these figures, saying the salary was “less than a great many think.” Pittsburgh’s correspondent for *The Sporting Life*, while given the opportunity to see the contract personally, declined to reveal the exact figures.³⁹

That was not the end of the drama for Pittsburgh. Of their existing team left from 1887, all but two declared their intent to hold out for better pay before signing contracts for 1888. Pitcher Jim “Pud” Galvin was unafraid of voicing his grievances over the club’s treatment of him in the past. Galvin was one of the true stalwart pitchers of baseball’s early years. He had pitched at least 370 innings every season going back to his first full campaign in 1879, going as

³⁴ “Dunlap And Nimick” NA, *The Sporting News*, December 17, 1887, 4.

³⁵ “Natural Gas Explosion” NA, *The Sporting Life*, December 21, 1887, 1.

³⁶ “Detroit Drift” MAT, *The Sporting Life*, December 28, 1887, 2; “Fred Dunlap” NA, *The Sporting News*, January 7, 1888, 1.

³⁷ “Fred Dunlap” Hincker, *The Sporting News*, December 31, 1887, 4.

³⁸ “Base Ball Notes” NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, January 8, 1887, 15; “Nimick’s Big Capture” NA, *The Sporting News*, January 7, 1888, 1; “Number Two” NA, *The Sporting Life*, January 11, 1888, 2.

³⁹ “Pittsburg Pencilings” Circle, *The Sporting Life*, January 11, 1888, 2.

high as 656 for Buffalo in 1883, and given his durability and dependability, he felt sore at Pittsburgh's management for their treatment of him the previous two seasons. He said to team secretary Al Scandrett, "I ain't going to say what I want until I am ready to sign, and I may not be ready to talk business until April 1. You had me in a hole for two years and want to get me again, and I have not decided whether I will play ball or not." The reference to being in the hole referred to an incident where the team denied him pay in 1885 for one of his rare arm injuries, causing Galvin to say "I will see them in hell before I sign for their price . . . they signed me in Buffalo for \$3,500, and when my arm gave out cut me down to \$2,000 in 1886. Last year they gave me \$100 of an increase."⁴⁰ (Scandrett was, apparently, quite good at his secretarial work. Besides his work for the Alleghenys, he also worked as a clerk in the Pittsburgh Sheriffs office for 1887 before transferring to the Pittsburgh Registers office granting marriage licenses early in 1888. Given the realities of the spoils system, which featured political favors as the main criteria for such offices in Gilded Age America, this caused *The Sporting Life's* Pittsburgh correspondent to remark, "this is certainly a high compliment to his ability, as the positions are 'plums' for campaign work. It is rare when efficiency is taken into consideration in cases of this kind."⁴¹)

Nimick had a plan to deal with Galvin. The strategy was to sign Hardie Henderson, a pitcher many considered washed up despite being just twenty-four years old, due in no small part to his inconsistent sobriety, as the team's third man for the pitcher's box. While Nimick blustered, somewhat dubiously, that Henderson was "a better pitcher than Jimmy Galvin," the hope was that Galvin, seeing the team no longer needed him quite as much as it did before, would soften his demands when faced with the reality that Pittsburg had other options for its

⁴⁰ "Pittsburg Pencilings" Circle, *The Sporting Life*, January 4, 1888, 3; "Affairs At Pittsburg" NA, *The Sporting News*, January 7, 1888, 1.

⁴¹ "Pittsburg Pencilings" Circle, *The Sporting Life*, January 11, 1888, 2.

pitching staff.⁴² Perhaps the team really did hope to get some value out of Henderson, as well. He claimed to have avoided alcohol for several months running, and once Dunlap joined the team as its captain, he said, “if Hardie lives up to his good intentions, and I think he’ll do it, let me tell you he will fool some of the League’s heavy hitters. He is capable of great work when he is in proper condition.”⁴³ Dunlap then took it upon himself to train Henderson (Dunlap was a fan of racket sports and competitive walking) to help Henderson slim down from 220 pounds to a more effective playing weight for a man a full two inches shy of six feet in height. “Dunlap says that if Hardie follows his course of training for a month he will be down to quarter-horse condition.”⁴⁴ (They were all deceived, however. Henderson’s actual work in the box consisted of 35 innings pitched in which he tied his career-worst totals for fewest strikeouts and most walks per nine innings.)

Galvin signed before his self-imposed April 1 deadline. Near the end of February, he worked things out with Pittsburg and signed for \$3,000, somewhat closer to his Buffalo salary than what he had made during the last two years in the Smoky City.⁴⁵ He offered the Alleghenys a choice of paying him \$3,500 with no advance money up front, or \$3,000 with \$1,000 advanced before the season began, and the club chose to agree to his second proposition.⁴⁶ He also pulled a neat trick on the team in order to get the management to up its salary offer. He pretended to

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ “Pittsburg’s Big Deal” NA, *The Sporting News*, January 28, 1888, 5.

⁴⁴ “Notes About the Players” NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, February 22, 1888, 2.

⁴⁵ “Jimmy Galvin Sings” Carter, *The Sporting News*, February 18, 1888, 1.

⁴⁶ “The Exact Figures” NA, *The Sporting News*, February 25, 1888, 1. Paying players advance money was a common practice in the Gilded Age, even though teams hated it. Often, players who were unscrupulous with their finances needed some extra money to get them through the winter until the next season began, and so would demand advances from their clubs when signing their contracts. In other cases, players did not truly need the extra money right away, but as teams were in the practice of agreeing to advances, would ask for one anyway to get their hands on their pay sooner.

take over the primary ownership of a saloon in which he had an interest, even going so far as to put his name on the sign at the front of his supposed grog shop. This convinced Allegheny management that he probably could hold out until April 1, as he said he would, and believing that this reduced its leverage over the veteran pitcher, the team decided to accept one of his offers.⁴⁷

* * * * *

The same week that the news concerning Dunlap began circulating, another potential blockbuster transaction went public. Washington decided to part with their top offensive player from 1887, outfielder Paul Hines. The deal was interesting in several respects. For one, Washington was essentially Hines' hometown, as he had been born nearby in Virginia (after his playing career he lived in Hyattsville, Maryland, and his family interred him in Washington, DC when he died) and he was able to play in front of his family on a regular basis in Washington. While most players considered this a good thing, Hines claimed that the hometown cranks expected so much from him that the pressure had become too great, and he believed he would play better in a different location. While these sentiments might not mean much under normal circumstances, Hines also had a clause in the contract he had signed with Washington the previous year where the team promised not to reserve him for 1888 if he wanted to go somewhere else. With this ace up his sleeve, he proclaimed his discontent with playing in the nation's capital, and led people to believe he did not care where he played in 1888, so long as it was not in Washington.

⁴⁷ "Pittsburg Pencilings" Circle, *The Sporting Life*, February 29, 1888, 2.

Upon hearing this news, like wolves pouncing on wounded prey, several teams sprang into action, with Boston, Pittsburgh, New York, Indianapolis, and the Philadelphia Quakers all making offers to the Nationals. In the end, Washington negotiated Hines' release to Indianapolis, basing their logic on the same principles Detroit had—that if someone was going to strengthen their nine at Washington's expense, it should be one of the weaker teams in the league. In return, the Hoosiers compensated the Nationals with \$5,000, but seemed perfectly satisfied they would get their money's worth. One stockholder told the sporting press, "when we get around next year with such stars like Glasscock, Denny, Hines, and our other fine players we will be one of the best drawing cards in the League. If the percentage system is adopted we will get our \$5,000 we paid for Hines back the first month."⁴⁸ Besides Hines' obvious merits on the field, everyone knew that he "does not need watching at home or abroad, and he was never known to suffer from "Charlie-horse," or any of the ailments which attack so many star players during a season," making him all the more attractive to the Hoosiers.⁴⁹

Of course, it would not be an off-season in major league baseball without some drama emanating from Bob Caruthers. As usual, he entered November regretting that the recently concluded season was his last. This time, the plan was to join his brother selling hardware. (His brother James did own a hardware store, at 186 Kinzie Street in Chicago.) "Positively I will quit. I guess I have pitched my last ball. I know people will think me to be working for a bigger salary but they will find out that they are in the wrong." He did leave the door open for a return to the diamond, just barely. "If I should ever play ball again which is almost out of the question, I want it understood that it will not be in St. Louis. Mr. Von der Ahe has not treated me as he should and for that reason I will shun him forever. . . . I will without a doubt settle down in

⁴⁸ "From Washington" WUD, *The Sporting Life*, November 2, 1887, 1.

⁴⁹ "From The Capital" Bob Larner, *The Sporting Life*, December 28, 1887, 5.

business and once settled down will remain there.” Chris Von der Ahe, perhaps savvy to the right-hander’s bluffs by now, was not impressed. “I suppose he expects me to run after or to call on him but I don’t propose to do any thing of the kind. If he wants to see me he can call at my office.”⁵⁰

It did not take long for the ruse to become transparent to all. Within a week or so, Caruthers was negotiating with Brooklyn to play in the City of Churches in 1888. The team offered \$4,500 while Parisian Bob sought an even \$5,000. While he still claimed to have communications from his family telling him to make no deals for any reason, already he had let people know that “\$5,000 for six months’ work is a good deal of money and he would like to sign a contract with any one for that salary.”⁵¹ Cincinnati also was in the hunt for Caruthers, however, especially when Caruthers’ mother sent him another letter stating that she would “sever the bonds of filial affection and love existing between them if he persisted in going to Brooklyn to play ball.” Apparently, she believed that her twenty-three-year-old son might succumb to the vices and temptations of the big city, and so Cincinnati entered into the negotiations. Mrs. Caruthers’ dislike of baseball does seem sincere, at least. In an interview at her home, 530 La Salle Avenue in Chicago, she said, “I have never seen a game of base-ball, and will not go to see one as long as he is connected with the game. . . . During the last two weeks I have received telegrams from base-ball Presidents and their agents, but paid no attention to any of them. I didn’t even answer them.”⁵² (His father James, a former State Attorney and judge in Tennessee, did approve of baseball, but had died the prior year.⁵³) Caruthers’ new tune was to claim, “I

⁵⁰ “The Case Of Caruthers” NA, *The Sporting News*, November 19, 1887, 5.

⁵¹ “Caruthers Thinks He Will Go to Brooklyn” NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, November 27, 1887, 15.

⁵² “Bob Caruthers Is Here” NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, December 2, 1887, 3.

⁵³ “The Great Caruthers” NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, December 4, 1887, 11.

can't go to Brooklyn; that's settled. I'll play in Cincinnati next year, or I'll be behind a counter in Chicago selling hardware." Rumor had it that, in response, Cincinnati offered St. Louis \$9,000 for Parisian Bob's release, along with a \$5,000 yearly salary.⁵⁴

By then, baseball observers knew that they should take nothing Caruthers said regarding money or contracts at face value. The denouement came when he agreed to go to Brooklyn in mid-December. His mother took a great deal of convincing, but eventually relented. For Brooklyn, the price was steep. The Bridegrooms paid \$8,250 to St. Louis to secure Caruthers' release, and then signed Caruthers to play for them at a salary north of what Mike Kelly received from Boston the previous year. The parties did not reveal the precise terms to the press, but did confirm the sum was nearer to \$6,000 than to \$5,000. Brooklyn owner Charles Byrne summed up the enormity of the transaction by stating, "we had started in to get Caruthers, and were forced to follow him up until we got him at an enormous cost. Still, in my opinion, he is the best ball-player in the country and is worth more than any other. We expect to get the benefit of the deal out of the increased price of admission, and the large crowds that a good team will attract, not only in Brooklyn, but everywhere we go."⁵⁵ As Mike Kelly's deal with Boston the year before had proven, the seemingly astronomical sums of money paid to acquire premier talent could actually turn out to be bargains, and with his signing of Caruthers, Byrne was hoping to achieve the same coup that Soden and company had in Boston. Indeed, to increase the hype, Byrne and others in Brooklyn's organization constantly mentioned the fact that the Caruthers deal exceeded the value of the Kelly deal from 1887, in the hope of stirring interest and enticing cranks to Washington Park to see baseball's highest salaried player in 1888. (It was a great

⁵⁴ "Cincinnati Likely to Get Caruthers" NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, November 28, 1887, 3.

⁵⁵ "Caruthers Goes To Brooklyn" NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, December 14, 1887, 1.

winter all around for Parisian Bob, as he also married that March in Chicago, pledging his eternal devotion to “a prominent north side belle.”⁵⁶

Perhaps the study of Caruthers and his salary-seeking antics deserves some analysis. No doubt, the reader has realized that even with the reserve rule, dissatisfied players could still, on occasion, get away from teams they disliked. Sometimes, it was simply a scheme to inveigle more money, while, at others, genuine grievances existed over how the player’s team treated him. It would be easy, and to some extent justified, to cast a player like Caruthers into the first of these two groups without thinking twice. Yet, given the presence of something like the reserve rule, it is difficult to see what other option a player had in his effort to try and get the salary his talents would be worth in an open market. Given that owners tended to show hostility towards an idea such as multi-year contracts, perhaps fearing the effect that such job security would have on player motivation, there was little else a player could do than whine, complain, and, like the kid on the playground that we all hated growing up, threaten to take his ball and go home. Therefore, while in retrospect it seems easy to lambaste a person like Caruthers for his manipulations and apparent lack of honor, we should keep in mind that he and other players had few other options. The situation was clearly more complex than it seems at first glance.

Things were not always straightforward for the teams, either. It is true that, because of the reserve clause, they had no obligation to move a petulant player to another team. They could simply reserve the man, work out a salary, and be done with it. There were many risks in such a way of doing business, however. For one, an unhappy player might not give premium effort on a daily basis. As anyone who has played baseball knows, there are many ways to give less than full effort without obviously dogging it on the field. Pitchers might experience unusual bouts of

⁵⁶ “Our Bobby Married” Eli, *The Sporting News*, March 10, 1888, 1.

wildness. Infielders could accidentally make bad throws, while outfielders could get a late jump on a fly ball or lose the ball in the sun, and it was next to impossible to determine if these mistakes were genuine or planned. Replacing such sulking players was not always an option, either, because clubs only carried fourteen or fifteen players (oftentimes, even fewer than this on road trips, to save on expenses) of which most were extra pitchers and catchers. Most teams had one or maybe two substitute fielders, because carrying more would cost money they were unwilling to spend. In addition to this, if a club acquired a reputation for stinginess, it risked that new players would be unwilling to sign with the club, and thus struggle to keep up its talent level as the years passed. All of these factors meant that it was a delicate task, for both players and their teams, to negotiate salary from one year to the next.

What is also interesting is that players such as Dunlap, Mullane, and Caruthers received frequent condemnation from the sporting press. One, for instance, referred to Dunlap as a “bloated capitalist” after his maneuvers of December 1887.⁵⁷ When a player worked the market for all it was worth and succeeded, this was somehow a bad thing, or reflected negatively on their character by implying greed, yet team owners who did the same (with the exception of the most crass and petty forms of exploitation, which did earn them the occasional media rebuke) in order to fatten their bottom lines only rarely received such censure. Writers tended to refer to them as capitalists (without the bloat), conservative men of sound principles, sensible businessmen who wanted to put the game on a permanent basis, and the like. A smart manager who succeeded at signing new players was a “hustler,” a term with largely positive connotations at the time, unlike today, but players rarely were.

⁵⁷ “Detroit Dotlets” MAT, *The Sporting Life*, January 11, 1888, 2.

Furthermore, condemning players for their role in pushing up salaries ignores the role that the club managers themselves played in the process. Frequently, players agitated for their release, and justified their desire to leave, by claiming another club was willing to offer them a higher salary. This was sometimes a bluff, but sometimes not. It was not against baseball's rules set forth in the National Agreement for a manager to make an offer to a player under contract to another club necessarily, but the practice did risk unduly aggravating their fellow team executives. In their enthusiasm to procure top players, then, managers often tried to lure players from their current team but did so indirectly, employing a journalist or another well-placed individual as a go-between to communicate his desire to talented players. Under such circumstances, it seems difficult to blame a player for wanting to go somewhere else if promised more money, especially considering that their baseball career had a finite length and they could only hope to earn money through playing ball for a relatively short number of years.

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Without Bob Caruthers, Chris Von der Ahe conducted other business as he tried to retool his St. Louis Browns after their World Series defeat by Detroit. To the great surprise of baseball observers, he decided to undertake a major retooling of his roster. He sold his catcher, Doc Bushong, to Brooklyn for \$4,500 and his centerfielder, Curt Welch, to the Philadelphia Athletics for two-thirds that price. He also traded shortstop Bill Gleason to the Athletics, receiving catcher Jocko Milligan and reserve infielder Chippy McGarr in return.⁵⁸ It was only the beginning of a

⁵⁸ "Von der Ahe Sells Bushong to Brooklyn" NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, November 22, 1887, 6.

major makeover in St. Louis that winter, as Von der Ahe also sold pitcher Dave Foutz to Brooklyn, where he rejoined Caruthers.

He gave his reasons in an interview. Welch had to go on account of his drinking. Not only did he imbibe too often; he had the unfortunate habit of convincing teammates to join him in after-hours frivolity. Foutz, who rotated between pitcher and right field due to his exceptional skill at both positions, went to Brooklyn for \$5,000. Von der Ahe believed, based on Foutz's lackluster performance in the World Series with Detroit, that Foutz had a sore arm and was done as a pitcher (and was essentially correct, for while Foutz continued to pitch on occasion afterwards, he appeared in the box just eighty times in his final seven seasons, after pitching in 171 games his first four campaigns. Foutz also saw his ratio of strikeouts to walks, which had been 1.93 to 1 between 1884 and 1886, fall to a very pedestrian 1.04 to 1 in 1887, a total only marginally above the average in major league baseball) and so was expendable, given that he had also signed several new players. Shortstop Bill Gleason, though popular in the Mound City, brought two useful players in return, one of whom was a catcher, Milligan, giving him the chance to sell the popular Doc Bushong as well. Von der Ahe felt that Bushong was a selfish and divisive player, especially after a quarrel with Arlie Latham. At the time of the interview, he still hoped to keep Caruthers, although Caruthers also ended up in Brooklyn before all Von der Ahe completed his makeover. Still, Von der Ahe believed his nine would be as strong as ever in 1888, due to the new blood he had procured, and it nearly was, as the team's record dropped only slightly, from 95-40 to 92-43, good enough for yet another American Association pennant.⁵⁹

That is not to say, however, that Von der Ahe was correct that the team's new blood would be its salvation, or that he was a genius of player evaluation. Despite the team's

⁵⁹ "Our New Browns" NA, *The Sporting News*, December 3, 1887, 1; "Dave Foutz" NA, *The Sporting News*, December 3, 1887, 2.

continued strong performance, the facts say otherwise. These departed players, Welch and Caruthers especially, left a glaring hole in the St. Louis lineup. Combined, they accumulated 14.5 WAR in 1888, a very significant total. The Browns made up for the losses not with their new players, as primary replacements Jack Boyle (catcher), Bill White (shortstop), Harry Lyons (center field), and Tommy McCarthy (right field) were, as a group, pedestrian at best. Their combined WAR was a measly 2.2, mainly due to McCarthy's 2.9 WAR performance, but by promoting two pitchers left over from the prior season, Silver King and Nat Hudson, to leading roles, the Browns persevered. Foutz and Caruthers, as the team's two leading pitchers, combined for 731 innings pitched and 8.6 WAR in 1887, but their replacements, King and Hudson, put in 918 innings pitched in 1888 and combined for a mammoth 18.5 WAR, with King contributing an olympian 14.5 mark.

To be fair, when making the decision to move his old players Von der Ahe expected he would have James "Bug" Holliday in his outfield, but the player ended up taking the field in Des Moines, Iowa, after a disputed contract situation in which Von der Ahe tried to ink Holliday to a pact a day before the rules allowed him to officially. Von der Ahe claimed to possess a telegram from the outfielder legitimating the Browns' side of the story, but upon further examination, the Arbitration Committee ruled in favor of Des Moines.⁶⁰ When Holliday surfaced in the major leagues in Cincinnati the following season, he blasted 19 home runs and had an excellent OPS+ of 143. The Browns would, without doubt, have posted a few more win in 1888 with Holliday in center field rather than Harry Lyons.

⁶⁰ "Captious Cowboys" Klein, *The Sporting Life*, December 7, 1887, 1; Holliday's SABR biography at <http://sabr.org/bioproj/person/5b06bc9d>, accessed October 11, 2014; "The Annual Meeting" NA, *The Sporting News*, December 10, 1887, 1; "The Halliday Case" NA, *The Sporting Life*, December 28, 1887, 1; "We Do Not Get Holliday" NA, *The Sporting News*, December 31, 1887, 1.

This did not necessarily mean that the Browns were simply sitting on a stockpile of great pitchers in 1887. For the 1887 season, major league pitchers walked 3.0 batters per nine innings pitched, while striking out 2.9 batters per nine innings. In 1888, those numbers were 2.2 for the walks and 3.8 for the strikeouts. (A change in the rules, requiring only three strikes, rather than four, to strike out a batter, was the primary reason why walks decreased and strikeouts increased between the two seasons.) In 1887, Bob Caruthers posted 1.6 walks per nine innings but a mere 2.0 strikeouts per nine innings. Foutz's totals were 2.4 for the walks and 2.5 for the strikeouts. Recalling that the number of hits a pitcher allows is a function of how many batters he strikes out (more strikeouts by the pitcher equating to fewer hits for the batters) we would expect both men to allow more hits than the league average for 1887. Yet this was not the case in St. Louis. Caruthers surrendered 8.9 hits per nine innings, Foutz 9.8, in a season where the league average was 9.9 hits allowed per nine innings.

Now let us investigate the performance of their replacements. Silver King's 1888 statistics show him with 1.2 walks and 4.0 strikeouts per nine innings. Nat Hudson registered 1.6 walks per nine innings against 3.5 strikeouts. This resulted in King allowing a stingy 6.7 hits per nine innings pitched and Hudson 7.6 hits per nine innings pitched, in a season where the major league average was 8.4 hits allowed per nine innings. Again, given the numbers, we would expect to see King yield a total number of hits very near the league average, and the same for Hudson, with King slightly better than average and Hudson slightly below. This is not the case, as both were significantly better than average at denying hits.

Only one conclusion explains these numbers. The St. Louis Browns fielded a team with incredible defensive ability during these two seasons, in terms of depriving batters of hits.

Combine this with the fact that all four men walked fewer hitters than an average pitcher, and the

combination was devastatingly effective. The 1888 Browns, in particular, were amazing. Taken as a whole, the team's pitchers struck out 3.8 batters per nine innings, exactly the league average, yet Browns pitchers allowed just 7.0 hits per nine innings, or almost one and a half fewer hits per game than an average team. Another statistical measure confirms this observation. The recently devised statistic called Fielding Independent Pitching (FIP) attempts to determine what a pitcher's earned run average would have been had he been backed by a league-average defense. The Browns' pitching staff for 1888 had a collective FIP of 2.66 but an actual ERA of 2.09, meaning that the team's defense was worth more than half an earned run in an average game. These numbers indicate that, over the course of a 140-game schedule, the team's defense saved about 80 earned runs, which equates to about eight wins.

What this also says is that the team's pitchers deserve far less credit for their strong pitching performances than their earned run averages and won-lost records would indicate. It is an exaggeration, for sure, but only a mild one, to say that the Browns could have used pitchers who underhanded the ball to the plate, softball style, and still had effective pitchers as long as they got the ball over the plate and avoided walks. This also means, of course, that the huge money Brooklyn paid for Foutz and Caruthers over the winter of 1887-1888 was not a prudent investment of funds. They overpaid, significantly, for the quality of player they acquired. Many pitchers could have equaled the success of these men, given the sterling defense with which their teammates in St. Louis supported them.

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There was one other issue of importance in baseball during this winter, and it involved the gate distribution plan of the American Association. As one might expect, whenever something controversial arose regarding the American Association, it involved St. Louis and its Boss President, Chris Von der Ahe. In a reversal of what the National League had done the winter prior, Von der Ahe clamored for the Association to ditch its guarantee plan that gave all visitors a set share (sixty-five dollars) of the gate receipts for games and adopt a percentage plan instead. Unlike in the National League which, other than Chicago, featured Eastern teams like New York and Philadelphia amongst the strongest and most influential franchises, in the Association, three of the four best teams in 1887, St. Louis, Louisville, and Cincinnati, were in the West. The St. Louis Browns were the best of the bunch, and because their team was so strong on the field and at the gate, owner Von der Ahe's desires carried a lot of weight in the Association. (Recall that the ill-conceived changes to Section 33 of the Association's constitution, to allow greater latitude in blacklisting players, which the entire Association wanted to repeal almost before the ink was dry on the document, passed in the first place largely because of Von der Ahe's personal influence.)

This was important because the American Association found itself in the opposite position the National League faced the year before. In the League, wealthier Eastern clubs, with the help of Chicago, forced the guarantee plan on the western members of the organization. In the Association, however, the Browns had the most clout, and as they were the Association's top drawing card, if they wanted a percentage system to distribute gate receipts, the other franchises had to listen. Von der Ahe did not hesitate to use the greatest trump card he held, the threat that the Browns would leave the Association and join the League. Stating, "I am in deadly earnest as far as my demand for the percentage system is concerned," Von der Ahe and the rest of the

American Association decided to hold a special meeting in early September to discuss the situation. Secondary issues for discussion at the meeting included discussion of replacing Wheeler Wikoff as leader for the Association and dealing with the issue of betting on games at pool halls around the nation. (Apparently, the pool hall issue was a serious problem for the National League as well, as Washington complained about them, while in Boston, “the police are amusing themselves in raiding the base ball pool rooms of the city. Five minutes after the raids business is running at full blast again.”⁶¹)

Giving further credence to Von der Ahe’s threat, the National League held its own special meeting at the same time. Its main business was rather less dramatic, with some relatively minor matters of a forfeited game and the attempted blacklisting of a couple players, but it also planned to reopen the guarantee vs. percentage question, with a great deal of feeling on both sides. While there was no guarantee that the League’s moguls would send Von der Ahe greetings from Asbury Park, New Jersey, where they planned to meet, the swirling rumors made it seem a distinct possibility.⁶²

Von der Ahe was in dead earnest because, like Detroit in the League, his club was simply making money for the rest of the Association, and he did not see why this should continue. As Cleveland manager Jimmy Williams, who also supported the change, figured it, the Browns lost a potential \$25,000 yearly because they drew such large crowds on the road while getting the measly sum of sixty-five dollars per game in return. Williams feared that the League might decide to lure Von der Ahe into its arms by promising him a percentage of the gate from the League’s most lucrative cities, essentially pursuing the same course it had followed with Detroit

⁶¹ “From The Hub” Mugwump, *The Sporting Life*, August 31, 1887, 2.

⁶² “The American Association” NA, *The Sporting News*, August 13, 1887, 1; “Beatin And Kinslow” NA, *The Sporting News*, August 13, 1887, 1; “The Meetings” NA, *The Sporting Life*, August 17, 1887, 1.

the year before. Both Von der Ahe and Williams, however, hoped that the Association would avoid a showdown on this issue, as in addition to St. Louis and Williams' Cleveland team, the Mets and Louisville favored the percentage plan, meaning that if Cincinnati or Baltimore came around, the Association could avert disaster the Browns would stay put.⁶³

One Baltimore sportswriter hoped his home city would see the light, describing how the team had lost money in more seasons that it had profited in its Association career so far. He admitted this was due in part to a losing team with poor overall patronage (and admitted that on occasion the club had exaggerated its attendance to hide the fact) but realized this was a good reason for the team to favor the percentage plan rather than oppose it.⁶⁴ Others hoped that by switching to the percentage plan, the Association might lure the Detroit Wolverines from the League to the Association, as all remembered how disgruntled Detroit management was when the League switched in the opposite direction for 1887. Considering the vast array of talented offensive players the Wolverines would bring with them, such a move might boost attendance in all Association cities, partly because of Detroit's quality and partly because of the novelty of seeing such great players as Dan Brouthers and Sam Thompson for the first time. As another Association supporter put it, "President Wikoff ought to be empowered to act in this matter and he ought to open negotiations with the Detroit president without further delay. . . . If the Association wants the Detroiters let the percentage system be adopted and then set the nets and the club will be landed high and dry."⁶⁵ Detroit did not jump, but the Association did achieve a more equitable financial plan.

⁶³ "Local Hits" NA, *The Sporting News*, August 13, 1887, 5.

⁶⁴ "From Baltimore" TTT, *The Sporting Life*, August 17, 1887, 2.

⁶⁵ "From St. Louis" Joe Pritchard, *The Sporting Life*, August 31, 1887, 4.

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Certainly, there was plenty of drama during the 1887-1888 off-season, but it was a different kind of drama than had been the case in years past. This time, there was no owner-imposed salary limit, at least not one that anyone paid any attention to, to anger players and cause them to hold out or complain. Many players did try to induce their clubs to pay them more, certainly, but there was no unifying rationale to their actions. The players did so because they believed their teams were in the black, and they wanted a larger share of the pie.

That does not mean that nothing important took place, however, as this off-season brought to light two important trends that grew in importance in the seasons to come. The first of these was the increased amount of money teams spent to find new talent. Just to purchase a new player, Gus Krock or Bug Holliday, for instance, in some cases teams saw their outlays rise to levels beyond what their 1886 salary cap had tried to enforce on all players. This is one of the reasons established players often held out for more cash. If a new, unproven player was worth \$2,500 to a team, why should veterans settle for less? (See chapter two for a discussion of the financial relations of major and minor league teams, and the move to extend the reserve rule to the minor leagues at this time.) The prevailing methods of acquiring new talent thus served to inflate the prices teams had to pay to all of their men.

In turn, this led to the second key trend that emerged at this time. As salaries for all players rose, this strained the resources of teams in certain locations. A club such as Boston could afford to drop \$10,000 to acquire John Clarkson. Other clubs, Louisville or Kansas City, for instance, could not even dream of doing so. The total salary a team paid to its nine was, for some ball clubs, reaching the tipping point beyond which they claimed they could not go. If

their operating expenses grew any larger, they had but two choices. They could raise ticket prices as the American Association did for 1888, and hope fans would continue patronizing their games even at the increased expense, or they could imitate Detroit and sell off their best players, hoping to make up their operating deficiencies with the money obtained thereby.

This first option was quite risky, and was not even under the control of team management. Only the leagues as a whole could approve changes in ticket prices. The second option had limited applications. Unless a club was lucky enough to find and sign cheap new talent, which was not all that cheap by this time anyway, to take the place of the veteran players they had to sell to make ends meet, its performance was going to decline at some point. In addition, the larger market teams buying these valuable players got stronger, and the talent gap between the top clubs of each league and the bottom ones grew larger. A decline in performance meant fewer cranks at the games, which meant less revenue, and that was a death spiral. A team might try the route of the St. Louis Browns and sell off its overvalued assets (Foutz and Caruthers), and invest that money in new men, but that would be an anachronistic suggestion, considering that the player evaluation models used to demonstrate that these players were overrated did not exist in 1888.

Baseball observers began to note and pay attention to these emerging issues as the 1888 season got underway. Some looked to the Millennium Plan (see chapter fourteen), or some similar scheme, to set things right. Others hoped that a winning team would draw sufficient patronage to keep up with rising costs. In any event, with hindsight, we can see that the foundations underlying the game, never completely sturdy to begin with, gained a few more cracks as the new season approached.

Chapter 15

The Brotherhood, Contracts, and the Millennium Plan, 1887-1888

For the first year of its career, the Brotherhood of Professional Base Ball Players kept a low profile. Between July 1886, when it announced its existence to the public, and July 1887, it played a marginal role in the affairs of major league baseball. It would be going a bit far to say that people forgot about it during the first months of the 1887 season, but for most observers, it was a minor blip on their radar. This began to change in August 1887. In that month, the BPBP started to involve itself in the intertwined questions of player salaries and the language in player contracts. Although it was probably inevitable that this would happen at some point in the Brotherhood's career, by taking these questions up, it raised its profile considerably. The players in major league baseball began looking at the organization in a new light, and the moguls who ran the game did as well, although the light appeared either brighter or dimmer, depending on the observer's point of view.

There were other important movements afoot in major league baseball at the same time, however. When the American Association held its yearly meeting in 1887, there were many issues to deal with, the demands and continuing membership of the St. Louis Browns in the organization foremost among them (see chapter thirteen). The Association meeting was of greater moment, however, than the mere future of the Browns as a member, critical though that issue was. In addition, in mid-August (the Association's meeting was on September 5) *The*

Sporting Life teased its readers with vague hints that the Association would discuss a measure that would revolutionize the game. The paper would not describe the measure in detail, but merely stated it would end the career of the “odious and tyrannical reserve rule” and make the percentage vs. guarantee debate, which both the National League and American Association seemed to wrestle with on a yearly basis, a moot one.¹ The Chicago *Daily Tribune* publicized the rumor as well, stating, “the last report has it that the reserve rule will be done away with at the next meeting of the American Association.”²

As rumors of such revolutionary moment swirled, Al Spalding added to the murkiness, as he often did. In an interview with the Old Brooklynite, Henry Chadwick, he claimed that if St. Louis ever joined the National League, it must do so without Sunday baseball. Spalding also said he was not in favor of an amalgamation of the two leagues, and that he wanted a return to the percentage ticket plan after trying the guarantee plan for one year in the National League. When Chadwick asked Spalding about the White Stockings and his temperance pledge, it evoked a lengthy response demonstrating the issue remained central to Spalding’s vision for the respectable future of the game. He told Chadwick, “you have no idea of the contrast afforded between the condition of things which prevailed in my club last season and this season. Why, sir, last year I was worried and tormented so much with the result of the drinking habits of our team that I felt like giving up the whole damned business. This year everything is running so smoothly that it is a real pleasure to run the club.” When asked about rumors that Silver Flint had returned to his old habit of rushing the growler, Spalding beamed with pride. “There is not a word of truth in it . . . Flint is keeping to his word like a man.” He remained steadfast in his desire to hold the line on C₂H₅OH, instructing his subordinates to “put the screws on the first

¹ “The Meetings” NA, *The Sporting Life*, August 17, 1887, 1.

² “Around the Bases” NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, September 1, 1887, 3.

man that broke the rule, even if it cost us the loss of the pennant,” but remained confident that “the men are doing splendid work, retain their self respect, and are saving money, besides making their families and relatives happy by their manly course.” Spalding’s hatred of player drinking, it seems, was one issue, maybe *the* one issue, on which he never wavered or equivocated.³

The Chicago owner also offered cautious praise of New York shortstop and Brotherhood president John Ward, probably because Ward, with his education and good personal habits, met Spalding’s profile of the type of man baseball needed more of. In addition to a rumor that Giants owner John Day was considering selling Ward to Washington, Ward and Day were also in the news because Day had demoted Ward earlier that summer, taking his team captaincy away from him. “Al has a high opinion of Ward,” Chadwick wrote, and concerning replacing Ward as team captain, “suffice it to say that he does not side with Mr. Day’s published opinion on the subject.” Spalding went so far as to say that if his own captain, Anson, should die, as a replacement “I’d want no better man than him.”⁴ (Some upheld Day in his decision, however, with one New York sportswriter praising the qualities of Buck Ewing, Ward’s replacement, writing, “Ewing has developed into quite a captain, and his generalship on the field has been excellent. He promises to develop kicking propensities of the Anson stripe, and the Giants will no longer submit to injustice with their former meekness.”⁵ Indeed, in future seasons, Ewing became so effective at persuading umpires, many baseball writers accused him of stealing games for the Giants through manipulation alone.)

³ “Chadwick’s Chat” Henry Chadwick, *The Sporting Life*, August 17, 1887, 3. The Society of Old Brooklynites was an organization featuring people who had resided in the United States for fifty years or more and had lived in Brooklyn for that entire span. Chadwick gained eligibility for the organization in 1887.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ “New York Mention” George Stackhouse, *The Sporting Life*, August 31, 1887, 3.

Interestingly, however, for such a crusader on the temperance issue, Spalding did not favor a consistent league policy regarding liquor sales on the grounds during games. While he remained adamant that Chicago would never sell beer at its ballpark, he did not oppose other clubs' right to do so if they chose. The New York Giants, for instance, did so openly despite National League official policy, so perhaps Spalding saw no point in denying what everyone already knew. He did say, however, that the National League would uphold its league policy concerning fifty-cent ticket prices. Why each team could decide its own policy on selling beer in violation of league rules but not tickets, he did not elaborate.⁶

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Meanwhile, the Brotherhood whirred into motion and tried to flex its muscles a bit. It was in August 1887 that John Ward penned his famous essay in *Lippincott's* magazine describing ball players as chattel. One can imagine the New York shortstop's chagrin, therefore, when rumors circulated that same month that his team might sell him to the Washington Nationals. Technically, it was a trade rather than a sale, as according to the rumor, the Giants would get the Washington battery of pitcher Dupee Shaw and catcher Barney Gilligan in return, but nonetheless, Ward was not pleased at the prospect. Nothing against Washington, of course, the city had a law library he could only envy, but he objected to the principle of the whole situation. Washington cranks could talk of nothing else, however, as in that city, "Ward is talked of more than President Cleveland."⁷ The New York shortstop did not go to Washington, however much the cranks there wished otherwise, and for the second time that season the

⁶ "Chadwick's Chat" Henry Chadwick, *The Sporting Life*, August 17, 1887, 3.

⁷ "Washington After Ward" WUD, *The Sporting Life*, August 17, 1887, 1.

Nationals came close to landing a big-name player, only to come up short. Washington owner Hewitt claimed that the deal would have gone down but for the outrage expressed by the New York sporting press over losing Ward, causing New York owner John Day to reconsider something manifestly unpopular with the sportswriters who wielded so much influence over public opinion.⁸

The rumors continued, however, as by October it was Brooklyn that was about to acquire New York's famed shortstop. Brooklyn owner Charles Byrne believed that the National League teams would allow Ward to clear waivers and join his club (the way the player claim system worked at the time, if a National League team wanted to release a player, all other teams from the NL had a chance to claim the player before teams in the American Association could do so, and vice versa) because they would be happy to see the president of the Brotherhood out of the National League and causing trouble somewhere else. This time, New York owner Day threw up a public wall of denial immediately. "Ward is a good player, and the New York Club cannot afford to lose his services. As regards my colleagues, they are not fearful of the threats of the Brotherhood. I would not accept a larger sum than you would be willing to give to part with my short stop."⁹

More importantly for the Brotherhood, August 1887 was also when its leadership started making a strong public case for the goals of the organization for the first time. *The Sporting Life* printed excerpts of a lengthy interview with Ward about the intentions of the Brotherhood, and Ward stated that he, on behalf of his brothers, had asked for a conference with the moguls of the National League, and that the Brotherhood wanted to work out a new form of contract. Ward

⁸ "The Washington Team" Sam, *The Sporting News*, August 27, 1887, 5; "From the Capital" WUD, *The Sporting Life*, August 31, 1887, 1. The other superstar nearly landed by the Nationals, recall, was Mike Kelly, who they tried to acquire the preceding winter.

⁹ "The Brooklyn Want Ward" NA, *New York Times*, October 9, 1887, 3.

stated his belief that “the old form has outlived its usefulness. The absolute power which it gives to the club may have been necessary at the time it was first made, but times have changed, baseball is a different game, ball players are not the same men and it is no longer necessary that the clubs should possess such an arbitrary power.” He also repeated one of the key themes of his *Lippincott’s* essay. “Ball players are at present forced to subscribe to contracts giving the clubs the most absolute control over them, and many of the grievances of the players, with which the public have become familiar through the press, are authorized and, to a certain extent, legalized by these contracts.”¹⁰

Ward then described the revisions he was seeking. One problem was that the current contract contained phrases binding the player to agree to and uphold all articles of the National League’s constitution and the National Agreement between the League and the Association. Ward, and other players, disliked these references to outside documents and wanted all responsibilities clearly stated in the contract because “it is simply impossible for a player to know what those documents are. They are changed from time to time and one cannot keep track of them at all.” He also pointed out that “if the player is willing to concede the right of reservation to the club, let that be stated in the contract, and if there are any limitations on the right, let them also be stated. Let the words of the contract itself contain the entire agreement between club and player, then any player may at any time know what to expect and what is expected of him.”¹¹

Speaking about the reserve rule, Ward reiterated his belief it was necessary in some form, but also proposed modifications to it that, incidentally, bore some similarity to the current system whereby a player became a free agent after six years of major league service time and was no

¹⁰ “League Players” NA, *The Sporting Life*, August 24, 1887, 1.

¹¹ Ibid.

longer bound to his team. “I do not think the time has yet come when base ball can do away with the reserve rule. The great majority of players still favor it, though they think it needs modification. The time during which a club may reserve a player should be limited to, say three or five years and the number of reserved should possibly be reduced.” Furthermore, instead of the current practice by which every contract was a one-year agreement with an option to renew the contract the following year, Ward said, “contracts should be signed for one, two, or five years if agreeable to both parties. A player could then take his family with him and feel secure of his stay for a definite time.”¹²

Ward concluded the interview with a statement calling for the end of his personal nemesis, the buying and selling of players. “A club has a right to sell its claim on a player under contract to it when the player also agrees to the transaction. But let it be distinctly stated that in such a case the buying club buys only the unexpired term of the contract and not the right of reservation or sale, and at the termination of the contract the player goes free upon the market.” Ward pointed out this simple clause would do away with selling players almost entirely, because there would be little value for the acquiring team without the right of reservation. “As for the selling of a player not under contract, let no such right be recognized at all. A player released from reservation to be free upon the market to all clubs, and no such thing tolerated as a release of a player from one club to another.”¹³

In a separate interview, Ward used the celebrated case of Mike Kelly to make this last point. “What did the Chicago club ever give Kelly in return for the right to control his future services? Absolutely nothing; and yet that club sells that right so cheaply acquired for \$10,000. But I repeat it never gave such a right, and any such claim by one set of men of the right of

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

property in another is as unnatural to-day as it was a quarter of a century ago.” Ward concluded his point regarding Kelly by stating, “Kelly received his salary from the Chicago Club . . . and returned every dollar of it several times over, and yet the Chicago Club makes \$10,000 for releasing Kelly from a claim for which it never paid him a dollar, but which it acquired by seizure some years ago.”¹⁴

The magnates of the National League received the Brotherhood’s request at their mid-August meeting. They did not comment about the request to the sporting press immediately, however, and “it was not divulged what action was taken upon it.”¹⁵ Ominously, they did not even send Ward any immediate answer to his request, although because of their decision to stonewall the media on the issue, no one could say for sure whether this was an act of disrespect towards the BPBP or an act to buy time to coordinate a coherent response.¹⁶

Undeterred by the lack of a response, the Brothers forged ahead. Fred Pfeffer, representative of the White Stockings, described their plans. “I don’t know what we will do, but there will undoubtedly be some action in reference to the one-sided character of the contracts with players as they now exist. We don’t want to make any row in the league, but there is a degree of justice that should be recognized in dealing with players, and we propose to find a remedy that will effect this.” He believed that, “the brotherhood is strong enough to make any demands it might choose to do, but no extreme measures will be proposed or tolerated. . . . We believe that the club officials can be induced to deal fairly with us. So far as I am personally concerned I have no complaints to make, but there are men I know who don’t get a fair show.”

¹⁴ “Base Ball Slavery” NA, *The Chicago Daily Inter Ocean*, July 16, 1887. The event of twenty-five years ago was, of course, the end of slavery in the United States via the Emancipation Proclamation and thirteenth amendment to the US Constitution.

¹⁵ “Current Topics” NA, *The Sporting Life*, August 24, 1887, 1.

¹⁶ “The Brotherhood Will Meet” NA, *The Sporting News*, August 27, 1887, 1.

He finished by stating, “I don’t believe we shall be able to do anything the effect of which will be felt immediately, but that our organization will be able to bring about needed reforms I am certain.”¹⁷

Proving that sometimes one can speak too soon, by the following day, Pfeffer did have a complaint to make. Captain Anson fined the second baseman a herculean \$100 for misplaying a ball in a game. There was some dispute over whether Pfeffer, who carried a reputation as a fine defensive player, muffed the ball intentionally (others claimed he just wanted to create a close play at first so he would have an excuse to fire the ball to Anson) just to earn the ire of his captain, as it appears the two were not on good terms at that particular moment. Pfeffer, apparently more popular with his teammates than the grizzled first baseman, wrote to team president Spalding demanding he cancel the fine, or else Pfeffer would refuse to play. As one Chicago observer put it, “I can’t say I blame him for fining Pfeffer. I saw the play he made, and it was a very bad exhibition, but Pfeffer seems to have the most friends in the matter. I don’t know how it will end. Anson will not stand a bluff.”¹⁸ Spalding declined to take sides in public, but did decide to force both men to accept an armistice so that Pfeffer would continue to take the field with the team. He then declared his intent to review the matter at a more appropriate time.¹⁹ Pfeffer did not, however, take his grievance to the Brotherhood at its meeting, despite rumors to the contrary.²⁰

The BPBP held their meeting on August 28. The delegates in attendance were Fred Pfeffer of Chicago, Arthur Irwin from Philadelphia, Cliff Carroll from Washington, Mert Hackett representing Indianapolis, Ned Hanlon on behalf of Detroit, Ward and Tim Keefe from

¹⁷ “Notes Of The Game” NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, August 28, 1887, 11.

¹⁸ “Brought A Black Cloud” NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, August 29, 1887, 2.

¹⁹ “The Old White Stockings” Eli, *The Sporting News*, September 3, 1887, 1.

²⁰ “New York Mention” George Stackhouse, *The Sporting Life*, September 7, 1887, 4.

New York, Abner Dalrymple of Pittsburgh, and Jack Burdock and Robert Hackett from Boston. They did indeed draw up a new contract “which is not so slavish” as the existing one, and decided to present it to the National League’s owners at the League’s next meeting, with the hope that that body would acknowledge the fair-mindedness of their reforms. As men such as Ward had said all along, they made no move against the reserve rule at this meeting. “Many people thought that the players would attack the reserve rule and tear it to pieces, but they did not. It was the sentiment of all the players that the reserve rule should stand. They say that it might be improved with a few minor changes, but that the rule, in the main, is in the interest of base-ball and the players.” In addition to asking concessions on the language of player contracts, the Brotherhood also decided to condemn the practice of selling players. Finally, they stated that if a club wanted to release a player, the release should free the player from all obligations and the player should be able to go wherever he wanted to; likewise in the case where a player’s team disbands.²¹

They offered the League something in return, stating, “the brotherhood will give the league all the help it can in fighting drunkenness among players, and resolutions will be submitted to the league suggesting that a player who drinks shall be fined \$25 for the first offense, \$50 for the second, and \$100 for the third. Then if the player has no intelligence left the fourth offense shall be punished with suspension and the blacklist.”²² This pronouncement probably had a few goals. First, by repudiating the drunken element, the BPBP could earn respect and support from the general sporting public. This could be quite valuable. The sporting public could hurt teams where it counted most, in the pocketbook, by withholding their patronage and not going to games. Having their support was no small matter, and earning their

²¹ “Reforms Proposed by the Brotherhood” NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, August 29, 1887, 2.

²² Ibid.

trust meant counteracting stories like what happened on August 24, when a minor league player's companion in Eau Claire, Wisconsin, broke into a brothel, intimidated the owner with his firearm, trashed the furniture, jumped out a window, pistol-whipped another man, and then fled from the authorities who tried to arrest him.²³

The same goal, improving the organization's public image, held for relations with the sporting press. Because they were the only means for disseminating information to the public in the Gilded Age, having the newspapers on your side, or at least neutral, was very important. In addition, the players knew perfectly well that Al Spalding cut the largest figure in the National League during meetings, and they also knew how much he abhorred drinking, both for the damage it did to his own team, and to the game's image in general. Getting his support for, or at least toleration and acknowledgment of, their brotherhood might go a long ways towards getting other owners to fall in line. The players still had no idea how the League might respond, however, and so they finished by stating that should the League refuse to treat with them, they would work out the necessary reforms on their own. The meeting concluded after appointing a committee consisting of Ward, Irwin, and Hanlon to carry forward the Brotherhood's resolutions and meet with ownership on the BPBP's behalf.²⁴

It appears this course met with approval from League players. At the same time the Brotherhood held its meeting, the majority of the Pittsburgh club voted to join. The Brotherhood had not had the chance to organize the Pittsburgh players, other than Abner Dalrymple who had

²³ "Another Player on a Rampage" NA, *The Sporting Life*, August 31, 1887, 1,

²⁴ "Reforms Proposed by the Brotherhood" NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, August 29, 1887, 2; "Base Ball" NA, *Galveston Daily News*, August 30, 1887, 6; "The Players Up In Arms" NA, *The Sporting News*, September 3, 1887, 1.

come to Pittsburgh from Chicago, as the team had been a member of the American Association until 1887, but now its players joined the fold.²⁵

The League, meanwhile, continued to debate the temperance question, and how best to discipline recalcitrant drinkers. Part of the problem was their lack of cooperation on what to do. All too often, when one club grew tired of the shenanigans of a lushing player, another club would step in and offer money for the release of the wayward player, hoping they would have better luck with him. This did not exactly encourage drinking or reward the player directly, but it did not encourage them to shape up, either. The only real penalty, as things stood at the moment, came when a player had let down so many teams time and again, like Sadie Houck, Charlie Sweeney, or Billy Taylor, that no one was willing to take a chance on them any longer.

The current lack of procedure also offered no solution of what to do with the likes of Jim McCormick or Mike Kelly, players who imbibed too frequently but had enough talent that someone would always want them, regardless. As things stood in August, teams could only fine them or deal with them in some other way, however the club's manager thought best. As a result, the League's magnates considered putting a temperance clause into the language of player contracts for 1888. The plan the owners discussed included fining the player through the league office, rather than through the individual teams, so the response would have greater uniformity than in the past. They also considered coming down on repeat offenders with suspensions, with the other owners barred from asking to purchase any player under suspension. "This it is thought will effectually weed out the drinking element or make them abandon the habit entirely for six months in the year."²⁶

²⁵ "Joined The Order" NA, *The Sporting Life*, August 31, 1887, 1.

²⁶ "Temperance In Base Ball" NA, *The Sporting Life*, August 31, 1887, 1.

This indicates that, under the right circumstances, there was ground for cooperation between the players and owners. The players offered help in weeding out alcoholism, which all owners favored. The moguls could reciprocate by giving a little on the issue of player releases, player sales, and the language used in contracts. The question was, of course, would the owners meet with the players? Doing so would advance them towards one of their most cherished goals. The risk, however, from ownership's point of view, was that if the players negotiated concessions here, they might want more in the future, and the Brotherhood might grow bolder in the process. This idea, of giving any voice to labor, was anathema to many capitalists in Gilded Age America, so no one could say for sure how the owners might respond.

The potential for compromise existed alongside the potential for conflict, and the sporting press realized the fact. One writer, with either inside knowledge or a fair amount of prescience, offered that, concerning the contract question, "suppose the directors of the League refused to grant it. Suppose, further, that the players thereupon should form a co-operative league of their own, apportion their own players and their territory, and begin next season on their own hook?" While conceding, "very likely nothing of the sort will be attempted so soon," the author also believed "such a thing is by no means impossible, and in case no change is made in the present constitution of the League and the Association it is hardly improbable. Base ball is a new business, comparatively—less than twenty years old—and its principles are not yet thoroughly determined." In the end, the writer sided with the players on the contract question, writing, "Pecuniarily, it is a tremendous success, but the relations between employers and employees are not yet settled, and are not likely to be until they are put upon a fairer basis than the present one."²⁷

²⁷ "It's In The Air" NA, *The Sporting Life*, August 31, 1887, 1.

Similarly, New York sportswriter George Stackhouse wrote regarding the Brotherhood, “if the members continue in their present manly course, the organization will be a benefit to base ball as well as the players. The meeting was a quiet and orderly one, and if some of the League moguls had heard some of the speeches made they would have at once become convinced that the brains of base ball are not all incased in the skulls of the directors.” After speaking with Ward, Stackhouse agreed that the organization was gaining strength, and warned that its suggestions of today might become its demands of tomorrow, should baseball’s capitalists fail to take heed.²⁸

The Brothers also discussed the possibility of organizing teams from the American Association and adding them to their organization. When asked about the possibility, president Ward stated,

we had it about fixed for a man to go ahead and do the work. He was a member of the Pittsburg Club. Just at that time Pittsburg came into the League, and that fact knocked us out. There are several men who are fully competent to organize the movement, and, since the Association players are with us in the matter of breaking up the old contract, I expect to see a brotherhood organized shortly. Comiskey, Stovey, Burns, Fennelly and a dozen others could be mentioned who could get the matter in shape. Of course we would help them.²⁹

When asked about his thoughts on the Brotherhood’s request, Al Spalding said he would approve of meeting their representatives because “it would enable club officials and directors to explain many points in connection with the question which Ward brings up which I think they do not fully understand. I shall always be ready and willing to discuss any questions bearing on the relations between the clubs and their players, if such discussion will make our relations any more satisfactory.”³⁰ When questioned on specifics, however, such as when to meet, his personal

²⁸ “New York Mention” George Stackhouse, *The Sporting Life*, September 7, 1887, 4.

²⁹ “The Association Players” NA, *The Sporting Life*, September 7, 1887, 4.

³⁰ “From Chicago” Harry Palmer, *The Sporting Life*, August 31, 1887, 2.

views on the organization and its objectives, and the like, Spalding returned to the noncommittal stance of his capitalist brethren, telling Chicago sportswriter Harry Palmer, “why discuss Christmas presents during the ice cream season?”³¹

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When the time came for the Association’s owners to hold their confab, somewhat unexpectedly, harmony reigned. The big question was whether the Association should keep their present revenue distribution plan of a simple guarantee to the visiting team, or switch over to a percentage plan whereby the visitors received a variable piece of the gate depending on that days’ attendance. Prior to the actual meeting, Von der Ahe met with his chief opponent on the percentage or guarantee question, Brooklyn owner Byrne, and the two smoothed out most of their differences over beers. Byrne agreed to cast his vote for the percentage plan in exchange for Von der Ahe’s help on the Sunday baseball question in Brooklyn.³² When the Association’s magnates took up the question at the actual meeting, there was a robust debate on what to do, and the owners finally agreed on a hybrid plan. The new plan called for a guarantee of \$130 to all visitors for every game, and then for any money realized on top of \$130 from ticket sales, the visitors got thirty percent.³³ It also provided visitors receive the same number of complimentary free tickets to distribute as the home club, and that each club could designate one day each week when ladies received free admission to the grounds, weekends excepted.³⁴

³¹ “From Chicago” Harry Palmer, *The Sporting Life*, September 7, 1887, 3.

³² “Everything Is Now Lovely” NA, *The Sporting News*, September 3, 1887, 1.

³³ “Our Flag Is Still There” Pete, *The Sporting News*, September 10, 1887, 1.

³⁴ “The Association Meeting” NA, *The Sporting Life*, September 14, 1887, 1.

Perhaps more importantly, it was at the Association's meeting that *The Sporting Life's* editor, Francis Richter, unveiled his proposal to revolutionize the business of baseball. Leading with an editorial titled, "The Millenium," Richter's Millenium Plan made just about every promise conceivable. As the paper proclaimed, the plan would accomplish all of the following:

- Players would no longer desert their clubs.
- There would be peace between all professional leagues, and the leagues need no longer fear teams disbanding in the middle of a season.
- Without teams disbanding, leagues need not trouble with filling vacancies in the off-season.
- It solved the percentage or guarantee question on distributing ticket revenue.
- All clubs, from the major leagues to the newest minor league, would profit.
- The plan would equalize the talent within each league to the point that no teams would hopelessly drop out of the pennant race until late in the season.
- The plan would equalize talent across each season, so that a team finishing at the bottom of a league one year had the same chance to contend the next season as the team finishing at the top.
- An absolute salary rule scaled to the capacity of each league, with player salaries equalized according to a scale.
- Eliminating the salary advances and bonuses paid to players in order to skirt the much-abused salary limit issue.
- Maintaining or slightly improving player salaries while saving each club one-third of their present costs, allowing teams to more accurately predict their costs for the season.
- Better discipline of the players without the arbitrary methods currently employed.

- Eliminating record playing. (Record playing was the Gilded Age term for players who refused to take difficult chances just for the sake of avoiding errors on defense and improving their fielding statistics.)
- It would eliminate the adversarial relationship between labor and capital, thus rendering such organizations as the BPBP unnecessary.
- The plan would simplify the National Agreement.

While stating that readers might, at first reading, proclaim the plan “impossible, Quixotic, chimerical,” Richter nonetheless claimed that he had already shown the scheme to many baseball men, including team owners in the American Association, and that they favored the idea. Not indulging in modesty, he finished his first essay on the Millennium Plan by writing,

it is grand in conception, comprehensive in scope and tremendous in wide-reaching ramifications; and yet withal it is so simple and direct in action, so easy of application and so harmonious in detail that once adopted the entire base ball world . . . will wonder why nobody ever thought of such a grand yet simple plan before, to the saving of years of disaster, failure, labor, worry, anxiety and enormous aggregate financial losses.³⁵

It took an agonizingly long time, but Richter and *The Sporting Life* finally got around to publishing all the details of the Millennium Plan in early December. Richter began by describing the existing problems with the National Agreement. The main thrust of his argument was that the agreement should include all baseball leagues in America, not just the two major leagues and the handful of minor league organizations they saw fit to admit. Although he probably exaggerated to some extent, he gave several sound reasons why the existing agreement was ineffective. “The two big leagues have tried to cover the ground and monopolize authority, and

³⁵ “The Millenium” Francis Richter, *The Sporting Life*, September 7, 1887, 1. The author realizes that the word millennium is spelled incorrectly, but that is how *The Sporting Life* spelled it in their publication, so I will follow their spelling whenever they refer to their plan.

failed. They have monopolized the power of reserve and yet receive no benefits therefrom, except a yearly increase of salaries and expenses, which could hardly be higher if there were no reserve at all.” Not only that, “they have destroyed the benefit of the reserve rule; they have appropriated to themselves the fruits of the minor leagues’ labors, and yet have paid more for it in the long run than would have been the case under fairer methods.” Regarding the relationship with the players, “they have essayed to rule their players as absolutely as they would have liked to control the market, with the result that they have driven them into a counter-organization, and finally they have forced other organizations into such antagonistic positions that necessary control of the players’ market has been made impossible.” Through his plan, Richter advised baseball’s leaders to “make common cause with the minor leagues, treat them upon a footing of equality, pool issues, work together under the same laws; in short organize upon *equal*, not *qualified*, basis a union of all for offensive and defensive purposes.”³⁶

The first step towards improving the situation, in Richter’s eyes, was extending the reserve rule to all minor league organizations. With a fair degree of accuracy, he described the present situation without the minor league reservation rule, and demonstrated how his plan would help check the evils of the present system. He believed those evils included overpaid players, which led to an undisciplined labor force, which injured the permanency of the sport. “The fact that players can get as much salary in a minor league, under less severe discipline and without reservation, as they can in a big league, where the work is continuously exacting and reservation from year to year certain, is certainly not calculated to easily land young players in big leagues or make old players in big leagues anxious to retain their places therein.” Richter recounted several instances from 1887 where “players were made dissatisfied or indifferent by

³⁶ “The Millenium” Francis Richter, *The Sporting Life*, December 7, 1887, 1.

communications from old confreres who had gone into minor leagues descriptive of the ‘very soft snaps’ they were enjoying; and is further illustrated at the present time when we see so many players who give every indication of future greatness resolutely refusing the most flattering offers from big clubs.” They refused these offers because in the minor leagues “the pay is nearly equal, and their work is less likely to be overshadowed.”³⁷

Richter did not approve of this practice of the minor leagues offering remuneration nearly equal to that of major league teams, but admitted the clubs had little choice. “Of course, the minor leagues should not pay these excessive salaries so damaging to themselves and the entire business, but they cannot help themselves so long as they are driven into competition season after season with the big leagues.” The major leagues were at fault here because they “force salaries up by breaking up the minor clubs, each season taking therefrom more players than they actually need, outbidding each other, and compelling the minor leagues in sheer self-defense to pay up to the standard set by the higher leagues, as they must have players, and pretty good ones at that, no matter what the cost.”³⁸ This in turn hurt the major leagues because, having to pay inflated salaries to entice minor league players into the major leagues, existing major league players became jealous of these high salaries paid to unproven talent, and logically enough asked for even higher pay for proven players such as themselves.

It seems Richter felt that as long as the market for players was even moderately free, and players could play off major league teams against minor league ones offering nearly equal compensation, competition between the various teams injured the sport. It did so by driving down profits and making it less likely that capitalists would invest in baseball in the first place. He believed that this pushed the best men out of the game, leaving room for lesser ones who

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

frequently made mistakes. This was in some measure true, but interestingly, it was also disturbingly elitist and social Darwinian at the same time. As he wrote about the game in general, “there should be a very large margin of profit, otherwise it cannot command the attention and ability of the best class of business men, who would otherwise gain nothing, either socially or commercially, by connection with base ball. The more money there is in it the higher the class of people in command and the stronger the guarantee of absolutely honest conduct of the game.” In Richter’s view, profits must be guaranteed, or nearly so, otherwise the best men, with their honesty, would not involve themselves. He also implied that the people at the top of the business world were more honest and capable than others, rather than having superior opportunities or more wealth to begin with, a nod to the Horatio Alger myth, and that explained why they held such a lofty position. Yet the statement contradicted itself. If these business leaders really had risen to the top solely based on their talent and honesty, why did they need a virtual guarantee in order to entice them into the game? If they were on top because of their talent, should not their talent as businessmen allow them to succeed where lesser mortals failed, if success was possible at all?

There were other interesting economic implications in Richter’s statements. A true capitalist was supposed to believe that competition was beneficial, because the need for greater efficiency would drive down costs. Whoever provided the best product at the least cost should be most successful, other things being equal. Yet baseball seemed to invalidate this principle, at least in part. In baseball, competition between the clubs, major and minor league, over the best players was ruining things, not improving them. In theory, competition between the leagues should also be for the general good, by weeding out the less competent and allowing the better organizations to survive. It was a recognized fact, however, generally acknowledged even by

many owners, that teams in any given league were interdependent. The New York Giants were better off financially if the Washington Nationals fielded a competitive club, because a competitive club would draw more spectators in New York than a noncompetitive club would. The same was true in any league, and even between the major and minor leagues. The major leagues needed the minor leagues to have some measure of success and stability in order to produce the talented players the major leagues would need in the future.

Therefore, this aspect of the Millennium Plan was both capitalist and non-capitalist at the same time. Or, perhaps more accurately, Richter believed that ownership of baseball must be based on his (however flawed) conception of enticing leading capitalists to involve themselves in the game. Within the game itself, however, competition and free market principles must be limited in order for the game to be most successful. Summing up his suggestions regarding the minor leagues, he wanted to make them more stable, more profitable, and thus an asset to both the major leagues and baseball in general. As he put it, “let the minor leagues make a regular, steady, profitable business of base ball, instead of an intermittent fever, as now, and they will soon pass into the hands of responsible, practical men, who will work hand in hand with the big leagues, and in brief time control the entire game and country so thoroughly . . . that nearly all the evils now afflicting and threatening the game will be overcome.”³⁹

What would the players get from this change? Richter believed it would give more job security to minor league players by making minor leagues more stable, although at the expense of the better salaries they earned at present, and that it would encourage them to practice and further hone their craft before reaching the major leagues. He hoped to cure the perceived evil of teams signing young blood to fat deals, but then simply carrying the young blood as dead weight

³⁹ “The Millenium” Francis Richter, *The Sporting Life*, December 7, 1887, 2.

on their rosters. If a team gave the young player a few opportunities, but the player did not perform up to expectations in these limited trials, the team would often let him go, thus realizing no return on its investment. Richter did not understand, or at least did not state in print, that teams signed young players voluntarily. In a free market, firms weigh the risk of an investment before entering into it. They only proceed if they think the benefits justify the risks. Major league baseball teams did the same when signing unproven players. It is true that they had to get players from somewhere, but there was always the possibility to purchase them from other clubs, or sign veteran minor league players rather than young bloods if a club sought to mitigate its risk and engage in less chancy methods of running its organization.⁴⁰

Once baseball took this first step in the Millennium Plan, the next issue was to make sure that all clubs had a voice on the Arbitration Committee. This committee, composed at present of three owners from major league baseball, should expand and include representatives from the minor leagues. "It would be well to remember that all the baseball brains is not confined to the major leagues, and that with an infusion of intelligent minor league blood new ideas may develop and such valuable assistance given the present able guardians that much good may accrue to the National game."⁴¹

One of the most radical aspects of the Millennium Plan was its call for a draft each year. Under the plan, following each season the major league teams would be able to draft talent from the minor leagues as a means of replenishing their talent base. The advantages seemed plentiful, from the business standpoint. A draft would obviate the need for bidding wars over minor league players, because teams would have no one against whom to bid. The plan further diminished competition between the clubs by stipulating that the National League and American

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

Association would select the talent pool jointly, rather than the individual teams just picking whatever man looked good to them. Richter wanted to leave the exact means up to the major league teams to work out, writing,

All major clubs could designate to the presidents of their respective organizations what players they would like. This list could be compared by the League and Association, and a joint committee appointed to draft and apportion; or the League and Association could agree upon the players to be drafted within the limit and apportion them by lot; or the players could, after draft, be made a matter of trade between these clubs. Any of these methods could, with some simplification, be made to answer, the main purpose being to get the desirable players at comparatively little cost.⁴²

By limiting the number of players any particular minor league team could lose in a given season to a number between two and four, the plan struck a balance between maintaining the competition level in the minor leagues (better teams would be more likely to lose valuable men, thus equalizing the playing field with less talented ones after each season) but still allowing minor league teams to keep most of their roster intact from one season to the next, providing the much-needed stability that all minor leagues sought.

Minor leagues might approve of this part of the plan, first, because they would receive compensation for drafted players. Richter suggested either a cash payment or, in lieu of cash, the drafting team supply one of its own players it deemed expendable. The money, however, did not go to the team that lost the individual player, but to the minor league, which would then redistribute the money amongst league members, further equalizing the resources and level of competition within the league. The minor leagues would also see more stability, increased competition, and more predictable player turnover, which presumably added up to greater prosperity and permanency.⁴³

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

More radical still was the plan's proposal that the leagues, rather than individual teams, would reserve all the players. Once again, Richter meant this part of the plan to remedy several evils. No longer would clubs change leagues, or threaten to do so unless their fellow owners granted them certain concessions, because they would have no players to take with them.

Richter also believed "such reservation would prevent such deals as in the past broke up the Providence, Buffalo, St. Louis, Cleveland, and Metropolitan clubs, would in short, prevent one club from buying out another piecemeal, for the sake of a few players, leaving the gutted club to eke out a miserable existence or drop out altogether to the great detriment of its fellow clubs."⁴⁴

All of this was a mere prelude, however, to the most controversial part of the plan, the method of equalizing the playing strength of the major league clubs. The plan called for each team to reserve one player, its captain, provided that person was not a pitcher or catcher. Next, "the club presidents, assisted by two, three or four practical managers could, as a committee, sort out all the players under reserve by the league, except the already selected captains, into their respective positions, and then by comparison of records and habits, and personal knowledge of ability, grade them as nearly equally as human skill and judgment could do it." Each league would determine thereby the eight best pitchers, catchers, shortstops, and so on for each position on the field. Once properly ordered, the clubs would draw by lot for the right to choose which men they wanted at any given position. Finally, there could be no transfer of players between teams after the initial draft. The entire intent was the equalization of talent throughout the league. Richter saw the following advantages in such a scheme:

- It would end the controversial buying and selling of players.

⁴⁴ Ibid. I have described the stories of the Buffalo, St. Louis, and Metropolitan clubs in other parts of this dissertation.

- All teams, rich, poor, or in between, would have an equal chance at top players.
- The teams in the largest markets, marshalling the greatest financial resources, would not derive any advantages in acquiring players from that financial strength.
- Because the talent within the league would be much more even, all of the pennant races would be competitive, and the days of teams waving their chances at a pennant goodbye in June or July would be over.
- Keeping all teams in the pennant race longer would increase patronage at games, as fans would keep their excitement much deeper into the season, and turn out in greater numbers to see competitive games as opposed to lopsided or meaningless ones.
- The membership of the teams would never grow stale, as each year fans would have a mostly new corps of players to cheer.
- The last place team of one season stood a chance at becoming a champion the next, so that several seasons of lackluster play could not demoralize teams and their fans.
- Fans could then judge the true talents of captains and managers, because each would have equal material to work with each season.
- There would no longer be any temptations for players to play poorly on purpose, just to anger their teams into releasing them.
- There would be no reason for teams to pay players advance money or bonuses any more, because they would not know who their players would be until the season was about to begin.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Ibid.

Each team would, by this process, end up with a roster of thirteen players. This would leave a handful of players without a team for the next season, however. Therefore, the Millennium Plan also called for each team to field a reserve team that would consist of a combination of marginal major league players and top minor league talent, paid at the going rate of the highest-level minor league teams. These teams would play each other, as well as exhibition games when the opportunity offered, and thereby pay for themselves, or nearly so. Furthermore, these reserve clubs would supply replacements to their parent teams in the case of injury, and give teams an ax to hold over the heads of players who sulked, quarreled with management, lost their talent due to age, and so forth.⁴⁶

Grading the players in order to assign them each year also gave Richter the means to cure what, in his eyes, was the most important threat to baseball—rising salaries. “Here we touch the very marrow of the base ball question and apply the knife to the cancer that will surely eat the life out of base ball unless checked.” His plan would standardize player salaries based on the position of the player, with pitchers and catchers getting the highest pay due to the greater risk and physical toll that came with playing those positions. Each league, major and minor, could scale its salaries to its level of revenue, thus preventing salaries from racing ahead of league income.⁴⁷

This leads to the final aspect of the plan, the one designed to prevent players from feeling demeaned by, and resenting, the whole concept of a position-based salary cap. Richter realized that a salary cap would certainly result in a loss of salary for the better players. In addition, once a player was in the major leagues, but had no hope of a higher salary in the future, there might be a need for motivation, other than pride and commitment to one’s teammates, to get players to

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

strive for continued improvement. This is where the unruly and spoiled children must be made to do what management thought was in their best interests. Because of the presence of reserve teams, and the threat of demotion they presented, “therefore a player, even if disposed to resent what he may in his own unreasoning way consider an injustice—limiting salary—could not afford to let down in his work, apart from the fact that with every year new blood would come up to crowd him out unless he could hold his own.”⁴⁸

Since players obviously would sulk over these limits and might be reluctant to give their best when there was no hope of increased personal gain, the Millennium Plan must account for this as well. Therefore, Richter advised giving players of the championship team twenty percent above their regular salary as a bonus, players of the second place team fifteen percent, the members of the third place team ten percent, and the players of the fourth place team an extra five percent. This would also correct for the rare occurrences when one or two teams did end up being greatly superior to the competition, because the players on other clubs would still have a bonus to strive for even if the championship was beyond their reach. Another interesting feature of this part of the plan was to encourage team discipline. Richter rightly surmised that if one or two players on a contending club began lushing, and threatened to hurt the team with their actions, the other members of the club, seeing their bonuses in jeopardy, no doubt would call out their brethren in short order. This would make fines from management less necessary, as players would tend to police themselves better, and thereby reduce friction between the players and management.⁴⁹

Interestingly, this last was the one piece of the plan (besides extending the reserve rule to the minor leagues, which baseball’s owners considered even before the Millennium Plan went

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

public) actually implemented by the American Association, although in an extremely diluted way. Prior to the 1888 championship season, the Association passed a measure providing \$1,000 in bonus money (from the Association's guarantee fund) to the first place club, \$750 to the second place finisher, and \$500 to the organization finishing third in the race in 1888. At first, it was not clear whether this bonus money went to the teams finishing in each position, or the players on those teams, and so no one was sure exactly how useful the measure would be.⁵⁰ It seems the money went to the club rather than the players, however, based on Cincinnati president Sterns' announcement to his players in March that, should they win the championship, he would divide the boodle amongst his men, implying that the funds were his to distribute in the first place. O.P. Caylor confirmed this distribution of the money as well.⁵¹ Brooklyn owner Charles Byrne, however, tried to reassure the baseball world that the players were supposed to get the bonus money all along, telling observers, "every one at the meeting knew that this was just what the rule was intended for. We could not make the rule read that way for many reasons, but it was clearly understood that it was to be done. The rule was wholly for the benefit of the players."⁵² Whatever Byrne said, observers should have known better than to take it at face value. When the St. Louis Browns won the Association pennant again in 1888, the players saw nary a penny of the bonus money.⁵³

There was also provision in the Millennium Plan for players who did not want to cooperate with the grading and distribution scheme. Any player who did not agree to the reapportionment plan would not be graded, and therefore not assigned to a team. Since his league still

⁵⁰ "The Association" NA, *The Sporting Life*, March 14, 1888, 2; "Mulford's Missive" Ren Mulford, Jr., *The Sporting Life*, March 14, 1888, 2.

⁵¹ "Base-Ball Notes" NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, March 21, 1888, 7; "Caylor's Comment" O.P. Caylor, *The Sporting Life*, March 21, 1888, 3.

⁵² "Reads One Way and Means Another" NA, *The Sporting Life*, March 28, 1888, 1.

⁵³ "Take It As It Stands" NA, *The Sporting Life*, December 5, 1888, 2.

reserved him, however, and all minor leagues were part of the Millennium Plan, there would be no place for the player to go, if he did not like the terms offered by his league.⁵⁴

The plan, taken in total, clearly leaned towards management and sought to prevent players from realizing what their services were worth in a free market. Despite the plan's claims that players would benefit from more stability in the minor leagues, which meant more successful minor league teams, which meant more jobs playing baseball, players might still chafe at the restrictions imposed by the plan. Likewise, even though the plan promised a more merit-based method of promotion to the major leagues than existed at present, Richter felt the need to sweeten the pot a little, to throw the players a bone, as it were. He pointed out that because the players were reserved to the league, rather than individual teams, it would be impossible for teams to arbitrarily fine their men, lay them off without cause, or threaten to release them for poor play, because the clubs would no longer have the rights to their individual players. Nor would teams any longer pay less to marginal players because they had to pay more to their top ones just to keep them happy. For the rare instances when controversy arose, the plan called for a Committee on Grievances, where the players would have representation.⁵⁵

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It seems important to lay out the provisions of the Millennium Plan in detail, partly because it would be such a radical break with established baseball practices in the mid-1880s. It was also at odds with the prevailing business and social attitudes of the United States in this era. The notion of a group of competitors working together for the mutual gain of the group must

⁵⁴ "The Millenium" Francis Richter, *The Sporting Life*, December 7, 1887, 2.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

have astonished many at the time. Favoring cooperation over competition as the means of establishing a prosperous business ranked among the vilest of heresies in an era featuring the likes of John D. Rockefeller and Andrew Carnegie. Any social Darwinists who also followed baseball must have been apoplectic.

In addition, the plan would necessitate a radical reconfiguration of the baseball business. It was certainly a more orderly and systematic way of doing things than baseball had at the time. The tradeoff for the order and system was that each individual team would have to give up a bit of its independence of action. It would probably hurt the wealthier teams more than smaller market ones, as their financial strength would be of less advantage than at present. Because the owners of those wealthy teams wielded the greatest influence in league meetings, persuading them was the most important obstacle to adoption.

In any event, such was Richter's plan. The question whether it would gain traction, and whether anyone in baseball would have the nerve to try it. The paper printed some of its responses in the next issue, claiming "an immense number" of positive responses against "not half a dozen" negative ones. The Pittsburg *Times* found the plan "somewhat Utopian" but saw many favorable features. It disliked the pay-for-position scheme, writing, "it is for the man that the price is given, and not for the position," but liked the incentives provided by giving players a salary bonus based on their club's position in the standings at the end of the championship season.

The Philadelphia *Sunday News* declined to discuss the minutiae of the plan, but opined, "I do not expect that anything like it will be adopted for several seasons to come, but parts of it must be adopted in the near future. Some such scheme for equalization must be taken up soon."

The *Sunday News*' rival paper, the Philadelphia *North American*, wrote, "perhaps one or two of

the most sweeping changes—equalization of the playing strength and the inviolable salary limit, for instance—would not stand the test of practice, but regarded as a whole the Millenium Plan is the most complete and ablest ever advanced for the perpetuation of the greatest field game yet invented.” Apparently popular amongst its Philadelphia brethren (*The Sporting Life*’s home office was in that city), the Philadelphia Sunday *Item* wrote, “it is a good thing, and the *Item*, knowing a good thing when it sees it, has no hesitation in endorsing it.” Meanwhile, the Pittsburg *Chronicle* decided, “it is not at all likely to meet with unanimous approval, but in many of its features it has much to commend it and will afford food for much argument during the next month or two.” Like-minded, the Cincinnati *Times-Star* decided, “Rome was not built in a day, nor will the Millenium Plan arrive this year.” However, “as each season brings its tremendous load of increased expenses, the plan will be a beacon of light, showing managers the way to escape from threatened ruin. The project appears just a day before the President’s message, and, it is safe to say, will create much more of a furor in the base ball world than Grover Cleveland’s little document of 22,000 words will do.”⁵⁶

A few other papers were lukewarm in their responses. The Philadelphia *Times* thought the plan exceedingly complex in implementation, given how many changes to accepted practices it entailed, and struggled to see how the plan served the best interests of the players in the ways advertised. The Toronto *World* thought, “the proposed equalization of playing strength is so revolutionary of existing methods, that it is doubtful if it will meet with favor.” The Philadelphia *Record* agreed with the *World* on this issue, stating, “the most objectionable feature about it is the annual shifting about of players, which would be disagreeable not only to the men themselves, but to the public as well.” These were minority opinions, however, or at least a

⁵⁶ “That Plan” NA, *The Sporting Life*, December 14, 1887, 2.

minority of those published in the paper (although it is easy to see why it might hesitate to print items condemning its own plan) as most responses, like that of the New Orleans *Daily States*, agreed with the views already stated. The *Daily States* believed “there are some faults in the Millenium scheme, but on the whole it approaches nearer perfection than any plan it has been the pleasure of the *States* to read of.”⁵⁷

The correspondents for *The Sporting Life* also chimed in with their views and interviews, and while once again remembering the caveat that they were unlikely to bite the hand that fed them, they too heaped praise on the idea, for the most part. None seemed more pleased, and none supported the scheme with greater fervor in the years to come, than Baltimore writer Albert Mott, who urged the immediate adoption of the plan for the 1888 season and continued urging its adoption on an almost weekly basis in his letters for months thereafter. Louisville’s correspondent interviewed team president Zach Phelps, who approved of the idea of reserve teams and offering players incentives based on their position in the final league standings. As any team president would do, of course he approved of any plan that would limit player salaries.⁵⁸

Over in Beantown, “Mugwump” decided “everyone must admit the cleverness of the whole plan in all its details, even though they may think the Millenium will actually come before it is carried out.” He recognized, however, that the players might not approve, especially concerning the part of the plan that would equalize the clubs by redistributing the players each year. The constant movement and relocation of a player’s home each season, with no monetary compensation for the trouble, might be hard for the players to stomach. Even the miserly Arthur

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ “Cogent Reasons, TTT, *The Sporting Life*, December 14, 1887, 2; “From The Falls City” JA, *The Sporting Life*, December 14, 1887, 2.

Soden, owner of the Beaneaters and never one to be overly concerned about player welfare, agreed on that point, stating, “it would not be right to make those who have homes and associations in one city, break off all their ties and go off where they have no friends, to begin again.” Interestingly, Soden did think that the financial motivations for finishing higher in the standings were a wise move, and offered some suggestions about how to regulate salaries, as he believed only a committee of men from outside the game might be trusted to grade the players impartially.⁵⁹

Harry Palmer “heartily endorsed” the plan from Chicago, although he limited his commentary because “my enthusiasm would carry me away beyond the limit of space.”⁶⁰ Bob Larnier, writing from the nation’s capital, believed the plan, “if honestly and faithfully carried out, would unquestionably redound to the interest of base ball.” However, Larnier was concerned that when it came to getting team owners to buy in, “it will be a difficult matter to convince these gentlemen, who have gone down deep in their pockets to secure a strong base ball team, that it will be to their interest in the end to throw the material they have been accumulating for years into a general pool and draw out in return whatever Dame Fortune decides they shall receive.” Larnier was, therefore, doubtful that the major leagues would actually try out the plan.⁶¹

While Larnier was certainly onto something with his commentary, out of all the paper’s correspondents, O.P. Caylor’s and Frank Brunell’s musings regarding the plan probably hit nearest the mark. While many of their contemporaries seemed to believe, deep down, that the game’s leaders really did have the good of the game at heart, rather than their own personal

⁵⁹ “Hub Happening” Mugwump, *The Sporting Life*, December 14, 1887, 3.

⁶⁰ “Chicago Comment” Harry Palmer, *The Sporting Life*, December 14, 1887, 5.

⁶¹ “From The Capital” Bob Larnier, *The Sporting Life*, December 14, 1887, 5.

interests, these two men were much more perceptive of what made businessmen tick in the Gilded Age. Caylor wrote,

We hear constantly of a millenium idea which demands that one club or a few clubs, or a League or Association of clubs shall do something for the general good of the whole or sacrifice some individual advantage that general good may come to the game. Those are millenium theories, but have any one of them ever been practiced? Has anybody ever heard of a club or a body of clubs which has sacrificed some advantage, that good might come in a shower. . . . I have been a close observer of base ball for twelve years and I have yet to discover the first instance of a sacrificing spirit in any base ball club official exercised for the general good of the game. If any of your readers can think of some act of any 'magnate' which might in his charitable mind smell a little milleniumish, I wish he would specify it in *The Sporting Life*, so that I may hold an autopsy.

None did. Caylor went on to add that, while he approved of the plan from the perspective of the overall good of the game, referring to baseball's leading men, "they have things their own way and they will not soon cease to forget it. The Millenium plan they will say is a good thing; a most excellent thing—for the rest, but we have a good thing of our own and will hold on. . . . The 'magnates' will talk about it, praise it, say it ought to be adopted some time hence, and that is all."⁶² Brunell believed the same, writing,

I talked at odd times with every man who had a vote at the Association meeting about *The Sporting Life* plan, and found them all—practical and otherwise—opposed to it on the ground that it was impracticable. This was the machine's decision on the plan, and settled it. There is as much of a ring in the American Association as in the League. Amongst us it is Byrne, Barnie, Von der Ahe and Phelps, with Stern just on the threshold, as the League business is done at the beck of Spalding, Rogers, Day, *et. al.* The Association ring being pretty well fixed for players, and being satisfied with their present outlook, didn't want any literary fellers bothering with their business, and so the literary fellers' scheme was knocked in the head with the club of impracticability.⁶³

The statements by Brunell and Caylor are worth closer consideration. Not merely because time proved them correct, but because these two men discerned another critical trend developing in the late 1880s that has gone largely unnoticed in discussions of this era. Part of

⁶² "Caylor's Comment" O.P. Caylor, *The Sporting Life*, December 14, 1887, 4.

⁶³ "The Association" F.H. Brunell, *The Sporting Life*, December 21, 1887, 5.

the Milennuim Plan’s purpose, through the grading of players and standardization of salaries, was to hold down costs so all members of the various leagues might compete on an equal, or nearly equal, financial footing. Teams did not compete on the same financial footing in the late 1880s, any more than they do in the 2010s. As Brunell put it, “the player is waxing fat and arrogant off the clubs who have to sustain \$50,000 teams in \$12,000 towns because New York, Boston, and Chicago—\$50,000 towns, every one of them, to say nothing of a small profit from \$50,000 to \$80,000 per town per annum—have \$50,000 teams and must be competed with.” Brunell did not blame the players for this, writing he would act in the same way were he in their stead, but simply pointed to the logical result of this system. Because the managers and owners of certain clubs could do things like pay \$10,000 for Mike Kelly, and then pay him a \$5,000 salary too, eventually, those teams would corral the best players when the financially weaker clubs could not offer comparable money. “The men who reared and rounded out the Detroit Club ought to have made \$100,000 out of the team. . . . Yet they didn’t get one-fifth of \$100,000 a year. And why? Because they did not have the right town. With less work and talent the club in New York has earned four times as much.”⁶⁴

This led to him to predict, on several occasions, exactly what transpired by 1892: the combination of the two major leagues into one large league without the smaller market teams that struggled to compete financially. That it happened on the National League’s terms, rather than as an equitable merger, was irrelevant; it happened all the same. Furthermore, he believed that the ownership of the larger market teams planned it that way. “Base ball prices will not fall and an equitable plan, like that proposed by *The Sporting Life*, will never be adopted by the big clubs, who have set, and will set, a financial pace *which they can stand, but other clubs cannot*.

⁶⁴ “Brunell’s Budget” F.H. Brunell, *The Sporting Life*, February 8, 1888, 3.

Base ball must be operated by groups and the best talent will go into the first and best paid class.”⁶⁵ On another occasion, he remarked, “the only real trouble is that the richer clubs set the pace and run the poorer ones—paying more according to financial ability based on income—off their feet. If there were less howls at the players and more attention to stable laws that would stand, and advance that which they rule, there would be less need of cries and more time to give to the good of the game.”⁶⁶

Caylor arrived at essentially the same conclusion. He wrote, “the evil in the present system of salaries lies in its unfairness and inequality. . . . But can you blame any player in either League or Association for demanding an excessively large salary when one man gets \$5,500 and another \$4,500 . . . while just as good and valuable players are asked to take part in the same championship fight for half the sum and less?” The primary responsibility for the present financial state of things, then, lay with the management of the clubs. “There is no use in laying the blame for this threatened ruin upon the player. It is the rich and reckless club owner who must shoulder the responsibility, and the primitive offence came from Boston.” Players, after witnessing the Triumvirates’ actions in the Mike Kelly signing, “naturally reasoned that if clubs had \$10,000 packages of greenbacks to pay for a release, they had money to pay for increased salaries. The reasoning was good . . . but they did not stop to think that only one out of every three clubs could afford such prodigality, or any prodigality at all, and that what was an advertisement for the Boston Club was a death warrant to some of the rest.”⁶⁷

By 1891, the National League consisted of Boston, Chicago, New York, Philadelphia, Cleveland, Brooklyn, Cincinnati, and Pittsburgh. This group contained the six most populous

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ “Brunell’s Budget” F.H. Brunell, *The Sporting Life*, April 11, 1888, 4.

⁶⁷ “Caylor’s Comment” O.P. Caylor, *The Sporting Life*, March 14, 1888, 3.

cities in the nation (1890 census) except for St. Louis (which ranked fifth), with Cincinnati ranking ninth, Cleveland tenth, and Pittsburgh thirteenth. In the same year, the American Association fielded teams in Boston, St. Louis, Baltimore, Philadelphia, Columbus, Chicago (a replacement for Milwaukee, which dropped out of the circuit after thirty-six games), Louisville, and Washington, DC. When the National League forced the American Association out of baseball in 1891, it did away with the competing teams in Boston, Chicago, and Philadelphia, absorbed St. Louis, Baltimore, Louisville, and Washington, DC, and dropped Columbus. The new National League, with twelve teams, kept this configuration until the 1900 season, but the smaller market teams had little chance against their more prosperous brethren. Louisville, for instance, twentieth in population in the 1890 census, never finished better than ninth out of twelve before leaving major league baseball for good after 1899. Washington, DC, fourteenth in population, likewise finished above ninth just once in the 1890s, in 1897 when the club tied for sixth.

Therefore, when writers like Brunell or Caylor complained about escalating salaries, as they often did, what they really meant was that these salaries would doom the game, not because the players did not deserve their fair value, but because in the absence of a more equitable scheme to distribute revenue between the ball clubs, they strained competition to, and eventually past, the breaking point. By the late 1880s, teams in cities such as Detroit or Louisville could pay only so much before they started losing money. Teams in Boston, Chicago, or New York could pay much more before reaching the same financial precipice. Therefore, the talent gravitated to these larger markets, baseball became less competitive, and patronage suffered.

When evaluating the Millennium Plan, bit and pieces of it became policy. The minor leagues gained the right of reservation, a version of it, anyway, as discussed in chapter two. The

idea of a pay scale for the players eventually found purchase in the form of the Brush Plan in 1889, but Brush's version was not exactly what Richter laid out. The American Association tried an extremely weak variation of the plan to reward teams for their final position in the standings.

Such half-hearted measures remained very limited in impact, however, and no league ever tried the plan in its entirety. Writers in the sporting press continued urging it for the next two years, but as the 1889 season wound down and the Brotherhood and National League drifted further apart, that issue stole the spotlight. It is impossible to guess whether the Millennium Plan, or something near it, might have kept peace, because no league ever used it. By the time the 1890 season and the Brotherhood War were over, things were radically different in baseball. By 1891, the National League was on its way to monopolizing major league baseball, and the Millennium Plan gradually faded from view. Its publication was an event specific to a certain time and set of circumstances, and when those circumstances changed, the new landscape in baseball had no place for the Millennium Plan.

* * * * *

While all this talk of millennium plans and an enlarged role for the Brotherhood in the affairs of the game took place, members of the press continued to refine their views of the organization, some for the better, others for the worst. One example was Harry Palmer in Chicago, who wrote about some of the typical ideas put for to counter the Brotherhood. While he sympathized with some of the organization's complaints, he also worried it might become an exclusive organization that would work to the benefit of its membership rather than the general

benefit of the game. (How this was different than, say, how the National League's moguls treated their brethren in Detroit or Kansas City, he left unsaid.) He saw danger in the possibility that the Brotherhood might request multi-year contracts for some or all of its players. Palmer believed this might become a tool for existing members to use to preserve their own positions in baseball and keep out younger talent. He also worried what these contracts might do to player motivation. Would they continue to work and strive for improvement if their contract guaranteed employment several years into the future? He therefore cautioned younger players to think twice before joining the organization. In his attempt at persuasion he also continued to repeat several complete or partial fallacies regarding the players, writing such nonsense as that ballplayers dressed their wives in silks and diamonds, and that they worked just seven months of the year.⁶⁸

One thing that Palmer did not bring up, but should have in order to make his point, was what would happen should a player get hurt and lose his effectiveness before the contract was up. Given the injury history, of pitchers especially, in Gilded Age baseball, this was no small matter. He also neglected to mention, considering the other side of the issue, that a long-term contract had benefits. Foremost among these is that it achieved the same purpose as the reserve rule; that is, keeping the player on the team, and the core of the team intact, over an extended period but without the negativity produced by the restrictiveness of the reserve rule. It would also avoid the yearly disputes over salary that had done so much to complicate the lives of owners such as Chris Von der Ahe in recent years. Finally, a long-term contract gave each club more predictability. If a team were to sign a player to a three-year deal, for instance, the team could better predict what its costs would be three years into the future and plan accordingly,

⁶⁸ "From Chicago" Harry Palmer, *The Sporting Life*, September 14, 1887, 2.

instead of having to worry about what would happen to its financial situation should an important player become dissatisfied and demand more cash before signing for the next season.

In a way, however, these points were moot, as the Brotherhood spent the fall of 1887 discussing the language of contracts as its top concern, rather than their length. Ward also responded to Palmer's critique, writing a letter to *The Sporting Life* describing Palmer's position as misinformed. Ward tried to clarify that the Brotherhood did not desire to make multi-year contract obligatory. Rather, "I expressed the opinion, individually, that there was no good reason why contracts, instead of for one year, might not be made for two, three or even five years, and I meant, of course, *if agreeable to ball club and player*. But as for making this condition obligatory, I never entertained any such absurd idea." Seeking to avoid burning bridges unnecessarily, Ward also said of Palmer, "several of the ablest articles on the subject of the players' wrongs have been contributed by your Chicago correspondent . . . we confidently expect his continued co-operation."⁶⁹

Palmer was not easily mollified, however. He believed the Brotherhood in the wrong to focus on the issue of player sales, and tried to turn around Ward's story of the Kelly sale to make his own point. In his eyes, "when Kelly's release was sold to Boston it was sold because Kelly had positively refused to play another season in Chicago. *Before* it was sold, however, Kelly was consulted by the purchasing club. He stated that the transfer was agreeable to him and named the salary he would play for. Was there any "*slavery*" in this transaction?"⁷⁰ At the same time, he began conjuring up new fears regarding the Brotherhood's intentions. Palmer warned that if the BPBP succeeded on the contract issue, other leagues would, in short order, have their own brotherhoods to deal with, and that eventually, these separate brotherhoods would

⁶⁹ "What They Want" John Ward, *The Sporting Life*, September 21, 1887, 1.

⁷⁰ "From Chicago" Harry Palmer, *The Sporting Life*, September 28, 1887, 4.

consolidate. Taking new players into their ranks as fast as the clubs discovered them, the consolidated brotherhood would then destroy baseball within one season.⁷¹

This dispute between Ward and Palmer aside, in order to make headway on the contract language question, the BPBP needed official recognition from the National League. As of mid-September, that recognition was not forthcoming from National League president Nick Young, or anyone else in baseball's senior organization, and the Brotherhood's leadership became restless. Perhaps seeking to divide and conquer, or to test the BPBP's cohesiveness and resolve, Young and associates told Ward they were happy to meet a delegation of players, but that the delegation could not represent the Brotherhood. Interviewed in Pittsburgh, John Ward said, "If this resolve is persisted in there will be trouble. The brotherhood has come to stay, and not one of us will sign a contract until a delegation from our organization confers with the representatives of the National League. . . . President Young and others look upon us as something weak, but they will find out their mistake if a conflict takes place."⁷² The owners were unmoved, however. When a sportswriter queried Pittsburgh president Nimick about the organization, he simply stated, "I know nothing about it."⁷³

When asked what the Brotherhood would do if the League continued on its course and the players refused to sign, Ward said, "I am not at liberty to say what we will do. Let me say, however, that there is plenty of money at our disposal to organize any association or league. We know of any amount of capitalists who want to invest their money in base-ball. I will go further and say that we will be recognized as an organization, and we will all play next year whether the

⁷¹ "From Chicago" Harry Palmer, *The Sporting Life*, October 5, 1887, 4.

⁷² Quote in "The Brotherhood Of Base-Ball Players Demand Recognition" NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, September 19, 1887, 3; Stevens, *Baseball's Radical for all Seasons*, 50; Di Salvatore, *A Clever Base-Ballist*, 194; "Sporting Notes" NA, *Morning Oregonian* (Portland) September 19, 1887.

⁷³ "From The Smoky City" Circle, *The Sporting Life*, October 19, 1887, 1.

league people like it or not.”⁷⁴ We might interpret this hinting at forming a rival organization in several ways. Perhaps it was premature confidence on the part of Ward and the Brotherhood. He might have been bluffing, hoping to startle the National League into showing its cards. Finally, these statements might have been Ward’s attempt to throw the National League owners off balance when they were already starting to argue among themselves through the press about the merits of returning to the percentage system for distributing ticket revenues after deciding on the guarantee system for 1887.

Lastly, in this interview, Ward also drew attention to the benefits the Brotherhood already provided its membership in an effort to cast the organization in a fair and reasonable light for the public. He mentioned the case, briefly described earlier, of Boston Beaneaters pitcher Charles Radbourn. The ownership in Boston, the Triumvirs, suspended Radbourn without pay in September 1887 for what they deemed ineffective pitching, with insinuations that Radbourn was not giving his best effort each day, thus defrauding them of money. The fact that the Triumvirs reversed course within a few days, Ward felt, was a testament to Boston’s fear that the Brotherhood might take up Radbourn’s cause. He told his interviewer, “The union meant to respect the reserve rule, but would not tolerate a system by which honest players can be cast aside for weeks without pay simply because he is not playing as well as the club directors would like to see him.”⁷⁵ As another member of the Brotherhood put it a short time later, “The point I made in his case was that *indefinite* suspensions are illegal under the contract or otherwise. It is not proposed to uphold wrong-doers, but in all cases the player must, and *will*, have a hearing,

⁷⁴ “The Brotherhood Of Base-Ball Players Demand Recognition” NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, September 19, 1887, 3.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

and the punishment must not be *unreasonable*, etc.”⁷⁶ (The Old Hoss did not hold a grudge, apparently, as by the end of the season Bostonians were complimenting him once again for his fine work in the pitcher’s box.) Radbourn’s case was not the only time observers suspected a team of suspending a man just to save money in 1887. A Washington sportswriter believed the same fate had befallen one of the Nationals’ players as well. In a general critique of the club’s management offered to explain the team’s weak performance that year, in September he wrote of the team’s president, “only this week he suspended a player for an offence committed prior to June 16, and after the man has been upon the field and played several good games. I do not think it was so much his desire to correct abuses as it was to curtail the expenses of the club.”⁷⁷

The following day, the Chicago *Daily Tribune* printed a lengthy piece that, while not attributed to Ward, glowed in its references to the Brotherhood while demonizing National League ownership. Discussing the “one-sided” contracts, it stated that they gave the clubs, “absolute control over every player that could be induced to sign a contract—have held their players in a state of bondage, and have in numerous instances sold and assigned them like so many slaves.” These contracts “are clearly illegal, and have been so pronounced by the courts, and the practices of the league in dealing with players have been repugnant to every idea of freedom, if not hostile to American institutions.” As if that was not enough, the article also reported, “it is only a short time since the President of a league club, in speaking of the players in his team, said, ‘Those men belong to me body and soul, and I’ll make them play ball,’ emphasizing his remarks with appropriate profanity. An organization whose methods can justify such assertions does not deserve well of the American people.” Not stopping there, “the league, however, appears to be considerable of a foreign element. It claims to have done much to

⁷⁶ “What the Brotherhood Did for ‘Rad’” NA, *The Sporting Life*, September 28, 1887, 1.

⁷⁷ “From The Capital” WUD, *The Sporting Life*, September 28, 1887, 6.

promote the game, and possibly it has, but all its work has been of a mercenary character.” After casting all these aspersions of un-Americanism at the League’s owners, the article went on to applaud the BPBP’s manly course, and called on all its readers to support it, should the situation develop into a showdown between capital and labor. It closed by pointing out the great financial rewards realized by ownership, as justification of why the owners could afford to share a bit more with their players.⁷⁸

As September neared its end, and storm clouds continued to gather over the future of the game, both sides took their argument to the sporting press. Nick Young published the exchange of letters between himself and Ward in *The Sporting Life*. He acknowledged receiving Ward’s letter describing how the Brotherhood had appointed a committee to discuss the contract question in their August 28 meeting at Earle’s Hotel in New York City. Young’s evasive reply on September 1 was to write, “in the absence of a League meeting, which could not conveniently be held at a very early day, I had no authority to recognize any communication from the Brotherhood, and at the same time suggested that he adhere to or renew his original request that the League officials meet a committee of its players, etc.”⁷⁹ This, according to Harry Palmer at least, was a lie. There was no point in Young calling a League meeting to discuss recognition of the Brotherhood, because the League’s magnates already had discussed it by that time, and decided to deny the Brotherhood any recognition even before Ward and the Brotherhood decided to ask for it.⁸⁰ Given Palmer’s access to Al Spalding, the most important figure in the League, his version of is probably the correct one.

⁷⁸ “The Ball-Players League” NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, September 20, 1887, 3.

⁷⁹ “The League’s Position Defined” Nick Young, *The Sporting Life*, September 28, 1887, 1.

⁸⁰ “From Chicago” Harry Palmer, *The Sporting Life*, October 5, 1887, 4.

Ward did not buy it. His response on September 3 called out Young for his obfuscation. Ward pointed out that there was no question on whether or not the League had to agree or discuss whether Young had authority to meet a delegation of the Brotherhood. It had already done so, at its joint committee meeting on rules, as the minutes of that meeting clearly demonstrated. Ward stated, “a refusal to recognize the Brotherhood now will look very much like hostility toward it, simply on the ground that it is an *organization* of the players. . . . Will the League go on record as opposed to any organization of the players on that ground alone?” He also warned Young, “delays are always dangerous and an unsettled condition at the close of the season might prove a serious misfortune.”⁸¹

While, clearly, Young’s delaying tactics perturbed Ward, there was conciliation as well in his September 3 letter, as he tried to repeat a theme he had brought up often, that the interests of the players and the owners were much the same.

Presidents Stearns, Reach and Day are successful businessmen outside of their base ball interests, while, on the other hand, Hanlon, Irwin and myself are entirely dependent on base ball for a livelihood. Are we not, therefore, relatively as much interested in the game’s welfare as they? If then the game has nothing to fear, but the officials themselves have, we must conclude the interests of the game and that of the officials are two different things. I am sure you will not agree to see any such distinction drawn.⁸²

Young again split hairs in his response. In his answering letter written September 10, he pointed out that at the rules committee meeting Ward referenced, the minutes merely named Ward, along with three other players, as prominent players interested in the proposed rule changes. He further claimed that his financial records showed Ward attending at the National League’s expense, rather than the Brotherhood’s, in an attempt to deny that the BPBP ever enjoyed official status or sanction. Ward refuted this claim also. He pointed out that, first, the

⁸¹ “The League’s Position Defined” Nick Young, *The Sporting Life*, September 28, 1887, 1.

⁸² Ibid.

League had invited him; as its guest, the League of course paid for his trip, just as it did the other players. He also possessed a telegraph from Al Spalding and John Day specifically stating his presence as a member of the Brotherhood, and that, furthermore, John Day officially referred to him as such in front of the entire rules committee.⁸³

Young again denied having authority to recognize the Brotherhood delegation, and insisted “no emergency demands that I take a vote of League clubs by mail or telegraph, as suggested.” He then closed with a statement that seems intended to achieve some combination of discrediting the need for the Brotherhood at all, casting doubt on its motives and loyalty to American values, and threatening what might happen if the BPBP persisted on its present course. He wrote, “I cannot understand what difference it makes to the players whether their proposed amendments to the contracts are to be considered as emanating from individual players, or from a secret society whose membership is mainly composed of League players. If you accomplish equitable results, why quarrel with the form or method of their consummation.” Furthermore, “The very marrow or essence of the good you are seeking can as well be reached by the old and usual means as by the new, without compromising the existing status of anyone.”⁸⁴

Following Young’s epistle, the paper gave the Brotherhood a chance to air its side of the story, as president Ward gave another interview upon alighting from his train at Pittsburgh. “Yes, it is true that the League refuses to recognize the Brotherhood. The League evidently regards us as of no importance, yet there are not nine players of any note whatever in the League that are not members of the Brotherhood.” When reporters asked Ward what he and his Brothers proposed to do should the present impasse remain, he restated their intent not sign contracts for 1888, and again pontificated on the evils the Brotherhood justly sought remedy for. “Men can be

⁸³ “Ball Players’ Brotherhood” John Ward, *New York Times*, October 2, 1887, 3.

⁸⁴ “The League’s Position Defined” Nick Young, *The Sporting Life*, September 28, 1887, 1.

suspended without pay or fined at the whim of any set of directors, and still be held by an iron grip. Take for instance the case of Radbourn . . . he was suspended without pay because the officials of the team allege that his work was not satisfactory. Mark you, no charges were made against him, and he was refused his release.” Referring to the reporters present, Ward reminded them, “now, if you fail to satisfy your employers they can either discharge you or you can quit. In Radbourn’s case they simply held him by an iron-bound contract without pay, and had he quit the club he would have been debarred from playing in any club recognizing the National Agreement in the United States.” Going on concerning the arbitrariness of the present system, Ward said, “under the present contract system a player can be fined for walking around the corner and buying a cigar if the officials of a club in their wisdom see fit to construe the act into an offense.” Finally getting to the Brotherhood’s main point, Ward told the reporters, “But what we most object to is being sold like cattle. This evil must be checked, or it is going to injure the National game. It is on this point that the League refuses to recognize us, for it has been a great source of revenue to its clubs in having the privilege of selling its best players wherever and whenever it liked.”⁸⁵

Ward’s teammate and fellow Brother, “Orator” Jim O’Rourke, also spoke to the assemblage. He reiterated Ward’s theme that the National League had recognized the Brotherhood at its rules committee meeting, and promised that should the League’s magnates decide on a showdown, the players were ready. Describing the organization’s membership, he said, “well, we have our club, Boston, Philadelphia and Washington entire; about eight men in Indianapolis; all of the Pittsburg nine, except Smith, Whitney and Beecher, and they are willing to go in; nearly all of Detroit, and three men in Chicago, Pfeffer, Williamson and Flint.”

⁸⁵ “The Brotherhood’s Side” John Ward, *The Sporting Life*, September 28, 1887, 1.

O'Rourke also sounded a note of hope, however, as he finished his comments by saying, "I don't think there will be any occasion" when asked about a possible strike by the entire Brotherhood.⁸⁶

Brother Jack Burdock of Boston said that while the players were not yet in a position to challenge the League directly,

the day is near at hand when they will be in that position. We are satisfied with the reserve rule and the salaries paid, but we are not at all satisfied with the form of contract now in use by the managers. No player who is a member of the Brotherhood of Base-Ball Players will ever again sign that contract. We must and will have a new form. The present contract won't stand law. It is too one-sided and gives the player no show. As soon as a man signs it he binds himself for life to a club and becomes a mere chattel so long as he depends upon base-ball as a means of livelihood. The managers can do with him as they please. If they don't want him to play ball he can't, and must remain idle forever. The manifest injustice of this appears when it is understood that in such an event he does not receive a salary. The managers of a club can lay a player off without pay, and even, under the present ironclad contracts, prevent him from signing with another club that might be glad to avail itself of his services. That means that they have it in their power to take the bread and butter out of our families' mouths.⁸⁷

The Sporting Life then canvassed "leading base ball men," in other words, team owners, on their reaction to the developing drama with the Brotherhood, and it seems clear that they had been in conversation with president Young since his September 10 letter to Ward, and that the owners had decided to play up the angle that the BPBP was a secret organization with questionable loyalty to America. They also, as a body, chose to obfuscate the questions surrounding the contract issue by trying to shift the terms of the debate and portray the players as out to injure the game with a hopeless scheme to get up a new organization. President Young wrote, regarding his reasons for his refusal to recognize the Brotherhood, "in the first place, if the Brotherhood was organized solely for mutual benefit, as many other societies are, there might be no reasonable objection to its recognition by the League, though there would be no special reason and certainly no necessity for such action." Then, seeking to cast doubt on the motives of

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ "Base-Ball Notes" NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, October 30, 1887, 13.

the Brothers, he continued, “if, on the other hand, it is organized for the purpose of guaranteeing to its members immunity from the consequences of violating the laws and contracts of the League, its attitude is distinctly antagonistic, and its promoters have no right to expect recognition at our hands.” He closed his statement by implying which of those two scenarios he found more likely. “The disposition of all the officers of the League clubs is most friendly to the players, but they do not see that any good purpose can be served by recognizing a secret organization among them.”⁸⁸

New York Giants owner John Day did not offer personal comment when *The Sporting Life* tried to obtain his views, but sent an unnamed “right hand man” instead. This individual tried to uproot the basic grievance of the players by portraying the present contract as entirely correct and appropriate. “The Brotherhood object to our contract and insist upon one that would take the control of the players out of the League, both on and off the field. There are certain terms of our contract which may appear rather grinding, but they are never enforced. For instance, the stipulation that the player shall assume all risk of personal injury on the field or otherwise is not enforced.” One can almost hear Bobby Mathews choking, but nonetheless, the man went on, “it is merely a provision to guard against unreasonable litigation on the part of any cranky players.”⁸⁹

The paper spoke to Al Spalding, of course, but the Chicago owner was far too sly and experienced in such political maneuvering to say anything too dramatic or inflammatory. As usual, he took the opportunity to portray the present contract system as necessary to the present state of things, a reasonable act on the part of respectable businessmen that avoided placing control in the hands of an unruly mob of undisciplined players. When queried on whether or not

⁸⁸ “Various Opinions” Nick Young, *The Sporting Life*, September 28, 1887, 1.

⁸⁹ “Various Opinions” NA, *The Sporting Life*, September 28, 1887, 1.

the current contract was one-sided, he replied, “Necessarily so. The power must be placed in the hands of the club, which is a responsible organization. It is much safer when in such keeping than if it were in the hands of roving players with no special responsibility. It is much safer in the hands of a club by whom it will be judiciously used. I claim it is for the interest of the players themselves.” Judicious, responsible men, doing what was best for the roving, childish players who did not know what was in their own best interest. Nothing more, nothing less.⁹⁰

Not so reserved as Spalding in his remarks, John Rogers, owner of the Philadelphia Quakers, joined Nick Young in tossing accusations of disloyalty and un-American principles at the players. “The League really could not afford to officially recognize a secret organization within its ranks of whose intentions and methods nothing is known, and whose work is done in the dark.” This despite the fact that the Brotherhood was not secret, having published its goals as well as its organizational structure back in 1886. Nonetheless, Rogers continued on, stating the fallacy that a new contract preventing owners from buying and selling players at will was part of a grand plot of the players to take over the League. “To make such a precedent now would be only the commencement of an interminable series of demands and concessions, the possibility of which would outstrip all conception, and would ultimately leave the League utterly powerless in the hands of its subordinates.” He meant to emphasize, of course, that he feared any concessions to the players would embolden them and give them some control over their fate. Like many Gilded Age capitalists, Rogers had difficulty conceptualizing a situation in which this could work, as he clearly assumed, or wanted the sporting public to assume, that given any power, the players would act just as tyrannically as he would.⁹¹ He was probably already sour over the fact that the Columbian Bank in Philadelphia, of which he was a director, was collapsing, and the

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

\$7,500 the Quakers had with the bank was in danger of disappearing into thin air, so perhaps this seemed a good opportunity to take out some personal frustrations.⁹²

When interviewed later, Boston Triumvir Arthur Soden expressed similar ideas. In his conversation with Boston writer “Mugwump,” he offered, “I am in favor of hearing our players whenever they wish to meet us in conference, but I don’t quite believe in recognizing them as a Brotherhood. . . . It is establishing a bad precedent. A manufacturer will receive his own employees, but don’t fancy entertaining a committee of the Knights of Labor. That is the way I feel in this case.” When Mugwump pointed out to Soden that receiving the Brotherhood as an organization was the same thing as receiving his employees, since the organization consisted solely of players, including his own, he could only weakly change the subject. Unlikely as it may seem, Soden was actually more favorable towards the BPBP than his fellow Triumvir, Billings. “He don’t like anything secret, and is death on the Brotherhood. He don’t want anything to do with the organization, and if he had the casting of Boston’s vote, I am afraid it would be thrown against hearing John Ward’s communication.”⁹³

As if all the National League’s contract drama was not enough, the American Association’s players considered joining the fracas as well. Rumors about an Association Brotherhood, not to mention its efficacy and organization, were a bit over the top as rumors often are, but in this case, they probably added to the tension. When reporters asked John Ward about the rumors, he replied, “the Association players have no organization at present, but the matter is being considered. I have had correspondence with representatives of the Association for some

⁹² “Philadelphia’s Loss by a Bank Failure” NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, October 2, 1887, 13.

⁹³ “Hub Happenings” Mugwump, *The Sporting Life*, November 16, 1887, 5.

time, and they may form a brotherhood. In case they do, they can and will work in harmony with our organization.”⁹⁴

Returning to the impending crisis with the League, Ward continued to stand his ground in his interviews with the press. He pointed out that the League could not reject the proposals of the Brotherhood as unreasonable, because it had not accepted any proposals. Therefore, the League’s objection must be to the organization itself. He reiterated the Brotherhood’s intent to discuss proposals with the owners and withdraw any demands that the owners could demonstrate to be unreasonable, but clearly, that could not happen until the two sides met on an equal footing.⁹⁵ He also reversed Young’s statement that it made no difference whether changes for the players emanated from individual players or the Brotherhood, stating, “what possible difference can it make to you whether you confer with a committee of individual players or a committee from the brotherhood, since the brotherhood practically is the players?” He also smashed the fallacy propagated by Young and Rogers that the Brotherhood was in any way a secret organization. “Its business meetings, like those of many other bodies—the League, for example—are not open to the general public, but there is no obligation of secrecy imposed upon any member, and its constitution and bylaws are free at any time for your inspection.”⁹⁶

While it might seem that playing shortstop for the Giants and serving as the lightning rod for the BPBP’s troubles with the National League would be more than one man could handle, that was not all Ward was up to in the fall of 1887. He also married the noted actress Helen Dauvray (she was also known as Ida Mae Gibson and Little Nell, the California Diamond, among other names, and claimed to have as many home towns as names. One paper, for

⁹⁴ “Another Sensation” NA, *The Sporting Life*, September 28, 1887, 1.

⁹⁵ “Ball Players’ Brotherhood” NA, *The Chicago Daily Inter Ocean*, October 2, 1887, 2.

⁹⁶ “Ball Players’ Brotherhood” John Ward, *New York Times*, October 2, 1887, 3.

instance, gave her real name as Helen Gibson, claimed she was from Cincinnati, and that Helen first performed in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in California at age five.⁹⁷) on October 12 and embarked on a honeymoon which featured a western tour of the country. Although seen together often in 1887, the pair made the arrangements hastily so as to avoid giving the New York press a chance to have a field day with the story. Ward also began work on his book of how to play baseball, titled *Base-Ball: How to Become a Player*, that winter, as apparently enjoying time with his new wife and battling eight of the most powerful men in baseball just was not enough to keep him occupied.⁹⁸

While Harry Palmer in Chicago wavered in his support of Ward and the BPBP, many other writers were taking Ward's side, at least to a moderate extent. One Baltimore writer observed that listening to the Brotherhood cost the League nothing, and required no concessions, but would convince both the players and the public that they had the game's best interests in mind. He reminded his readers that calling the BPBP a secret organization was "thoroughly inconsistent, for both the League and Association hold secret meetings and the latter body is re-handed from the outrage of expelling a member merely for publishing the standing of a vote on one of the most senseless and damning pieces of legislation that ever disgraced the record of a sane assembly." He also pointed out that, when it came to the League or the Association, "if there are any good reasons why these meetings of the employers should be star chamber affairs, the argument would apply equally well to the employed." While admitting that there were some

⁹⁷ "The Ward-Dauvray Marriage" NA, *Omaha Daily Bee*, October 30, 1887, 9.

⁹⁸ For more on Ward's courtship, marriage, and eventual divorce from Dauvray, please see either of Ward's biographies, especially chapter four of Stevens, *Baseball's Radical for all Seasons*, and chapter eighteen of Di Salvatore, *A Clever Base-Ballist*. Helen Dauvray was a big fan of baseball, to the extent that she sponsored the Dauvray Cup, a trophy that went to the winner of the World Series each year in the 1880s. In 1887, for instance, the trophy traveled in its own railroad car as Detroit and St. Louis traveled across the country playing each other.

players so ignorant that they could not tell their own name “from the sign of a Chinese wash house,” not all owners were the intellectual heirs of Voltaire, either; they often did the kind of petty, tyrannical, and borderline dishonest things that the players wanted to eliminate.⁹⁹

Interestingly, this writer also expounded what we might call the Modified Labor Theory of Baseball Value. In its simplest form, Karl Marx’s Labor Theory of Value held that since workers take raw materials and turn them into finished products, their labor creates the value of the product beyond its original value as a raw material. When a capitalist then sells the finished product, keeping most of the profit for himself while giving only a fraction of it back to the workers, the capitalist is stealing from the workers, because their work is what gave the item its increased value. Because they increased the value of the item, they deserve most of the profit from its sale. Applied to baseball, the author stated some obvious truths. “The public do not visit the Polo Ground on account of Mr. Day or Mr. Mutrie, and certainly, in Baltimore, if Bernie was the card offered it would not draw like an army mule. People go to see well-known players play a game . . . and they would go see them whether offered as a show by Mr. Day or Mr. Ward, Mr. Bernie or Purcell, or even an unknown employer.” Similarly, “How many people would the Jersey City or the Newark Club draw in New York even if named the New York Club?”¹⁰⁰

The word “modified” is appropriate here because, as the sportswriter quoted also realized, it is clear that the clubs provided things of value as well. They furnished a place to play the games, for one thing, advertising to draw fans to the grounds, administrative time to create

⁹⁹ “League Vs. Brotherhood” TTT, *The Sporting Life*, October 5, 1887, 1. In regards to the quote about the red-handed behavior of the American Association, TTT refers to its treatment of O.P. Caylor, whom the Association barred from a recent meeting, even though Caylor was the manager of the New York Metropolitans, because he had the nerve to publish the record of the Association’s vote on the matter of blacklisting players who would not sign the contracts offered them by their clubs. The decision to adopt the blacklisting measure was the “senseless and damning” measure mentioned in the quote.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

the schedule and make travel arrangements, and so forth. Still, it is probably fair to say that sports like baseball come closer to the Labor Theory of Value than most businesses. The workers at a fast food chain are expendable, because almost anyone can perform their tasks satisfactorily. Few people, however, can hit a baseball traveling at ninety miles per hour, or throw a baseball accurately at ninety miles per hour, and so those who command those skills create a great deal of value through the rareness of their talents. This is why major league baseball games draw tens of thousands of fans while most high school baseball games draw one hundred or so. Or, as the *Baltimore Herald* put it,

It is high time that the idea that crack ball-players get more than they are worth was exploded. Men like Latham and Comiskey are scarce. Ten thousand men might be examined before one could be found combining all the qualifications of a first-rate ball player, mental and physical, as they do. They are very different from the average man, and are worth a great deal more. They are experts in their business, and experts in nearly every other calling in life are higher paid than these men. They may have been cart-drivers before they became professional ball-players, but they are as different from ordinary cart-drivers as Daniel Webster and Rufus Choate were from the ordinary 'shyster' lawyer who carries his office in his hat. It is no argument to say that players like Robinson of the Browns, Hanlon, and Dunlap could not earn more than \$15 a week at any other occupation. Neither could the Rev. Dr. Talmage as a book-keeper.¹⁰¹

* * * * *

The verbal sparring continued into October. While the Brotherhood's committee of Ward, Irwin, and Hanlon worked on their own version of a new contract, National League president Nick Young continued in the fantasy that "the League is in no way responsible for the present condition of things," and proclaimed that "contracts will be prepared as usual and

¹⁰¹ Quoted in "Base-Ball Notes" NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, October 30, 1887, 13.

submitted to the players for signature. This test of the sincerity of the men will be a crucial one, and will serve in a measure to indicate how much in earnest they are in this movement.”¹⁰²

The committee, with the help of James Blackhurst, finished its work at the Bingham House in Philadelphia in mid-October. They planned to submit their work to the various Brotherhood chapters for ratification, which was all but assured. They also, through Blackhurst, reached out to the barons of the National League by contacting Philadelphia owner and lawyer John Rogers in another effort to calm the seas in their relations with the League. Despite his inflammatory comments earlier, Rogers appears to have cooled down a bit along with the October weather. He and Blackhurst held “amicable” discussions that “led to the clearing away of some doubts and misconstructions” on the contract and Brotherhood recognition questions. A glimmer of hope, at least, returned after these discussions.¹⁰³

Philadelphia Quakers co-owner Al Reach also offered baseball fans the possibility that the two sides might work out some of their differences, remarking in a Pittsburgh interview, “I am confident that when the league meets next week the brotherhood will be frankly recognized. We have nothing to fear. If the brotherhood proposes anything that will elevate the national game of course we will agree to it, as our desire is to make the game as pure and honest as possible.” Reach later denied saying that the League would recognize the BPBP, however, saying he had been misquoted and had merely said the NL would listen to suggestions only.¹⁰⁴ Either way, Reach would not mention how the League would react on the contract question. Regarding the Radbourn situation, and the Brotherhood’s request to end the practice of suspending players without pay generally, he said, “I don’t think that that request will be granted.

¹⁰² “The Next Move” Nick Young, *The Sporting Life*, October 19, 1887, 1.

¹⁰³ “As To Contracts” NA, *The Sporting Life*, October 26, 1887, 1.

¹⁰⁴ Quote in “The Baseball Players’ Brotherhood” NA, *Washington, DC Evening Star*, November 3, 1887, 5; “Pfeffer Not Released” NA, *New York Times*, November 5, 1887, 5.

If that rule is abolished it will have a downward tendency. In the absence of that rule there would be nothing to keep players in line. . . . It is only by forcing players to do right that the game has become so popular with the people, and so pure that ladies and gentlemen of the best classes take an interest in it.”¹⁰⁵ Reach’s remarks are quite reminiscent of Spalding’s at this point. The owners represented reasonable, principled men, who had to force the childish players to do right. Only this would make baseball respectable amongst the finer classes of the country. As Reach said a few weeks later, “some of them are straightforward, conscientious men, with whom it is unnecessary to make a contract. Their word alone is good, but there are a great many others whom you have to watch like a hawk in order to make them toe the mark.”¹⁰⁶

At this point, the BPBP called a special session of its delegates to take stock of the situation. Ward and Tim Keefe from New York, along with Arthur Irwin, Jerry Denny, Abner Dalrymple, Mike Kelly, Dan Brouthers, George Wood, and Fred Pfeffer representing the National League’s other clubs, met in Cincinnati to discuss the situation.¹⁰⁷ Partly, it was a meeting of convenience, as the players of several League clubs were crossing paths on their way to their various winter destinations, but the men also met because, as Ward put it, “the members of the brotherhood think they themselves have some knowledge of their wants and rights as players, but the league officials do not appear to look at it that way at all, in so far, although frequently importuned, they have refused us recognitions as a body.” The BPBP remained focused solely on the contract language issue. “No question of salary is involved in any way. No member of the brotherhood has yet signed for the season of ’88, and it is probably safe to say that none will sign until the management of the league vouchsafe us some recognition . . . and

¹⁰⁵ “The Baseball Players’ Brotherhood” NA, *Washington, DC Evening Star*, November 3, 1887, 5.

¹⁰⁶ “The Base-Ball League” NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, November 17, 1887, 3.

¹⁰⁷ “Base-Ball And Athletics” NA, *St. Louis Daily Globe-Democrat*, October 28, 1887, 8.

from today's meeting will emanate another demand for the arrangement of such a joint conference."¹⁰⁸

The players adjourned this meeting with a challenge to the League's magnates. Ward wrote a final letter to Nick Young stating that, should the League fail to agree to a meeting prior to November 12, the Brotherhood and its 125 members would, in effect, secede from the National League on November 15. President Young cannily replied through the press that it was impossible to meet this deadline, as the League's upcoming meeting was the proper time to discuss the letter, and that meeting was on November 16.¹⁰⁹ The lines were drawn. Or so it seemed for a few days, until the public discovered that the whole affair was a misunderstanding. Ward quickly sent another missive to Young clarifying he thought the League meeting was on the 14th. He then moved back his demand by two days, and the Brotherhood sat back to await the outcome of ownership's deliberations.¹¹⁰

* * * * *

The BPBP soon had other issues besides contracts, as the first desertions from the ranks struck as October turned to November. Former Brothers Ned Williamson and Silver Flint of Chicago left the Brotherhood in order to sign contracts individually with Spalding in Chicago. Using a divide-and-conquer strategy, Spalding offered the men liberal increases in pay, probably including considerable money in advance (it appears Williamson especially was in monetary

¹⁰⁸ "Base-Ball" NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, October 28, 1887, 6.

¹⁰⁹ "Ball Players' Ultimatum" NA, *New York Times*, November 6, 1887, 10.

¹¹⁰ "The League And The Brotherhood" NA, *New York Times*, November 7, 1887, 1.

straits at the time¹¹¹), in order to go back on their fellows, as “Flint and Williamson signed regular contracts calling for limit salaries, \$2,000, but other documents provide that each will receive considerable above that figure.” Spalding himself said of Williamson, “He is a good player, and gets what he is worth. We had no trouble about salary and we treated him right, as we treat all our men. These stories that the Chicago club doesn’t treat its men right are all lies.” In an interview with the Chicago *Daily Tribune*, Spalding also continued the familiar themes of the childishness of players generally. When queried about Williamson’s withdrawal from the BPBP, he claimed Williamson told him he had no idea why he had joined in the first place, other than out of fellowship for other players, but that he had done so thoughtlessly. Spalding also drew out a new theme in the ideological battle over the contract issue, but one that certainly echoed the claims put forward by other industrial leaders of the day, the idea that labor and management entered into a contract on equal terms, so there was no need for any labor organizations at all. He claimed that Williamson said to him that Williamson had nothing to complain about in his relations with Chicago management, but, “if I had, I should not expect any association to adjust my individual wrongs, whether those wrongs were either fancied or real.”¹¹²

Ward put forth a different view of events in a New York *Times* interview shortly after the desertion. Quoting from a letter Williamson wrote to him, Ward repeated to the interviewer, “believe me, comrade, I am with you and yours. Necessity compels me to adopt my present course, and it is with deep regret that I tender my resignation as a member of the brotherhood. While I am no longer a member, my sympathy is with your cause.”¹¹³ Williamson himself

¹¹¹ “Meeting Of The Base-Ball League In New York Wednesday” NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, November 13, 1887, 14.

¹¹² Quote from “Sporting News” NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, November 2, 1887, 2; “About Baseball Matters” NA, *New York Times*, November 5, 1887, 8.

¹¹³ “Baseball Matters” NA, *New York Times*, November 13, 1887, 6.

corroborated Ward's interpretation of events as soon as he was able. Interviewed in Charleston, South Carolina, where he was playing exhibition games in late October, he claimed the sensational reporting of his signing as a major victory for the League against the Brotherhood was all wrong. "He does not hesitate to let his friends know that he is one of the heartiest admirers of the Brotherhood, and is doing all in his power to advance its interests."¹¹⁴

Interestingly, O.P. Caylor had warned Ward against the possibility that indiscriminately taking in members might prove a weakness. Caylor wrote that all club officials "knew there were men in every chapter to whom the contemplation of five winter months without the consolation of advance money would be a dream of terror; men, too, whose principles are represented by so many hundred of dollars. And those are the fellows who will be approached first."¹¹⁵

Flint had his own spin on things. In an interview, he said that he conceived the purpose of the Brotherhood was "so that players could obtain that which they wanted from the different managements." He felt that he and Williamson had done so, and thus the BPPB had served its purpose for them. The possibility that future events might require additional help from the Brotherhood seems not to have entered his mind, or if it did, he did not say so in the interview.¹¹⁶

The owners, meanwhile, had at least a few dark clouds on the horizon themselves in the contract battle. At issue was the common practice of signing players to a contract in the fall, and then releasing them from their contract in the spring, before the championship season began, when the team decided it did not need the player any longer, thus breaking the contract. A Maine court found this practice illegal because the team had no legal grounds for ending the contract; the mere convenience of not needing a player's services any longer was not sufficient

¹¹⁴ "Not A Deserter" George Munson, *The Sporting Life*, November 9, 1887, 1.

¹¹⁵ "Caylor's Comment" O.P. Caylor, *The Sporting Life*, November 9, 1887, 5.

¹¹⁶ "Frank Flint" NA, *The Sporting News*, November 12, 1887, 1.

grounds to terminate the agreement. When a sportswriter asked Al Spalding about the legality of the practice (he was noted for doing so frequently, and in this case, he may also have been preparing for the possibility that the Brotherhood would actually follow through on its threats by loading up his roster with potential replacements), the Chicagoan's response was, "well, we have been doing it right along." When the writer pointed out that the Bobby Mathews case (described in chapter two) was another example of how players could compel clubs to honor their contracts, and that what Chicago and other teams did in signing extra men and then releasing them was illegal, Spalding simply stated, "we'll see about that."¹¹⁷

As the meeting neared, speculation built in the sporting press on whether or not the League meant to recognize the Brotherhood. Pittsburgh, some believed, would vote recognition as a matter of self-preservation. Given the strength of the trade union movement in that city, some feared that attendance at Pittsburgh's Recreation Park would fall catastrophically as workers would avoid the games out of sympathy for the BPBP, should Pittsburgh ownership vote against recognition. There were additional rumors that some of these organizations had vowed to "make matters very unpleasant" for Williamson and Flint the next time Chicago visited the Smoky City.¹¹⁸ It appears that the Pittsburgh chapter of the Knights of Labor, at least, regarded the BPBP as a fellow labor organization, as two of its leaders expressed their support for the organization, along with the support of their 12,000 fellows in the Pittsburgh vicinity.¹¹⁹

The workingmen of the Smoky City were quite active in baseball patronage, as it turned out. Later, in 1888, they discovered that one of the stockholders of the Pittsburgh team, Henry

¹¹⁷ "Spalding and His Surplus Players" NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, November 3, 1887, 6.

¹¹⁸ "Meeting Of The Base-Ball League In New York Wednesday" NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, November 13, 1887, 14.

¹¹⁹ No title, NA, *New York Evening World*, November 5, 1887, 1; "Baseball Notes" NA, *New York Times*, November 13, 1887, 16.

Brown, was associated with the steel mill of Singer, Nimick, & Co., which employed non-union labor. Therefore, they decided to organize a boycott of Allegheny games until Pittsburgh severed its connection with Brown. Brown claimed he had divested himself of the stock a year ago, but it appears this assertion was untrue, and so the Amalgamated Iron and Steel Association still planned to stay away from Pittsburgh's grounds at Recreation Park.¹²⁰ As one member of their association said, "I can say that scores of men in Manchester and West End, who are good attendants of the game, have quit going and it is because of Henry Brown's connection with the Pittsburg Club. Brown is still running the rolls at Singer, Nimick & Co's. mill, and has four jobs. This is not the first time he hasn't done the square thing with us. . . . I'll venture the assertion that I know of 300 men who have quit going."¹²¹

* * * * *

Finally, November 15 arrived and the National League's magnates held their confab in Parlor F of New York's Fifth Avenue Hotel. As if to underscore their lack of concern for the Brotherhood, whose representatives waited at the nearby Barrett House, the owners put off the discussion of recognition until the second day. In the meantime, they did allow for an increase in the salary of umpires, lifting the \$1,000 cap of umpires' salaries and increasing their pay to a maximum of \$2,000 in an effort to secure better, more qualified men. There was also some

¹²⁰ "A Pittsburg Sensation" Circle, *The Sporting Life*, July 11, 1888, 1; "The Pittsburg Boycott" NA, *The Sporting Life*, July 18, 1888, 1.

¹²¹ "Pittsburg Pencilings" Circle, *The Sporting Life*, July 18, 1888, 3.

discussion of splitting the league into an Eastern and Western circuit to save on travel expenses and increase the enthusiasm created by geographic rivalries, but this talk came to naught.¹²²

Finally, on November 16, the moguls sent a letter, signed by League president Nick Young, to Ward and his two Brothers at the Barrett House, Dan Brouthers and Ned Hanlon. Their lawyer, James Blackhurst, was also present. It read, “I am instructed by the League, in annual meeting convened, to state that they will be most happy to meet you and your associates of League players this evening at 8:30 o’clock, for the purpose of ascertaining the objects of the association for which you claim recognition.” Once in the presence of the assembly of owners, Ward soliloquized, “Mr. Brouthers, Hanlon, and myself represent the Ball Players’ Brotherhood. I am not unconscious of the fact that you have failed to designate us as such in your invitation to appear here. . . . Before we make known our mission you must recognize us as a committee from the Brotherhood.”¹²³

In an exchange that was rather farcical, given that everything stated had been hashed out repeatedly over the past two months, Giants owner John Day, along with Philadelphia’s president, John Rogers, asked about the goals of the BPBP and why it deserved legitimacy and recognition. Ward repeated the by now familiar litany. Al Spalding moved that the owners recognize the Brotherhood. The motion carried unanimously. So far, so good for Ward and his Brothers, they had cleared their first hurdle. Mere recognition, however, while positive, meant little as far as gaining acceptance of the new form of contract they had engineered in Cincinnati

¹²² “Base Ball Matter” NA, *The Chicago Daily Inter Ocean*, November 17, 1887, 2; “The Base-Ball League” NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, November 17, 1887, 3.

¹²³ “The Men Make Their Point” NA, *New York Times*, November 18, 1887, 2.

in October.¹²⁴ That would await their discussion with the committee of owners appointed to meet them.

The meeting took place deep into the night and continued the following morning. The players presented their new version of the standard contract, while the ownership committee of John Day, John Rogers, and Al Spalding examined the document and made revisions of their own. It was, in all, rather anticlimactic, considering all the verbal sparring and threats that preceded the conference. The group presented its work to all the National League owners at 3:30 on November 17, and the group agreed to the new contract language. Both sides seemed pleased with the deal, asserting that the new contract protected their vital interests while serving to advance the game. Ward stated that the new agreement was “a fair one” and the owners stated they felt it protected them and their interests. Somewhat surprisingly, given the reluctance of the owners to even meet the Brotherhood in the first place, the *Chicago Daily Tribune* described the language of the contract as “the one drawn up and presented by the brotherhood, with but slight changes in phraseology.” Nick Young’s official statement on the entire situation with the BPBP was now to say, “It is a good thing. I think they will do their best for the interests of the league.”¹²⁵ Al Spalding had a similarly revised take, stating, “I am glad they are recognized, and there is a complete understanding between the league and the players. If the brotherhood lives up to the spirit of what they outlined at New York the organization will be a good thing for the players, the league, and the game.”¹²⁶

In brief, section one of the new agreement defined the parties to the agreement, and section two the length of the contract, binding the player to play baseball at “reasonable times

¹²⁴ Ibid.; “League And Brotherhood” NA, *San Francisco Evening Bulletin*, November 18, 1887, 4.

¹²⁵ “Base-Ball War Averted” NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, November 19, 1887, 6.

¹²⁶ “Interview With Ward” NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, November 22, 1887, 6.

and places from April 1 to October 31.” Section three required the player to obey club officers, managers, and field captains while the fourth section allowed for the disciplining of players for “dishonest play or insubordination,” carelessness, or indifference, and bound the players to refrain “from any excess or dissipation.” The next section provided for the blacklisting of players who broke contracts or conspired with anyone to lose games on purpose. Part six further defined the penalties for drunkenness, those being fines of twenty-five dollars for the first offense, fifty for the second, one hundred dollars for the third, and a suspension for the remainder of the season for any further infractions. All these, of course, protected the owners to make sure that they received a full and sober effort from players in exchange for pay.

Section seven offered a bit to the players, stating that teams could not implement the above penalties until providing written notice justifying their actions. Part eight meant to provide a plan to deal with cases such as those of Curry Foley or Bobby Mathews described earlier. This said that if a player became ill from “natural causes” and could not play, the club could deduct from his pay during the time lost. On the other hand, injury sustained on the field in the discharge of the players’ duty would not result in a loss of pay, unless the team decided to release the player. If that happened, however, the release would be unconditional. Section ten, while affirming the clubs’ power to fine players, capped the fines at fifty dollars per offense.¹²⁷

While there were many more sections to the contract, twenty in all, a few more merit description. Sections fourteen and fifteen allowed that if either party to the contract violated the terms of the agreement, the aggrieved party could terminate the agreement. If a player violated the deal, they forfeited all future pay; if the club did so, the player could opt out of the contract. Furthermore, to deal with situations such as that of the disbanding Kansas City Cowboys

¹²⁷ “Base-Ball War Averted” NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, November 19, 1887, 6.

following 1886, the league still held the right of reservation of players even if their team disbanded, but if the player was transferred to a new club, they must receive at least the same salary as during the previous season, or they would be free from the contract. Finally, section eighteen expanded the number of players a club could reserve to fourteen, but stated that reserved players must make at least the same salary as during the previous season unless they agreed to play for less.¹²⁸ This was a new, and important, development. Heretofore, the clubs had always claimed the right to reserve players via the reserve rule, but the rule itself had never actually appeared in any written contract. For better or worse, Ward and the players wanted the rights and responsibilities of the clubs and players as regards the reserve rule clearly stated in the contract signed each year.¹²⁹

* * * * *

In the end, the two sides averted a war. Both groups, it seems, deserve some credit for the peaceful conclusion. The players certainly did not get all they wanted, but they did succeed in getting some new language inserted into their contracts that they sought. In retrospect, probably their wisest move was not to bite off more than they could chew. They had no chance of getting rid of the reserve clause, for instance, even though doing so might have benefited most of them financially, and they realized this and pulled back from making any demands on that score. They picked one goal, had the wisdom to pick an achievable goal, and as a result, they carried the day, to the extent they ended up with most of what they wanted on the contract issue.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ “Interview With Ward” NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, November 22, 1887, 6.

The owners, too, made some wise moves. They now had official, standardized penalties for some of their greatest grievances with the players, especially on the alcohol question. With the code for dealing with drunkenness clearly laid out in the view of all, they no longer had to worry about players complaining about random or arbitrary fines on that account. They still had the blacklist available to them in extreme cases, and now they could reserve fourteen players from one season to the next. The league also retained the right to transfer players from one team to another, should one of its teams disband or leave the league.

This is not to say that all owners were pleased with how things transpired. Arthur Soden of Boston, especially, was not. On recognizing the Brotherhood, Soden remarked, “they gained that point, but we never ought to have allowed it. And we would never have had to recognize them if the Westerners had kept their mouths shut and let Rogers alone.” Offering a backhanded compliment towards the new contract, he opined, “it is a fairly equitable one, in fact, as much so as you can make it between a responsible party and an irresponsible one. The contract don’t bother me. It is not that, but now that this so-called brotherhood has gained a foothold I fear we may see trouble from it in the future.” Defeated also on the percentage or guarantee question, he breathed defiance. “I estimate that we shall lose about \$15,000 by the operation next year. However, we are not going to let that bother us. The next thing is to get together a winning team, and we intend to do that if it takes a big pile of money.”¹³⁰

Soden’s views aside, both sides, consciously or not, stepped back from the brink, realizing that baseball was doing well, and that now was not the time to risk the game’s public reputation by engaging in brinksmanship. There was no pressing reason for the players to challenge owners on the salary issue, because with the salary limit of 1886 now a dead letter

¹³⁰ “Around the Bases” NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, November 27, 1887, 15.

anyway, salaries were indeed rising. On the owners' side, with all teams in the league making a profit, there was great risk in alienating the players as a body and tempting them into disrupting a system that was making money, when the only price to pay was revising the language in player contracts. Both groups proclaimed that they only had the best interests of the game at heart, and only wanted what was reasonable. In November of 1887, they could agree on what was and was not reasonable. When their next showdown occurred two years later, however, this was no longer certain.

Chapter 16

The Winter of 1888-1889 and Spalding's World Tour

In many ways, the winter of 1888-1889 differed from the one before it not so much in kind as in scale. The main issues were the same—the cost of players and the difficulties of some teams to try to meet their costs and compete while avoiding financial loss. A year later, however, these issues were more serious. During November, National League owners secretly worked on a plan they hoped would fix their increasingly broken business model. While they did so, two other events of major importance happened simultaneously. One was baseball's first effort at international expansion. The other was a novel attempt at circumventing the reserve rule launched by a pair of veteran players in Detroit.

The men who ran baseball in the United States, like others who ruled the corporate world during the Gilded Age, were always on the lookout for ways to expand their operations. For baseball men such as Al Spalding in Chicago and Al Reach in Philadelphia, who had already branched out into the sporting goods business, there was a direct link between the fate of their businesses and the growth of baseball. The more popular the game became, the better their businesses supplying the game would fare. Every time a new league organized, their emporia had the opportunity to sell more of the implements of play. Bats, balls, uniforms, scorebooks, shoes, gloves, and anything else the sporting public might require, were available by mail order. As the nation's transportation grid, based around the railroads, filled in and matured, it became

easier for the moguls who offered sporting goods to the public to find customers and ship them all they needed to play the national game.

Unlike many observers, however, whose interests and vision were local or national in character, Spalding especially had greater plans. Although he was Machiavellian in his manipulations of others, puritanical in his distaste for alcohol in baseball, and willing to bend the rules when the chances of success seemed to outweigh the risks, he was also a cunning businessman with international plans for his sporting goods empire. Like many other capitalists in Gilded Age America who, fearing that the national market for their goods might be nearing the saturation point, began looking abroad for further opportunities, as early as 1887 Spalding was forming plans to look for overseas markets and broaden the base of sales for his company.

Every now and then during the 1880s, someone connected with baseball floated plans for some kind of international tour to popularize the game abroad. The most popular destination was, of course, the United Kingdom. Not only was baseball similar to cricket, distressingly so for those who wanted to claim purely American origins for the game of baseball; the differences in language and cultural norms were small compared to what Americans might find in other areas of the globe. The UK seemed, therefore, the best candidate among other nations to adopt the American game and give American businesses another market in which to offer sporting goods. As noted in chapter one, American baseball players had traveled to the British Isles for this purpose as far back as 1874, but they had had little luck persuading the British to take up the game.

One of the problems these plans to spread baseball to the UK encountered, besides the fact that the British seemed firmly attached to cricket, was timing. Because of its northerly latitude and weather, a baseball tour in Britain would not do well in winter months when

conditions would be hostile to players and spectators alike. Therefore, a tour of any duration needed to take place during the summer. This would, of course, interfere with the championship schedule in the United States, and no team would surrender the sure money they realized from healthy attendance in the US for the potential profits, uncertain at best, of a trip across the Atlantic, even if they could somehow get the permission of their fellow league members to suspend the normal schedule for such a trip.

The answer to this conundrum, some realized, was to tour in the southern hemisphere over the winter instead. Speculation about such a tour centered on Australia as the logical destination because it offered nearly all the same advantages, in terms of language and culture, which a trip to Great Britain did. The population of Australia was much sparser than in the British Isles, it was true, so such a trip required much more travel time between games, but by the later 1880s, most baseball observers had decided that the road to popularizing baseball internationally began Down Under. (One other proposal involved taking two teams of amateurs, possibly made up of college students, to tour in Britain. Not only would their schedules allow for summer travel, but as college students largely came from the ranks of the well-to-do in the 1880s, the social skills and standing of college students would serve ambassadorial functions as well.”¹)

¹ “It Might Pay, After All” Henry Chadwick, *The Sporting Life*, April 25, 1888, 1. We must consider material trying to evaluate the Spalding tour rather carefully. Harry Palmer, Chicago correspondent for *The Sporting Life* and Spalding’s right-hand newspaper man, accompanied the tour and wrote most of the material concerning it for that paper. His writing was not blindly laudatory, but as Spalding’s mouthpiece, he tended to look on the brighter side of things. *The Sporting News*, on the other hand, did its best to diminish Spalding’s attempt in the eyes of the public and tear down his achievements, referring to the tourists as the “Chicago Fakirs.” It appears Spalding had recently declined to renew his advertising with *The Sporting News*, and so that paper decided to hold a grudge in retaliation. When its correspondent interviewed James Hart, Spalding’s financial manager for the trip, and Hart claimed the tour had brought in \$10,000 in exhibition games before leaving the United States, the subtitle of the article was “Hart’s

Once this became accepted wisdom, the question was whether such a tour would pay. The odds seemed against it. Australians had no prior experience with baseball. To many it seemed doubtful that they would pay to watch Americans play a game with which they were unfamiliar. Besides the obvious logistical issues of planning such a tour, this question was the rock upon which all plans to tour internationally foundered. By 1887, however, Al Spalding believed he had a plan that would untie this Gordian knot. As a participant in the England tour of 1874, he knew that immediate financial reward was unlikely. As he explained his plans to Harry Palmer, “in my judgment such a trip would prove a losing venture to any man who undertook the journey with any expectation of making money out of the gate receipts of his games.” Therefore, rather than beginning the tour with the thought of immediate profit, Spalding stated, “in undertaking such a trip I do so more for the purpose of extending my sporting goods business to that quarter of the globe and creating a market for goods there, rather than with any idea of realizing any profit from the work of the teams I take with me.”²

Spalding deemed the time was right for such a venture. “We have shipped a few goods to Australia during the past three years, and the trade from there has been growing so steadily that I feel confident of being able to build up a business there, as the result of my contemplated venture, that will, in the end, repay me.” When reminded of the enormous financial outlay it would take to tour across the Pacific with a party of twenty-two ballplayers, Spalding made clear he harbored no illusions about what he was getting into. “It will take at the correct calculation

Blarney.” Likewise, it titled other parts of its account, “Jim Hart of Milwaukee Doing Spalding’s Dirty Work” and “They Try to Skin The Ladies of San Francisco,” and wrote, “I can not tell you with what disgust the people of San Francisco look upon the recent exhibition games here by the Chicago and All-America teams.” “The Chicago Fakirs” Gold Pen, *The Sporting News*, November 17, 1888, 2. *The Sporting News* also referred to Harry Palmer as Spalding’s “bum polisher.” I have done my best to pick out the statements that are relatively free of bias when writing about what happened on the tour.

² “To Australia” Harry Palmer, *The Sporting Life*, March 28, 1888, 1.

\$30,000, and that amount of money will be deposited in bank for expenses before we leave here.” Furthermore, as he described his plans to Palmer, “I shall be perfectly willing . . . to spend a few thousand dollars to the end of establishing branch houses in Sydney and Melbourne, and that is principally what takes me there.”³

As of March of 1888, Spalding was still contemplating what players to take on his tour, but true to his belief in recruiting “respectable” people as patrons for his games, he did say,

every player we take with us must be not only a ball player, but a gentleman in appearance, intelligence, and address. Full dress suits will, I fancy, be almost as requisite to each player as his base ball uniform will be, for I intend to have our party received in royal style at Sydney and at Melbourne, and they will doubtless be generously entertained by many people of high social and official position during our stay.⁴

Realizing the value of publicity in such a plan, Spalding had already arranged for an October tour throughout the western US to increase the hype. On his way to Australia, he planned contests in Milwaukee, St. Paul, Minneapolis, Des Moines, Omaha, Kansas City, Topeka, Denver, Leadville, Colorado Springs, Cheyenne, Salt Lake, Sacramento, and San Francisco. “On the trip, you may rest assured, that the arrival and departure of our party at each point I have named will be a not-to-be-forgotten event, while the series of games we shall play in ‘Frisco, just before leaving, I anticipate, will be the biggest events in base ball that have yet taken place on the slope.” Following their embarkation, the players would call on King Kalakua in the Sandwich Islands (Hawaii) before arriving in Melbourne, where an American friend of Spalding’s would host them. Once there, “the boys will be able to tire themselves out, if they choose, at kangaroo shooting.”⁵

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

From there, the American contingent would play games in every Australian town that promised even a moderate audience. The original itinerary called for games in Adalaide, Burabura, Gelong, Balarat, Sandhurst, Waga, Orange, Bathurst, Sydney, New Castle, and Brisbane, plus Launceston and Hobartown in Tasmania and Auckland, Thames, Hokaika, Christ's Church, Wellington, and Dunedin in New Zealand. Spalding's original plan called for a return to San Francisco after this grand tour, although later, he would change the tour into something far longer and more ambitious than he was willing to discuss in March.

Spalding predicted that, even if the tour were not an immediate financial success, the game itself would take root in Australia much more easily than it had in Britain. He said Australians would embrace baseball "like a duck to water. Australians have all of that love for outdoor sports and athletics which characterizes the English people, coupled with the push and enterprise of the Americans."⁶ There were a few glimmers of baseball activity in Australia on which to base such rosy predictions. Melbourne did have a baseball club, although it limited its membership to Americans only, and had been active but a single year, but the US Consul-General to Australia, W.J. Morgan, was an honorary member, as were "a number of other prominent citizens of America."⁷

Joining Palmer in praising the potential of Spalding's venture, and in his assigning certain national characteristics to Australians, Henry Chadwick was "confident that Mr. Spalding will find large profit in it; not, perhaps, in the way of gate receipts, but certainly in the wider extension of his sporting goods business. With characteristic Western pluck and energy, however, he is going to take the chances of success or failure in his business venture, and I predict for him a noteworthy success." Chadwick was confident the Australian trip would

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ "A Ball Club in Australia" H.G. Kritch, *The Sporting Life*, March 28, 1888, 5.

succeed where the trip to Great Britain in 1874 failed, because “he is now, too, going to a very different country, and among a people, who, despite of certain inherited colonial tendencies, have more of the characteristics of our own people, in certain respects, than their old-country progenitors have; and there is not likely to be such national prejudice met with in Australia by a party of American base ball players in 1889 as the visitors to England in 1874 encountered.”⁸

Spalding later asked Chadwick, as baseball’s greatest living historian, to accompany the expedition and write about the grand adventure, but the Old Brooklynite declined on account of age and other duties. (We should remember, of course, that Chadwick’s “other duties” included working on Spalding’s yearly baseball publication, so it is no surprise that he was an enthusiastic supporter of the whole plan.)⁹

Not all were sanguine of success, however. One Californian sportswriter, who professed to have met many Australians in the Golden State, did not like the odds. “We feel sorry for Al, so far as the financial part of the undertaking is concerned. Almost universally do they express themselves as wedded to cricket and lacrosse, affect to despise base ball, and in prejudice out-English even a Londoner.”¹⁰ The Australian sports editor for the *Referee* and *Sunday Times*, Neville Forder, offered the same prognosis. Asked by James Hart if such a trip would pay in Australia’s larger cities, he answered no. He admitted that some had made efforts to organize baseball clubs in Australia, but “our people are educated up to cricket, and can see no fun in the quadrangular game. . . . Your runners and boxers do very well here, and are generally very well treated, if they are white. . . . So you see we support good goods, but base ball is not our game.”¹¹

⁸ “Chadwick’s Chat” Henry Chadwick, *The Sporting Life*, April 11, 1888, 4.

⁹ “The Australian Trip” Henry Chadwick, *The Sporting Life*, September 12, 1888, 7.

¹⁰ “California Cullings” Waller Wallace, *The Sporting Life*, May 2, 1888, 7.

¹¹ Letter printed in “Base Ball in Australia” Neville Forder, *The Sporting Life*, May 16, 1888, 1.

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Despite the naysayers, Spalding made his grand excursion. He could not pass up such a visible opportunity to promote the game of baseball and his business interests. Proclaiming his intent to bring America's game to the "crowned heads, nobles, and peasantry of the Old World," Spalding decided to match his Chicago team, headed by first baseman Cap Anson and centerfielder Jimmy Ryan, against a second team featuring players recruited for the trip from other National League and American Association clubs. The most visible player among this second group was, ironically considering his role in the drama to come, noted shortstop and BPBP president John Ward of the National League champion New York Giants.¹²

Spalding billed his second squad as the "All-American Team," and it was somewhat akin to what we might today call an all-star team, although the comparison is not exact. Most members of the All-Americans were good players; after all, Spalding wanted competitive games between closely matched teams to help stimulate interest in his tour. However, his other primary criterion for selection was the deportment and reputation of the men. Knowing that the tour would involve diplomatic responsibilities as well as athletic ones, he recruited players who would look as good at a formal dinner as they did on the diamond.

It is not necessary here to discuss all the details of the Australia trip, as there is already literature on the Spalding tour. A few things merit further description, however, because they provide more insight into the milieu of which baseball was a part. One of the most notable was the membership of the teams that embarked on the tour. With all the issues between owners and players beginning to come to a head, the two men who were the acknowledged leaders on each

¹² Levine, *A.G. Spalding and the Rise of Baseball*, 103.

side, Al Spalding and John Ward, were not even in the United States for most of this critical winter. Of course, it is possible that this was by Spalding's design. Having the National League's most articulate and accomplished enemy out of the country, and thus conveniently unavailable to confer with his brothers on baseball matters, may well have been part of Spalding's plan when he invited Ward to go on the expedition. That Spalding's fellow owners adopted the Brush Classification Scheme over this winter in Ward's absence might not have been a coincidence.

Taking Ward was a double-edged sword, however. The trip to Australia and beyond involved a lengthy sea voyage with not many responsibilities along the way, giving a man of Ward's intellectual stature abundant time to think, plan, and evaluate options of what the Brotherhood might do in the future. Ward's only real responsibility, besides the social gatherings planned for the expedition, was to captain the All-American team. Incidentally, while Ward was abroad displaying his skills in Australia and Europe, back in the United States, sports newspapers spent much of the winter discussing where he might play in 1889. Rumors had him going to either Boston or Washington to captain their nines, based on the premise that he wanted to captain a team, which he could not do in New York so long as Buck Ewing remained. When he finally returned to the US, Ward ended up going nowhere and playing another season in New York. Some reasoned his change of heart sprang from the fact that captaining the All-Americans gave him all the experience he wanted in that line, along with the fact that his teammates did not want to see him leave.¹³

Furthermore, the timing surrounding the trip was interesting, in several respects. On the whole, 1887 was a good year in major league baseball. Despite a few hiccups, most clubs did

¹³ "Ward's Case" Henry Chadwick, *The Sporting Life*, April 10, 1889, 5.

well financially and the popularity of the game seemed to be booming. The 1888 campaign had not been as satisfactory. Between lousy weather, the American Association's squabble over ticket prices, the rising cost of fielding a team, and the general lack of cohesion amongst American Association owners leading to speculation about which club was moving to what league in 1889, the season of '88 had not been profitable for several clubs, and major changes seemed in the air. National League president Nick Young could state, with honesty, that the attendance at League games was better than ever in 1888, but the increase was not general.¹⁴ Some teams, such as Boston, were more popular than ever, but others, like Detroit, saw a great enough decline that the Wolverine ownership decided to throw in the towel and disband its team.

Brooklyn, even after spending big money in hopes of fielding a championship nine in 1888, still ended up 6.5 games back of the St. Louis Browns. Not content with their position, they commenced spending even more money as the 1888 season wound down, acquiring shortstop Tom "Oyster" Burns from Baltimore, outfielder Pop Corkhill from Cincinnati, and second baseman Hub Collins from Louisville, paying significant cash to buy each player. Apparently, Charles Byrne wanted a pennant, regardless of expense. Perhaps he grew tired of the foolishness of some of his fellow Association owners. He had stated many times, however, that he would not change leagues until winning the American Association pennant, hoping to carry that glory into a new league and dreaming of what the combination of a championship team and a brand new set of opponents would do for attendance at Washington Park. This seemed to be his chance, and he determined not to let it pass.

Spalding seemed to sense, as well, that this was the time for a big move. He had stated many times in public that the purpose of the Australia tour was promotion of the game and his

¹⁴ "President Nick Young" Sam, *The Sporting News*, October 20, 1888, 4.

sporting goods business—this was no secret to anyone who read sports newspapers. He had ventured a great deal to put the trip together, making contracts with many of the best players in baseball, and creating a vast array of promotional materials, including wall paper, lithographs and printed histories of each player on the two teams, wood cuts for use in newspapers, and more. He planned to cover all traveling expenses for the players, as well, although he did not offer much in the way of remuneration beyond expenses, the contract calling for each player to receive fifty dollars per week. Perhaps this turned off some potential players who might have joined. Charlie Comiskey, noted first baseman and captain of the St. Louis Browns, objected on these grounds, according to some sources. Other sources, however, including Spalding himself in a letter to Henry Chadwick, stated the Comiskey declined in order to manage business interests. Other players who also turned down invitations seem to have done so from a mix of motivations. Still, an international vacation lasting several months, with the occasional baseball game thrown in, all expenses paid, was an opportunity occurring once in a lifetime.¹⁵ Later, Spalding also decided to offer \$5 to each player on the winning team for each game, in order to ensure that both teams played their best, rather than going through the motions.¹⁶

Al Spalding hoped for official diplomatic recognition from outgoing president Grover Cleveland for his trip, but despite meeting the president at the White House, and the love of both Mr. and Mrs. Cleveland for baseball, such was not forthcoming.¹⁷ Spalding's tourists, as most observers named them, steamed around the world nonetheless, with plans to make port and demonstrate their talents in such expected English-speaking locations as Great Britain and

¹⁵ "The Base Ball Event Of The Century" NA, *The Sporting Life*, October 17, 1888, 2;

"Chadwick's Chat" Henry Chadwick, *The Sporting Life*, October 17, 1888, 5.

¹⁶ "Across The Continent" John Montgomery Ward, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, November 11, 1888, 25.

¹⁷ "Washington Whispers" Bob Lerner, *The Sporting Life*, June 6, 1888, 9.

Australia, but also in more exotic locales (in their eyes) such as Egypt, India, and Ceylon. An outbreak of disease in Calcutta, along with a tight schedule, cancelled the planned stop in India, but the teams did stop in Egypt and play a game of ball on the sands near the Great Pyramids. The tourists even posed for a photograph draped all over the Great Sphinx like Yankee tinsel. This act, however, along with insulting and obviously futile attempts to loft baseballs over the ancient tombs of the pharaohs, probably cancelled out whatever curiosity they might have aroused amongst the Egyptian population.

Before departing, however, three players from the All-American team, Ward, Jim Fogarty, and Jim Manning, succeeded in climbing to the apex of one of the Great Pyramids and back down in less than ten minutes. While the agile trio performed this feat of endurance, some of the Chicago players held a contest to see which of them could hit the eye of the Sphinx with a thrown ball first. This led to a rebuke from one of the Chicago newspapermen accompanying the tour, who wrote, “when Napoleon was in Egypt he stood in awed silence before the solemn majesty of the forty century old Sphinx. The members of the Chicago club, when brought into the presence of this impassive mystery of the desert, threw hard balls at it and hit it in the eye. The Sphinx has seen and suffered much. . . . But never . . . has she been hit in the eye . . . by a Chicago ball-player.” The writer hoped the Chicago players would shape up before they reached Europe, so that “the kindly offices of the Secretary of State will not have to be invoked in a month or so to rescue from a French or English dungeon a merry Chicagoan who has been pelting the image of Napoleon or of Nelson.”¹⁸ France was in the middle of the Boulanger Affair, after all, and when Chicago’s Cap Anson heard of it, he remarked that, “he could furnish

¹⁸ No title, NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, February 11, 1889, 4. Technically, this statement is incorrect, as the only player actually hitting the eye of the Sphinx was Jim Fogarty of the All-American team, according to Harry Palmer, one Chicago sportswriter who accompanied the tour. Palmer was, by 1889, also the head baseball editor for the *Chicago Daily Tribune*.

President Carnot with a Cabinet which would knock Boulanger out of the box in a single inning.”¹⁹

In addition to Anson’s comment regarding France’s political problems, the tour was not immune to other political issues involving Europeans. The Americans did do some pelting in Nice, France, but in the form of throwing flowers at masqueraders in that city’s Battle of the Flowers, rather than with baseballs. It appears they took especial aim at the heir to the throne of England, the Prince of Wales, but “the Prince, of course, did not understand that there was really a little American opposition to royalty concealed in the flowery weapons and looked upon it as a new exhibition of the queer ways of the people across the sea. When one especially big bunch fired by Healy hit the royal rider squarely on the nose, he bowed in acknowledgment of the precision of the shot.”²⁰ What the prince could not have known was that Healy was a fervent patriot for Irish independence, and thus took special pride in his feat. “Healy, whose special mission on the trip is the liberation of Ireland, uttered an exultant cry at his success. The Prince frowned at this, but speedily recovered his equanimity, lifted his hat, and fired a bunch of violets in return. The aim was faulty, but the boys secured the violets. Healy still has his as token that Ireland will yet be free.”²¹ The players later atoned for the flowery barrage when they interrupted their March 12 game in Kennington Oval to cheer the Prince on his arrival in the fourth inning.²²

In contrast to their experience in Egypt, the tourists were less fortunate, historic monument-wise, in Italy. For a moment, Spalding entertained hopes that the tourists would have

¹⁹ “Base-Ball Tourists At Naples” John Montgomery Ward, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, February 17, 1889, 11.

²⁰ “Pelting A Prince With Flowers” NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, March 1, 1889, 1.

²¹ “The Great Trip” Harry Palmer, *The Sporting Life*, March 6, 1889, 2.

²² “First Game Of The American Ball Players” NA, *New York Times*, March 13, 1889, 1.

an opportunity to play in Rome's Colosseum. He reportedly even offered Italian officials \$5,000 for the privilege. His efforts did not come to fruition, however, as the Italian authorities would not stand for it, nor was he able to secure an exhibition of baseball for the pope, Leo XIII (His Holiness pled illness). Denying the truth regarding this diplomatic setback, the *Chicago Daily Inter Ocean* chose to blame the tourists' failure to assume the mantle of the ancient gladiators on the faulty state of the spectator galleries in the Colosseum instead.²³

Another thing the tour demonstrated was the extent of the social Darwinism-inspired racism existing in the United States in the 1880s. Racism's existence, and the extent of its popularity in those years, is no secret. There is no need to repeat every example that surfaced on the trip. Still, a few examples are in order. Some, purposely forgetting that the trip's itinerary mainly consisted of coastal cities, wrote about the dangers posed by the aboriginal Australians. "Base ball in the bush! The American national game played by its ablest exponents before the Zulus, the bushmen and kangaroos of Australia! . . . They will be in danger from the aggressive female population from the time they first appear in their snow-white jersey suits in all the vigor of their virile powers." The greatest danger was that "travelers who have traversed the wilds of the inland continent say that one of the favorite ways of expressing love practiced by the dark-skinned but intensely affectionate maiden of the bush is to offer her accepted lover as a toothsome tid-bit to her cannibalistic chieftain father."²⁴

In fact, the tourists themselves did not even make it out of the United States before some began demonstrating their racism. In Omaha, on their way to San Francisco, the clubs acquired a

²³ Levine, *A.G. Spalding and the Rise of Baseball*, 101, 104-105; "Honored Ball Players." *The Chicago Daily Inter Ocean*, February 14, 1889, 2; Thorn, *Baseball in the Garden of Eden*, 233.

²⁴ "Base Ball In Australia" NA, *Rocky Mountain News*, October 28, 1888, 1. The paper's editor did make a note that Zulus did not actually live in Australia, but then flippantly added that the word worked well enough to describe the native Australians who did.

“mascot” for their trip, mascot in this case referring to a young black man named Clarence Duval, who traveled with the teams. Duval, an extra in a traveling opera company, had been the White Stockings’ mascot during the 1888 season before deserting the team in New York during an August road trip. He got to Omaha with this company, and there reunited with his old club, and he accompanied the tour around the world. While Anson described Duval as “a little darkey that I had met some time before while in Philadelphia, a singer and dancer of no mean ability, and a little coon whose skill in handling the baton would have put to the blush many a bandmaster of national reputation,” he also denigrated the young man by saying “outside of his dancing and his power of mimicry he was, however, a ‘no account nigger,’ and more than once did I wish that he had been left behind.” Duval may have wished the same when, in Egypt, players dressed him in catcher’s gear and led him, roped at the neck, through the Cairo rail station.²⁵ (An interesting coda to the story of Clarence Duval is the fact that, when the Players League set up shop for the 1890 season, Duval jumped ship from the Chicago White Stockings and signed on as mascot with the Chicago Pirates of the Players League.²⁶)

While in San Francisco waiting to embark, the tour’s chronicler, Harry Palmer, visited San Francisco’s Chinatown along with others in the party before the tourists took their berths. In describing the experience, he wrote, “I am safe in saying that no pen, however clever, could adequately depict the revolting and fascinatingly hideous sights we witnessed. The illustrations of the vice, crime and bestiality, so prevalent in the Chinese quarters of this city, which have appeared in our illustrated publications from time to time, have not been overdrawn or exaggerated.” Palmer went on to describe how the Chinese lived in buildings with 400-600

²⁵ Material and quote from Thorn, *Baseball in the Garden of Eden*, 231-232, Levine, *AG Spalding and the Rise of Baseball*, 101-102.

²⁶ Levine, *AG Spalding and the Rise of Baseball*, 60, 104.

residents “which could not accommodate more than 30 or 40 Americans comfortably,” thus playing upon fears of a “Yellow Peril” of Asians taking over the West Coast of the United States. Also echoing the fears that Asians would never assimilate into American society, Palmer wrote, “the streets swarm with Mongolians. They have run all white people out of the district and have established their own government, their own mercantile houses, their own water works, their own courts, until, although they are under the surveillance of the city authorities, they nevertheless, to a great extent, live independently of the municipal laws.”²⁷

Despite this, Palmer and the rest of the tourists risked an expedition “into vile-smelling lodging houses; into opium joints, thick with the sickening vapors that issued from the overcrowded compartments, down through underground passage-ways . . . into Joss houses, with their hideous idols . . . our little party threaded its way, until we grew dizzy from the overpowering odors and anxious again to breath the air of a Christianized and civilized community.” Only the accompanying law enforcement officers ennobled the ballplayers enough to risk such a journey. This led Palmer to conclude his description of the Chinese by writing, “No religion save idolatry is known in Chinatown. Virtue has never had an abiding place there. The people have brought the heathenish customs and horrible practices of their barbarous country with them to San Francisco, and cling to them with a tenacity that shows the hopelessness of their conforming to our views of life and religion, or of their ever becoming desirable citizens.”²⁸

Following their foray into the warrens of San Francisco’s Chinatown, the men eventually set sail for the antipodes. Along the way, Spalding decided to inform them that he planned to extend the trip. The teams would still begin in Australia, but now they would also continue all

²⁷ “The Great Trip” Harry Palmer, *The Sporting Life*, November 21, 1888, 4.

²⁸ Ibid.

the way around the world, visiting Asia, Africa, and Europe before they returned to the United States. Wisely, Spalding did not broach this plan to the players until the sea voyages was underway; after the incident concerning Mike Kelly, who originally agreed to go on the tour but later went back on his decision, Spalding understandably was wary about anyone else getting cold feet at the last moment. Although the players were, almost to a man, in favor of the change, there was some concern that modifying the itinerary en route was a breach of contract on Spalding's part, as the contract signed by each player only engaged them to go to Australia and play baseball there. Ever the sly fox, Spalding escaped this pitfall by pointing out that the wording of the contracts did not specify the route by which the party would return to the US.²⁹

In any case, the trip to Australia called for a stopover in the Sandwich Islands, today known as Hawaii. This provided plentiful opportunities to demonstrate more of the racism and prejudice common to the late nineteenth century. Led by their baton-wielding young mascot, Clarence Duval, newly attired in "a scarlet jacket, khaki pants, black boots, and a braided cap," the men paraded through Honolulu to King Kalakaua's palace. Their marching tune was an interesting choice, "Marching Through Georgia," as they sought to present themselves as conquering heroes in imitation of General Sherman's Yankee troops in the Civil War. While both John Ward and Harry Palmer found the Hawaiian monarch an agreeable and dignified leader, Cap Anson noted that, "The monarch of the Sandwich Islands needs exercise. His flesh is soft and I don't believe he could do a hundred yards in less than two minutes."³⁰

The teams were supposed to play an exhibition for the people of Honolulu, but as the next day was Sunday, laws forced upon the Hawaiians by American missionaries prevented such

²⁹ Mark Lamster, *Spalding's World Tour: The Epic Adventure That Took Baseball Around the Globe—and Made It America's Game*, (New York: Public Affairs, 2006), 98-99.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 106.

a desecration of the Sabbath. The king, who wanted to see baseball and was constantly at odds with the missionaries because of their interference with traditional Hawaiian culture, therefore requested the men attend a luau instead. Newton MacMillan, another reporter accompanying the trip on behalf of the *Chicago Daily Inter Ocean* and *New York Sun*, described the luau as “a barbaric festival, fraught with that pagan abandon which obtained in the Sandwich Islands before the day when the good missionaries came and converted their Hawaiians from their wickedness and cannibalism.” The fact that MacMillan described the relationship of the missionaries to the native people by writing “their Hawaiians” is a good indication of the lack of cultural and racial tolerance existing towards darker-skinned people in 1889.³¹

This was not the end, however. King Kalakaua also scheduled a performance of the hula dance for Spalding’s tourists, “a dance considered so pagan and libidinous that it had been banned by the forces of missionary propriety.” The group also forced Clarence Duval to perform “plantation dances” for their entertainment. The missionary authorities overruled the king’s decision to hold a hula dance, however, on the grounds that, “a luau on the Sabbath was already a blasphemy; a hula dance would be untenable.” While King Kalakaua officially announced that the tourists could see the hula on their next stop in Honolulu, in secret, he arranged private performances for each player in the queen’s royal gardens. True to his practice of thinking about all events with baseball in mind, Cap Anson described the dancers by saying, “And such eyes! If my boys had them we would lead the batting for years to come.”³²

Finally, when referring to the Spalding tour, both participants and press also described its purpose using the racist, social Darwinism-influenced language of the time. One reporter, after viewing the incident with Duval in Cairo, remarked, “could a disciple of Darwin have seen the

³¹ Ibid., 112.

³² Ibid., 112-113.

mascot in his impromptu makeup, his host would have bounded with delightful visions of the missing link.” For Spalding, baseball epitomized “all those essentials of manliness, courage, nerve, pluck and endurance, characteristic of the Anglo-Saxon race,” while some in the press described the achievement by stating, “a country that holds liberty dear must have . . . men of athletic spirit” who make “a race fit for peace and war.”³³

Despite such sordid features, the tourists returned home in April of 1889 to a rousing reception that included the now-famous dinner at Delmonicos in New York City, considered among the most fashionable restaurants in the city at that time. This dinner, attended by Wall Street financiers, various and sundry baseball dignitaries, and other personages as luminous as Teddy Roosevelt and Mark Twain, was notable for more than just the guest list and the quantity of food (served in nine courses, naturally) consumed. Speeches abounded, as Spalding, Anson, and Ward described the tour, Ward displaying his “singularly correct knowledge of the English language.” While, predictably, listeners considered Twain’s speech the oratorical highlight of the evening, even it paled in drama compared to a historic pronouncement uttered by former National League president A.G. Mills. It was here that Mills took the podium and announced that, by virtue of both patriotism and research, baseball was a distinctly American game, devoid of roots in any foreign land or games. Thunderous applause greeted the verdict, along with a rhythmic pounding of the tables to chants of “No rounders! No rounders!”³⁴

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³³ The quotes are from Levine, *AG Spalding and the Rise of Baseball*, 104, 103, and 107, respectively.

³⁴ Thorn, *Baseball in the Garden of Eden*, 234-236. Rounders is an English game bearing certain resemblances to baseball. At that time, many debated whether baseball origins were as a game branching from Rounders at some time in the past, or if it was a truly American creation.

While this grand tour may not have resulted in other nations immediately embracing America's national pastime, any more than Spalding's discovery of the rickshaw in Ceylon produced the American rickshaw company he considered founding on his return to the States, in all, 1889 promised to be a good year for baseball's leading men. The success of Spalding's tour, and baseball's seemingly exponential growth in popularity, exemplified by incoming president Benjamin Harrison's display of a scorecard on the White House mantel, all forecast a rosy future for the national pastime. (Some, however, questioned the new president's commitment to baseball, as when Spalding and his tourists called on him at the White House after returning to the United States, he gave them somewhat of a cold shoulder according to some accounts, including that of tourist Jim Manning.)³⁵ More than ever, baseball aligned itself with patriotism, late nineteenth century feelings of the nation's manifest destiny, and the American Way. Each November, on Election Day, the New York and Brooklyn nines squared off in celebration of the Republic to remind the public of this fact, and Spalding's tour only reinforced such feelings.³⁶

This does not mean, however, that all was during Spalding's absence. In addition to the usual disagreements between players and their teams regarding salary, which were similar in nature to those described in chapter thirteen, a serious situation arose in December. When the Detroit club disbanded in October, the Wolverines commenced selling their men to the highest bidders around the National League, as described previously. In a move that sent a thunderclap throughout baseball, two players decided to toss a monkey wrench into the entire operation. Third baseman Deacon White, rumored on his way to Boston, did not want to go to the Hub

³⁵ Levine, *AG Spalding and the Rise of Baseball*, 104; "The Surprising Cowboys" Freeman, *The Sporting Life*, May 8, 1889, 1.

³⁶ To give just one example of this, see "A November Game" NA, *The Sporting Life*, November 10, 1886, 3.

City, because of a past grievance with the management there. Detroit also wanted to sell White's teammate Jack Rowe to Pittsburgh, and Rowe likewise claimed an objection to his new destination. Instead of consenting to their sale and transfer, therefore, White and Rowe decided to pool their resources and buy a controlling interest in the Buffalo franchise of the International League (both had played in Buffalo prior to going to Detroit, when that city held a National League franchise in 1885), then play for the team they now owned. To justify the legality of the move, the two men cited the fact they had signed a contract with Detroit and fulfilled it, so Detroit could no longer have a claim on their services, especially as the team no longer existed and had sold its franchise to Cleveland by that time.³⁷

Predictably, the National League responded with the blacklist, claiming that because the International League was a party to the National Agreement, no International League members could employ or play against the blacklisted men. Any teams who did so were risking expulsion from the National Agreement. Still more infuriating to the two players, the League claimed that Detroit was still a member until it formally resigned at the National League's spring meeting, citing the fact that the club had cast votes at all meetings held by the League since the conclusion of the season. Former Wolverines president Fred Stearns offered the meager consolation that, "they can own the club and manage it jointly, but they cannot play until they have the consent of the representatives of the stockholders of the old Detroit Club." White responded by stating, "I signed a contract with the Detroit Club to play ball for them from April to November, 1888, and have carried out that contract. . . . I am aware that in the League I should be obliged to go where I was sent, but I am not in the League now. I shall play ball at Buffalo." White also stated that, should the National League attempt to blacklist him, "we shall sue the clubs refusing for

³⁷ "Pugnacious Ball Players" NA, *New York Times*, December 20, 1888, 2.

conspiring to prevent us from earning a living. Our lawyers say that the reserve clause of the League and the claimed right to sell a player will not stand, and most of the League magnates privately admit as much.”³⁸

The Buffalo Two appeared set on their course, and they almost became the Buffalo Three, as a former teammate in Detroit, Charlie Bennett, considered joining them. After a stormy negotiating session with Boston’s Director Billings, Bennett said, “they must come to my terms or I don’t go. If I hold out until after the Detroit League Club expires I shall be a free man and can go where I please. I should like to join the boys in Buffalo or play here for Leadley.”³⁹ Recall that Detroit had reorganized with a new group of players and joined the International League, and Leadley was the manager of this new Detroit team. This further clouded the National League’s position, as it claimed Detroit was still a member of its organization, but at the same time, the National Agreement prohibited the establishment of any new team within a five-mile radius of an existing one. The League countered that new teams could be established should the existing one give its permission. This led Dave Rowe, Jack’s brother, to ask, “would Nick Young approve the contract of any player of the old Detroit Club with that club for next season, if sent by that defunct organization? . . . What *is* a club if it is not their franchise? When a club is admitted, *that* gives them a franchise. If they dispose of that to another party, in another city, and another League takes possession, it looks reasonable to suppose there is a National League vacancy in that town.”⁴⁰

White also took one of the Brotherhood’s key lines of argument when he framed his move as a challenge to the practice of buying and selling players, rather than the reserve rule.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ “Detroit Dotlets” NA, *The Sporting Life*, December 26, 1888, 1.

⁴⁰ “Baltimore Bulletin” TTT, *The Sporting Life*, January 20, 1889, 5.

“The reserve rule is all right. It is the bulwark of the National game. What I protest against is the selling of a player without his knowledge or consent. I am quite willing to break up that custom.” He believed the League’s claim to this power would fail in the court system. “If in law the Detroit Club can send me to Boston, it can also send me to New Zealand. According to the contract, I simply give the Detroit Club the right to reserve my play in Detroit, not in Boston. The reserve rule, to the extent I have set forth, is all right and should be respected, but it never contemplated the buying and selling of players.” He further charged that Boston had broken faith on three separate occasions in its efforts to sign White and others. “That club first broke the National Agreement by negotiating with players previous to Oct. 20, and then broke faith with Mr. Stearns and the Detroit Club by agreeing to deprive the latter of any purchase money agreed on for the players to be transferred, and lastly broke faith with the players in failing to carry out an agreement it made with them.”⁴¹

The incident White referred to was when Boston’s Triumvirs sent a man to act as their representative in negotiating with the players when Detroit played a late-season series in Washington on October 11-13. The Triumvirs wanted half a dozen Detroit players as a group, fearing that they might fall into the hands of their competitors one by one if they did not acquire the whole group preemptively, somewhat similar to what Brooklyn’s Byrne had done with the Metropolitan players the previous off-season. The Detroit players claimed they reached a verbal agreement with Boston’s representative, in front of several witnesses, but that Boston later reneged on the deal. The Beaneaters then proceeded to try to sign the players separately to cover up their deception. White closed his case by stating, “My contract with the Detroit Club expired last November. I fulfilled my part of that contract to the letter. There was nothing said in that

⁴¹ “A Revolt” NA, *The Sporting Life*, December 26, 1888, 2.

contract about letting them transfer me to any place they saw fit, and there is no law that allows a man who has a contract with me for one year to say what I shall do the next year.”⁴²

Bennett eventually decided not to cast his lot with Rowe and White, and signed with Boston in late January. Some hoped that would break the logjam, as Boston declared it no longer had interest in White, which cleared the path for Pittsburgh to sign both. Rowe and White stuck to their plans. They were not necessarily angry with any team in particular, just the general way in which teams bought and sold players. When Pittsburgh president Nimick went to meet with them in February, they had a friendly conversation, but maintained their desire to manage the Buffalo club rather than play in the Smoky City.⁴³

Complicating matters was the debate swirling around the future of the game in early 1889. By this time, all kinds of rumors had Brooklyn and Cincinnati joining the National League by 1890. Should that happen, the American Association would need new teams, and Buffalo was on the Association’s short list of replacements should that become necessary. The potential conflicts for the National Agreement, of having two men own a team in one major league and playing for a team in the other, are certainly interesting, not least for the potential conflicts of interest that might create.

The controversy dragged on into the spring. The League’s stated intent had been to accept Detroit’s official resignation from the National League at its spring meeting in March. In the meantime, however, they realized that if any Detroit players had not accepted new offers when the team reserving them finally ceased to exist, the men would be free to sign wherever they wished, and White and Rowe could then carry out their original plan. To circumvent this inconvenient truth, the League turned to paperwork shenanigans. “After careful consideration of

⁴² “Plain Talk” NA, *The Sporting Life*, December 26, 1888, 3.

⁴³ “Rowe and White’s Position” NA, *The Sporting News*, February 9, 1889, 1.

the case of Rowe and White it was determined not to accept the Detroit Club's resignation but to place the same in President Young's hands, subject to his acceptance at the proper time—which means when Rowe and White come to terms.”⁴⁴

Detroit, meanwhile, was getting rather desperate. Perhaps concerned it would never see a penny for Rowe and White any other way, it considered offering the men some of the purchase price offered by Pittsburgh, reasoning that getting less than everything was better than seeing the men retire from major league baseball and get nothing. Its former brethren in the National League would be displeased, of course, but as Detroit was only in the League on a dubious technicality at this point anyway, that seemed the lesser of two evils.⁴⁵ As a result, the team tried to tempt the recalcitrant duo into a compromise whereby they would play for Pittsburgh but pocket \$2,000 of the sale price. The men held out for \$3,000 at first, and in addition, made provisional arrangement's that Deacon White's brother, former major league pitcher Will White, would manage the team in their stead should they go to the Smoky City.⁴⁶

Neither side budged from their positions until July. Finally, in desperate need of reinforcements because of injury, Pittsburgh signed the pair for the remainder of the season at a salary of \$2,500 each, and paid \$8,000 to Detroit, or what was left of Detroit, as well.⁴⁷ The two men lost their bid for independent status, but got respectable paychecks all the same. It is also possible that Brotherhood president John Ward helped persuade them to sign, knowing that the players would need all the public goodwill they could muster in their upcoming showdown with the National League.

⁴⁴ “The League” NA, *The Sporting Life*, March 13, 1889, 3. Editor Francis Richter, who attended the meeting, is presumably the author of this piece.

⁴⁵ “Pittsburg Pencilings” Circle, *The Sporting Life*, March 20, 1889, 5.

⁴⁶ “Pittsburg News” NA, *The Sporting Life*, April 24, 1889, 1; “Condensed Despatches” NA, *The Sporting Life*, April 24, 1889, 1.

⁴⁷ “Pittsburgh Cranks Disgusted” NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, July 14, 1889, 12.

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It is difficult to tell if he timed everything to perfection or not, and if it was all part of one grand plan, but he may have. Just as his touring players left San Francisco for Hawaii, Al Spalding completed two other maneuvers. One was the National League's salary classification plan discussed in chapter sixteen, which some baseball historians believe he actually authored, even though contemporaries attributed it to John Brush of Indianapolis. The other was to extend his trip all the way around the world. How long Spalding had contemplated and planned this extension of his enterprise, we do not know for certain, but he confided his plan to baseball scribe Henry Chadwick as early as August of 1887, and he completed the final arrangements before he left California.⁴⁸ He intimated his intentions to a couple of the players on the tour, including John Ward, while still in San Francisco. The new route would leave Australia on or about January 5, sail to India, then travel west through the Suez Canal and across Egypt before moving on to Italy, France, and Great Britain.⁴⁹

Spalding's timing could not have been better personally or worse for the Brotherhood. Even as his fellow owners put the finishing touches on their new salary plan, his ship left San Francisco harbor with the BPBP's president on board. They left one day late. Had weather, or any other type of accident, delayed the trip even a few more days, Ward would have known about the new salary classification plan, may well have stayed behind, and baseball history might have turned out differently. There was only a one-day delay, however, Ward did sail with the

⁴⁸ "Chadwick's Chat" Henry Chadwick, *The Sporting Life*, December 5, 1888, 5.

⁴⁹ "Ward's Base-Ball Notes" John Montgomery Ward, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, November 25, 1888, 25.

expedition, and he did not find out about what took place back in New York City until months later.

Chapter 17

The Brotherhood and the Brush Classification Scheme of 1889

As the season of 1888 wore away into late September, we could forgive a baseball observer for forgetting about the Brotherhood of Professional Base Ball Players. The BPBP had maintained strict silence ever since its June meetings regarding the salary limit in the language of their contracts. The two national sporting papers of the day, *The Sporting Life* and *The Sporting News*, rarely mentioned the organization, and the group took no action worthy of notice while the season meandered through the summer months. Of course, this was partly because the members of the BPBP were busy playing baseball, and it was difficult to get enough delegates to the same place at the same time to hold any deliberations.

The first month of the off-season was likewise subdued. Partly, this was because two members of the Brotherhood's leadership, John Ward and Ned Hanlon, were involved in Spalding's world tour and were about to depart the United States. Some believed, therefore, that the organization would prove quiescent in whatever might happen that winter. Unlike the year before, there was no movement to send a delegation to the National League's winter meeting or to request a hearing on any major issue, as the BPBP believed its efforts at the previous League meeting had produced a satisfactory settlement, the small brouhaha over the limit rule notwithstanding. As of November, in any case, the organization saw no need to involve itself in

the National League's councils. It set its next meeting for early December, after the National League held its winter meeting.

Both of these beliefs, that the Brotherhood would prove malleable without Ward and Hanlon, and that relations between the BPBP and the League were now harmonious, were incorrect. The BPBP might have believed that their last conference had pacified relations with the League, but behind closed doors, the League's owners were about to concoct a new scheme that would, ultimately, transform and reconfigure the landscape of professional baseball in ways that few foresaw in November of 1888. Likewise, if the League's owners believed that they could walk over the Brotherhood without Ward and Hanlon in the picture, they were gravely mistaken as well. What they failed to grasp was the democratic nature of the BPBP. True, its president was tossing the sphere in Australia and New Zealand, but the Brotherhood's affairs meanwhile rested in the capable hands of its executive committee. The Brothers' most articulate spokesperson might be unavailable, but his absence hardly paralyzed the organization. Still, most of the members kept a low profile even as the National League unveiled its plans, "sawing much wood" in the parlance of the 1880s, and awaiting the return of their president in the spring.

It did not take long for the National League to create a general conflagration. At its yearly winter meeting, held in late November at the Fifth Avenue Hotel in New York City, they announced the new plan that would put all of baseball into an uproar for more than two years. After National League owners emerged from their council, League president Nick Young read the new salary plan to the assembled reporters anxious to hear about any changes planned for 1889. Young read:

The compensation for all League players for services as players shall be limited, regulated, and determined by the classification and grade to which such players may be assigned by the Secretary of the League, after the termination of the championship season, as follows:

Class A, compensation \$2,500; Class B, compensation \$2,250; Class C, compensation \$2,000; Class D, compensation \$1,750; Class E, maximum compensation \$1,500. But this section shall not prohibit the payment of extra compensation for the services of one person to each club as field Captain or team manager.

In determining such assignment, batting, fielding, base-running, battery work, earnest team work, and exemplary conduct, both on and off the field, at all times, shall be considered as a basis for classification.¹

Young continued, describing the technical aspects of what the League had decided to do, but by this point it was clear enough what had happened. The barons of the League had broken their agreement made just one year before with the BPBP and declared war on the organization. Furthermore, when it came to player compensation, they had determined to turn back the clock to 1886, at least as far as average players were concerned. Logically enough, people immediately questioned if this new plan would be like the salary limit adopted in 1886; that is, would owners live up to the letter of their law, or would they sidestep this new agreement with the same tactics they had used to punch holes in their last effort of this kind? Regardless, the National League owners were ready to toss the dice, and a series of events followed that would remake the entire landscape of professional baseball.

Incredibly, Young argued that this new plan was beneficial for the players. He claimed, “it will not affect rising and ambitious players. But it places a premium on honest and efficient work on the ball field, and requires good general deportment off the diamond. It will prevent players drawing large salaries because of their previous records. . . . Intelligent players will recognize it and it depends upon their own exertions whether they shall be benefited by it.”

When someone asked how Young and the rest of the league officials would determine in what class each player belonged, he stated, “I will consult certain persons and we will form a sort of

¹ “Bombshell In Baseball” NA, *New York Times*, November 23, 1888, 2.

civil service commission and pass upon the merits of the respective players. During the playing season I will make arrangements to obtain reliable reports of the playing and deportment of the players. In other words, I will establish something in the nature of a secret service department.”²

While Young refused to call it a spy system, one wonders exactly how he would obtain reliable reports on the deportment of the players without someone spying on them. Furthermore, leaving aside for a moment his motivations and simply examining the actual workability of such a plan, many potential pitfalls that would create legitimate cause for complaint are plain. How could any observer rate “earnest team work” or “exemplary conduct” in any reliably standardized way? Personal bias or honest differences of opinion (to put it more charitably) over what was “earnest” made any consistency in the classification scheme impossible. There was also the risk of what contemporaries called record playing. That meant that fielders would not take difficult chances to get to certain balls out of fear the official scorer would charge them with an error if they failed to field the ball cleanly. Instead, they would let the ball go by to avoid hurting their fielding record with an error that the classification committee might use against them when classifying players for the next season. Finally, Young’s remark about players not drawing a large salary based on their previous record was truly puzzling. If the classification committee were not going to base its conclusions on previous performance, what exactly would it use instead, short of intangible but unquantifiable things such as teamwork? The extension of this last argument includes the situation of how to classify men who played in the minor leagues the previous season and had no record against major league competition on which to draw.

Additionally, Young tried to evade accusations that the League had broken faith with the Brotherhood. He pointed out that this scheme did not apply to anyone who had signed a contract

² “The Players and the New Limit Rule” R.M. Larnier, *The Sporting Life*, November 28, 1888, 1.

before December 15, which was about three weeks away at that time. Young said, “the provisions of the existing contract will be carried out to the letter. This new rule is intended to apply only to future agreements. Those players held in reserve for next season cannot be classified at any salary below that which they received during the past season, as shown by existing contracts.”³ Even if this were true, this would eliminate all leverage for players negotiating for an increase in salary for 1889. Ownership could simply make a take-it-or-leave-it offer when the only other option was the salary classification scheme.

One final thing worth noting regarding the new plan was the composition of the vote regarding whether the League should adopt it. Six clubs voted in favor, while only Arthur Soden of Boston and John Day of New York responded in the negative. The League’s bylaws required a two-thirds majority for passage, which meant six votes out of eight, so the plan passed with the bare minimum of support. Day’s vote is not surprising. We have seen that he was on good terms with most of his ballplayers and believed in compensating them better than most. Apparently, he judged that keeping them happy, pleased to play in New York, and thus more likely to perform at their best because of having some loyalty to their organization, was more important than saving a couple thousand dollars. When asked about how the new scheme would affect the money he planned to offer his players, he said, “not in the least. There will be few of my men that will not receive the same salary next year that they received last season.” Day saw the only merit of the new plan as preventing players from complaining their way out of town, because if released from their present contract they would be subject to the classification scheme, and in reigning in the money paid to young and unproven players.⁴

³ Ibid.

⁴ “New York’s Idea” NA, *The Sporting Life*, December 5, 1888, 1.

Soden's vote might be a surprise, however, given his reputation for stinginess. The explanation for his behavior probably lies in the fact that Boston had enjoyed huge patronage in 1887 and 1888 thanks to its purchases of King Kelly and John Clarkson from Chicago. With its recent raiding of Detroit's larder to sign some of the Wolverines' top players for 1889, there was no reason for Soden to expect anything different in the coming campaign. The team was flush, and could afford to carry a large payroll in order to contend for the pennant while still making money anyway. Boston, therefore, gained a competitive advantage over other teams by paying big prices for crack players and thereby forcing up the cost of players generally. Boston could afford to pay a lot more than most of its competitors could, and when their opponents dropped out of the bidding due to lack of funds, the Triumvirs could swoop in and sign their man.

The sportswriters covering the game knew this, too. Frequently, they lashed out at the business practices of Boston, along with Brooklyn and occasionally New York, for the inflationary tendencies of those practices.⁵ When Soden said to Tim Keefe, a New York Giants pitcher but a Cambridge resident, "we are going to have that championship in Boston if it costs \$100,000. If we want a player we don't care what it will cost to get him, we'll pay it," *The Sporting Life* editorialized in return, "their plunging tactics more than any other one thing are responsible for the reckless extravagance prevalent the last few years, which made the new League salary limit rule and classification scheme imperative."⁶ As A.G. Ovens of Indianapolis put it, "some of these players have gone to Boston and will continue to draw salaries greatly in excess of what they can earn. They are worth no more to Boston, as far as they are individually concerned, than they were to Detroit, but the former city, by reason of its population and that fact that it is a great ball town, can afford to pay them what they demand." The result was clear.

⁵ "The League Meeting" NA, *The Sporting Life*, November 28, 1888, 2.

⁶ No title, NA, *The Sporting Life*, December 19, 1888, 2.

“For years four, if not five, clubs have been run practically at a loss for the sake and benefit of the first-named three [Boston, Chicago, and New York]. Year by year the matter was growing worse and it was only a question of time when such cities as Indianapolis, Washington, Cleveland and even Pittsburg would be forced to the wall.” While Ovens may have exaggerated the penury of a few of these franchises to make his point, he still expressed the general views of many within the baseball fraternity.⁷

It is curious, then, that baseball observers blamed the ownership of clubs like Boston and Brooklyn for inflating salaries, but decided that the only way to keep things in check was to punish the players, rather than the men they believed were causing the problem. If the purchasing tactics of a few teams were to blame, it might have made more sense to devise a stronger plan to redistribute revenue from the wealthier teams to the poorer ones. This approach, or some other more direct disincentive to purchasing men for large sums (getting rid of the direct sale of players, for instance), seems a wiser choice than that devised by the National League for 1889. Out west in Kansas City, the team’s president, Speas, proposed an interesting measure along these lines for the American Association. His idea was that all teams in the American Association would form a joint stock company, with the more valuable teams owning more shares in the company, and that whatever profits the new association made, it could pay teams proportional to their number of shares.⁸ In the absence of any alternate plan, however, the players saw the Brush Plan for what it was—a direct threat. Yet, all they were doing was trying to earn the best salary that the market would bear. Instead of penalizing the teams that engaged in inflationary business practices, the National League chose price controls instead.

⁷ “Indianapolis Mention” A.G. Ovens, *The Sporting Life*, December 5, 1888, 5.

⁸ “Speas’ Specific” Freeman, *The Sporting Life*, February 27, 1889, 2.

Grandfatherly Henry Chadwick was one of the few to make this connection at the time. Chadwick believed that some kind of plan to control salaries was important, but that this was the wrong way to do it. He wrote that a plan regarding salaries, “is not to be done in a hurry, or without due preparation. Besides which, the system itself is based upon a weakness which will at all times threaten its failure, and that is that it does not do away with the existing unhealthy competition for players’ services, which, while it remains in force, will always prove an obstacle to the success of any interference with salaries.” This led Chadwick, who had remained neutral on the subject for the most part, to announce his allegiance to the Millennium Plan. “It is this and only this which will stop the existing competition with its result of the sale of players and the paying of exorbitant salaries.”⁹

Despite such reasoned and rational protests, countering business practices like Boston’s appears to be the motivating factor for the rest of the League adopting the plan. The four National League cities of smaller market size, Indianapolis, Cleveland, Pittsburgh, and Washington DC, knew that in order to keep up and secure their share of talent to contend against teams like Boston and New York, they needed some rule to counteract this failure of the free market. They managed to talk Chicago and Philadelphia into approving their plan, giving them the six votes they needed for passage.¹⁰

In addition to the hope of leveling the financial playing field, National League owners also hoped this would help them defeat that persistent bugbear faced by all teams, alcohol. Despite the graded system of fines agreed to in their contract with the BPBP for 1888, this problem had not abated sufficiently in their eyes. League owners hoped that a salary plan taking into account off-field conduct would provide a stronger incentive for recalcitrant drinkers to

⁹ “Chadwick’s Chat” Henry Chadwick, *The Sporting Life*, December 19, 1888, 3.

¹⁰ “Classification And Limit” NA, *The Sporting Life*, December 5, 1888, 1.

brace up. It would also help them shift the blame and, presumably, the animosity of the drinker at the same time. Instead of the club leveling fines directly on its players, and possibly upsetting them, the teams could shift the blame for a reduction in salary to the more impersonal League Office that was responsible for the classifications. The League even wrote this into the plan, as teams now reported violations of club rules directly to Nick Young.¹¹ “The drinking habits of a player will be a fatal obstacle to his reaching class A. Temperate habits will be the first qualification for this class. . . . Professional base ball has been disgraced long enough by excessive drinkers.” The Brush Plan’s supporters hoped that “to be classified in class A at the close of the season will be his goal, and better exhibitions of ball playing may be expected as a consequence of this action on the part of the League.”¹²

One other notable aspect of the Brush Plan was that player grades were supposed to be a secret. Clearly, a team would know where its own men stood, because it had to pay them appropriately, but one club would not know the grades of players on other teams. There was nothing to prevent the players from revealing their own status if they wanted to, of course, but the grades would not be public knowledge otherwise. Cynics must have smiled, however, when Washington sportswriter Bob Larnier spoke with Young and reported, “‘Class A’ will not be heavily stocked at the beginning, and many players who are perhaps counting upon being at the top of the ladder, are more apt to find themselves in the middle or near the bottom.”¹³

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¹¹ No title, NA, *The Sporting Life*, March 27, 1889, 4.

¹² “Classification And Limit” NA, *The Sporting Life*, December 5, 1888, 1.

¹³ “The League Law” R.M. Larnier, *The Sporting Life*, December 19, 1888, 1.

One of the Brotherhood's ranking officers still in the United States, New York pitcher and Secretary-Treasurer Tim Keefe, seemed to have some of these questions in mind when asked his views on the League's move.

Though I cannot say definitely what shape the action of the brotherhood will take, depend upon it we are not going to sit idly by and allow the league to deal as unfairly by us and in as bad faith as has been the case. They broke faith with us last year, when they promised to abolish the \$2,000 limit clause and did not. At that time, when we asked Mr. Rogers why the league acted thus, he tried to throw the blame upon the American Association. When we came to investigate we found, through Mr. Brunell, that Mr. Rogers was to blame. The action of the league this year is in direct violation of our contract clause, which states that a player, when reserved, shall not receive less than he received the previous season. It is certainly time to act. There will be plenty of fun ahead for the league. Why, it is the old \$2,000 limit business over again.¹⁴

Many doubted, as Keefe did, that this new system would turn out any different from the 1886 rule, and reminded observers of the National League's breach of faith. After reviewing how every team had circumvented the old limit rule, the *Chicago Daily Tribune* wrote that the League meant to establish a pure baseball trust with complete control over the players, and pointed out, "last winter the league agree to a new form of contract submitted by the brotherhood of professional base-ball players. One stipulation in that contract is that a player shall not be reserved at a less salary than he received under his last year's contract. . . . The league will be compelled to either break the new law or overlook the clause by which it retains control of the players."¹⁵

Other members of the Brotherhood did not need Ward around to speak for them, either. Arthur Irwin, field captain of the Philadelphia Quakers and a man universally regarded for his heady play on the field, offered the first hints that the BPBP might have some hole cards of their own when he told Boston sportswriter William Sullivan, "if this business is enforced and lived

¹⁴ "Concerning the League Meeting" NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, November 25, 1888, 10.

¹⁵ "How Base-Ball Is Run" NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, November 25, 1888, 10.

up to and ball players' salaries are all kept down to \$2,500 a year, the eight League clubs will be owned and run by new men to the base ball world in two years." Irwin proceeded to drop a few more hints.

Supposing all the League players sign an agreement to stick together, and they are divided into eight teams, which are put into the eight League cities. Now don't think that can't be done, because it can. Let me tell you something that perhaps you don't know. We knew what we were about when we made our kick for the Brotherhood contract. I know some one may cry 'Chestnut' when I say that there were men behind us with money at that time, ready to take up our cause. Did you know that Erastus Wiman, the New York millionaire, informed us that if we would furnish him with the players for eight League clubs he would see that the money was forthcoming to run them? Every one knows what Erastus Wiman is.¹⁶

In St. Louis, sportswriter Joe Pritchard also seemed to have an inkling that all was not as it seemed with the Brotherhood. He thought it was "possessed of a great deal more strength than most people think for." Furthermore, "if the League moguls refuse to listen to their appeals the members of the Brotherhood then will strike for their rights, and if they are forced to do such a thing they will establish clubs in the various cities now under control of the National League and call the new circuit the Union League." Pritchard wrote that a Brotherhood member told him "I know just about what my services are worth to my club, and this amount I shall expect to get. If the bosses attempt to bulldoze us into signing, I am of the opinion that they will find they have bit off more than they can chew. . . . The Brotherhood is not saying much, but its members are doing considerable thinking, and they will act, and act promptly, too, when they see fit."¹⁷

Even as Irwin was breathing fire, however, Tim Keefe, after stewing over things for a week, was retracting his claws. He did confirm the truth of what Irwin said, but then remarked he might have responded a bit hastily at first. He said he believed Young's statements about not breaking the deal with the Brotherhood, and that their agreement still held for men already under

¹⁶ "Hub Happenings" Mugwump, *The Sporting Life*, December 5, 1888, 1.

¹⁷ "St. Louis Siftings" Joe Pritchard, *The Sporting Life*, December 5, 1888, 5.

reserve, stating that the initial reports he had read explaining the plan were incomplete and misleading. Keefe also acknowledged that a prime motivation for adopting the plan was to keep players from complaining their way out of town in order to get more money elsewhere, although he declined to say whether he found this part of the explanation mollifying or not.¹⁸ Was Keefe sincere in these remarks, or merely trying to muddle the situation by throwing out false leads as to the BPBP's intentions? Throwing up a smokescreen seems the most likely explanation.

To add to the confusion, Erastus Wiman denied being in league with the Brotherhood, although he admitted he had spoken with them and been part of their councils in the past. Interviewed by New York writer George Stackhouse, he said, "I am out of base ball. Some time ago, probably a year or more, I might have done so, but not now. At that time I had the old Metropolitan Club on my hands, and acknowledge that I did consider such a scheme. Ward came to me and made such a proposition and I thought favorably of it at the time. Now such a thing is out of the question."¹⁹

Further clouding matters was the fact that the implementation of the new salary rule seemed to work differently depending on who interpreted the rule. The League claimed it was not breaking faith with the Brotherhood, but at the same time, as Nick Young said on December 15, "the new classification rule takes effect on and after to-day and all players who are not under contractual obligation now will have to be graded in accordance with the provision of the law." Both of these things could not be true at the same time. Some teams in the National League seem to have been confused about their own rule as well. By December 15, only two of them, Washington and Indianapolis, had sent Young their list of which players needed classification

¹⁸ "Hub Happenings" Mugwump, *The Sporting Life*, December 5, 1888, 1.

¹⁹ "New York News" George Stackhouse, *The Sporting Life*, December 12, 1888, 4.

and which had come an agreement.²⁰ The Indianapolis list included its entire roster with the exception of captain Jack Glasscock and one other marginal player because, in a perversion of the intent of the rule that should not have been difficult to see coming, Indianapolis management had refused to negotiate with any players so they would have to fall into the classification system no matter what.²¹

One final notable aspect of the plan was its clear intent to divide the players against themselves. If a player had respectable talent and respectable habits, his salary under the Brush Plan was unlikely to vary significantly from what he would make with no plan in place. Owners and writers said so constantly in their attempts to persuade the public that they did not intend their plan to hurt the players. The only players hurt badly by this plan would be those who made in excess of \$2,500 per year, or those who drank and partied frequently. The League's owners hoped to turn the large body of players against their own leadership by trying to demonstrate to the average players that their interests were not the same as the interests of those well-off players such as Ward who claimed to speak for them. This part of the Brush Plan did not work, however, since most baseball players hoped they might one day end up playing in New York and earning a larger paycheck.

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At this point, it is interesting to note that the Brush Classification Plan was one part of the panaceas for all things ailing baseball put forth by Francis Richter in *The Sporting Life's* Millennium Plan, although modified in some important respects. How, then, did writers and

²⁰ "The League Law" R.M. Larner, *The Sporting Life*, December 19, 1888, 1.

²¹ "Indianapolis Affairs" A.G. Ovens, *The Sporting Life*, December 19, 1888, 1.

public opinion respond to its promulgation? This was a critical point, of course, because if the players were to attempt any large-scale protest, having the public on their side was of great value. Furthermore, as newspapers were the only source of news for most cranks, what writers had to say was equally crucial.

The sundry newspapers reporting on the new scheme had a predictable mix of reactions, although a majority favored the move. For its supporters, a few considerations seemed most meritorious. Some, like the *Philadelphia Item*, believed that the plan benefited the players in the end, because more stability in finances would remedy the evil of teams dropping out of leagues during or after the season. In fact, many minor league teams had gone bankrupt and disbanded in 1888, in addition to Detroit leaving the National League. Therefore, an overall drop in team expenses meant greater stability in the job market. Others, such as the *Philadelphia North American*, cited a similar reason, that uniform salaries would go a long ways towards allowing the clubs to compete on an even basis. Teams from smaller markets constantly selling the releases of men they could no longer afford would be a thing of the past.²²

Few papers were so blunt as to simply say that ballplayers were overpaid and deserved less money, but a few did, such as the *New York World*, which opined, “this new salary limit will reduce the aristocratic base ball player to the level of lawyers and doctors and journalists. The boss barons will be made a little richer, but the country can stand it.” Likewise, the *Washington Capital* stated, “the men will be better off under the change, as the smaller salaries will tend to make them more saving. As it is now, the high salaries paid serve no other purpose,

²² *The Sporting Life* reprinted the responses from these various newspapers in “The Salary Limit” NA, *The Sporting Life*, December 5, 1888, 3.

except in a very few instances, than to supply funds to be squandered in the various excesses of life.”²³

This last point was certainly in keeping with the times. In the 1880s, social Darwinism was at its height, with its belief that it was useless to help poor people or people of bad habits, because they would only squander whatever help they received. Their poverty was proof that they were unable to do better, in the eyes of the social Darwinists. This viewpoint came in different shadings, however, with some willing to allow that the poor could improve their situation, but only through acquiring the moral habits of their social betters. Nick Young, president of the National League, often struck this tone upon receipt of letters from players appealing to him for one reason or another. Whenever a player petitioned him, Young’s responses typically evaded the request but advised the petitioner to upgrade his moral habits in some fashion. For instance, when one player sent him a letter describing his qualifications for a spot in the National League (an inappropriate request, as Young had no power to sign players for teams) Young responded by writing, “You say you drink very little. Why not commence at once, and say ‘I never drink.’ The hardest drinker commenced by drinking very little. It is very important that men who aspire to be ball players should be temperate in all things, to put them in the best possible physical condition.”²⁴ This is not to say Young was incorrect in his views. Many players tarnished potentially fine careers through an over-fondness for intoxicating beverages. The significance is that rather than simply responding to the question posed, which in this example he could have done by replying that such a request was outside of his powers to grant, Young chose to include an unsolicited lecture on morality as well.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ “Appeals To Young” R.M. Larner, *The Sporting Life*, January 30, 1889, 1.

The plan's opponents likewise took various grounds for their disagreement. The New York *Sun* was among the few simply stating that players deserved what they could get, just like any other worker or business owner. "Buck and his brothers are eminently good laborers, and they are worthy of their hire. Why shouldn't they have it?" Others, such as the Cincinnati *Enquirer*, believed that teams would find every way imaginable to subvert the new rule and find loopholes, as everyone had done in 1886. That paper even quoted Cincinnati Red Stockings president Aaron Stern as opposed to the American Association copying the League. Stern said, "I believe in every club being master of its own affairs. I want to be able to do business with my men in my own style. I think I am able to judge what their services are worth without having someone to classify them for me." Stern also stated his belief that this classification system would drastically increase record playing, both in the field and at the bat. This last complaint was probably the most common of all. Many observers, like the St. Louis *Globe-Democrat*, thought players would play for their statistics, since statistics were the only fair criterion for judgment, and that teamwork and strategy inevitably would suffer as a result.²⁵

From Washington, Bob Larner called the new plan "undoubtedly a sensible and businesslike proceeding" that he felt would reverse the current situation in which, "the life blood has been slowly, but steadily ebbing from base ball for several years past." He wrote that the star players would no doubt complain, "But when they stop to consider the situation in a calm, reasonable spirit they will probably appreciate the policy." Larner also tried to assuage worries about the feasibility of a classification system that included intangible factors by stating that president Nick Young, "has the confidence of players, managers and the public, and there is no

²⁵ *The Sporting Life* reprinted the responses from these various newspapers in "The Salary Limit" NA, *The Sporting Life*, December 5, 1888, 3.

doubt but he will do his work well, and at the same time earn the merited advance in his salary.”²⁶

O.P. Caylor saw some merit in the plan, but believed the teams should have graded salaries between \$1,000 and \$3,000, with jumps of \$500 in between. In addition, he thought that continuous and quality service with the same team should entitle a player to improve their standing by one grade every three years, even if the man’s performance had stayed steady and his classification was otherwise unchanged. If the teams did not like this or want to pay the increase, they should let the player go. He also called for the BPBP to offer a compromise plan if they were unhappy as a group, believing that such a plan had a chance of acceptance.

The backbone of Caylor’s commentary was that the Brush Plan gave no reward for long and faithful service on the part of individual players. All observers agreed that one of the reasons salaries had spiked in recent years was that talented but discontented players felt they could make more elsewhere, thus putting pressure on their teams to move them or else risk an uninspired performance by a petulant player. This new graded salary scheme would only provide more reasons for dissatisfaction, which might lead to lackluster play on the field. If veterans of long experience and loyalty saw younger, unproven men getting as much or more compensation than they did, it would not provide much incentive for loyalty to the ball club.²⁷

When making such comments, he possibly had in mind the situation in his former home, Cincinnati. There, the Red Stockings signed young outfielder “Bug” Holliday and, as an American Association team, they could sign Holliday for whatever they saw fit to pay him. Apparently, the team saw fit to pay Holliday quite a bit (the rumored value was \$2,800), because the signing caused three of Cincinnati’s talented veterans, John Reilly, Bid McPhee, and Hick

²⁶ “Washington Whispers” Bob Lerner, *The Sporting Life*, November 28, 1888, 6.

²⁷ “Caylor’s Comment” O.P. Caylor, *The Sporting Life*, January 23, 1889, 4.

Carpenter, to hold out for greater pay.²⁸ A graded salary plan would result in the same situation, the only difference being that the salaries producing the jealousy would be a bit lower. (It turned out that Holliday was the best hitter on the Reds in 1889, but of course, young players did not usually have such spectacular debuts, and no one could predict this ahead of time.) Carpenter and McPhee came to terms with Sterns before too many suns had set, but Reilly proved more stubborn. When interviewed, Reilly confirmed this was indeed the reason for his holdout. “Mr. Stern pays Holliday a large salary, and I think I can reasonably ask for as much as he is to receive. I have been with the Cincinnati Club for a number of seasons, and I feel that I have always given satisfaction and have improved each year in my work.”²⁹ Reilly, because of his past efforts in Cincinnati, had support for his position. “The argument made by Long John is that if ‘Bug’ Holliday is worth \$2,800 to the Cincinnati team, he is surely entitled to as much . . . if there is one man in the Cincinnati team whose whole soul is in its success that man is Reilly. He is one of your mortals who mourns over a lost game like a man who has buried a friend.”³⁰

Over in Baltimore, Albert Mott was not sanguine of the plan’s chances. He wrote that the Brush Plan, “has the fatal defect of depending entirely for its success upon the good faith of a miscellaneous assembly of human beings, with the usual human traits, among which it may be safely depended upon they possess at least a modest avarice and a laudable rivalry.” Mott predicted,

when fate, luck or the fortunes of the field combine with private proddings of patrons and public impaling by the press, the temptation to evade the law becomes too strong for fallible human nature, and the result is a breach of the rule such as to ultimately cause it to become a dead letter. Unhealthy sentiment may ascribe a more lofty code of morals to

²⁸ No title, NA, *The Sporting Life*, February 6, 1889, 2.

²⁹ “Reilly’s Ultimatum” John Reilly, *The Sporting Life*, February 13, 1889, 2.

³⁰ “Cincinnati Chips” Ren Mulford, Jr., *The Sporting Life*, February 13, 1889, 5.

'magnates' than to the balance of the human race, but unfortunately for the welfare of the game, they have always shown themselves to be possessed of the average failings.³¹

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As if to confirm the worst fears of the critics almost immediately, even before December was over, various teams behaved in ways suggesting they were not following the letter of their own law. "It is understood that several of the New York, Boston and Philadelphia players have already made acceptable terms with their respective managers, but their contracts have not been formally announced. Such proceedings are calculated to create dissatisfaction in various quarters and open the door to allegations of favoritism in allowing players and managers to dicker about terms after the 15th."³²

This suspicion thickened when, in early February, the New York Giants announced that Roger Connor, Mickey Welch, Jim O'Rourke, Danny Richardson, Art Whitney, Gil Hatfield, Will George, Bill Brown, Mike Slattery, George Gore, and Ledell Titcomb had signed that week, with Tim Keefe and Buck Ewing on the verge. As the December 15 deadline was long gone, but the men signed without much news or discussion or complaint about the amount they had signed for, baseball observers understandably surmised that something might be afoot.³³ It also turned out Keefe was not ready to sign, but chose to hold out instead. Making a mockery of the Brush Plan's rules, he held out all the way into May, signing after the season began. He timed everything perfectly. By the time the season opened, several New York pitchers were injured. Things were so bad that catcher Buck Ewing was forced to pitch a game, against the now-

³¹ "Baltimore Bulletin" TTT, *The Sporting Life*, December 26, 1888, 5.

³² "Washington Whispers" R.M. Lerner, *The Sporting Life*, December 26, 1888, 1.

³³ "From League Headquarters" R.M. Lerner, *The Sporting Life*, February 13, 1889, 1.

formidable Boston Beaneaters lineup, at that. While Ewing did admirably, showing a terrific fastball, at this point New York owner John Day saw no choice but to give in and sign Keefe on Keefe's terms, which were a salary of \$4,500.³⁴

Of course, several players also kicked against their classification, and refused to accept the terms offered at first. Washington's ace pitcher, Jim Whitney, was among them, aggrieved despite his Class A ranking because it would violate his contract and pay a lesser salary than he had enjoyed in 1888. The Grasshopper, despite a losing record for his career, was a terrific pitcher by modern evaluation methods. He led the National League in fewest walks allowed per nine innings in five consecutive seasons, 1883-1887, and led the NL in ratio of strikeouts to walks four different times. The first eight years of his career were possibly of Hall of Fame caliber. By 1889, however, he was suffering from an illness that became more serious over time, and he died in 1891. No one could foresee this in the off-season of 1888-1889, however, and while most sportswriters were praising the efforts to bring salaries down, many sympathized with Whitney as a man who deserved better due to his pitching work and off-field comportment.³⁵ Jerry Denny even vouched for Whitney's health after a winter spent playing ball in California, claiming he showed no physical problems.³⁶ Whitney did manage to complain his way out of Washington, as the Nationals traded him to Indianapolis in exchange for another pitcher, John Healy, but Whitney still had to sign for the figure at which Nick Young slotted him.³⁷

There was also the matter of the lingering effects of the salary limit of 1886 complicating matters. Recall that, to work around the \$2,000 limit, teams often offered players \$2,000 in their

³⁴ "New York News" W.I. Harris, *The Sporting Life*, May 15, 1889, 5.

³⁵ "Washington Whispers" R.M. Larner, *The Sporting Life*, February 6, 1889, 6; "The Washingtonians" Sam, *The Sporting News*, February 9, 1889, 3.

³⁶ "Indianapolis Mention" A.G. Ovens, *The Sporting Life*, April 10, 1889, 1.

³⁷ "Signed With the Hoosiers" NA, *Pittsburg Dispatch*, April 6, 1889, 6.

official contract, but then supplemented that amount with personal service contracts for the remainder of the salary they agreed on with their players. Jack Glasscock, of Indianapolis, was one player affected by this situation. In 1888, his official contract and supplemental contract together paid him \$3,000 total. Indianapolis offered him a straight \$2,500 for 1889 (along with an extra stipend for being team captain, which was allowed under the Brush Plan), a clear decrease over the previous year. Yet, the Hoosiers had the audacity to claim they were giving their infielder a raise, as his official contract would stand \$500 higher than in 1888. Glasscock did not see things in that light, feeling this was an act of bad faith given the provision in the National League's deal with the Brotherhood on contracts disallowing the unilateral reduction of a player's salary. He decided not to sign his contract, hoping the Brotherhood would take up his cause.³⁸ Glasscock later relented, however, and accepted the terms offered by the Hoosiers.

Indianapolis created another interesting situation that the Brush Plan did not clearly address when they moved to sign pitcher Charlie Getzein in early March. Getzein had obviously not signed by December 15, but because he had formerly been with Detroit, which disbanded operations, it was impossible for him to have done so. He believed he should be exempt from classification, as the team that would have classified him no longer existed. He could not sign with his old team, but that team had not sent him somewhere else in time to negotiate by the December deadline, so Getzein understandably felt aggrieved.³⁹ He signed with Indianapolis in late March, lacking a better option, but without undue complaining.⁴⁰ This caused one paper to

³⁸ "Jack Glasscock Talks" Pickwick, *The Sporting Life*, February 27, 1889, 1.

³⁹ "Getzein Of Detroit" Lew, *The Sporting News*, March 9, 1889, 3.

⁴⁰ "Getzein Has Accepted the Terms" NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, March 24, 1889, 6.

offer, “it is no sure thing that Detroit did not divide the purchase money with Getzein. At any rate, he became well satisfied with Indianapolis very suddenly.”⁴¹

As mentioned previously, players with limited major league experience proved difficult to classify properly, because they had a limited record of performance against major league competition and little reputation, for good or ill, in terms of deportment. Such was true of Chicago White Stockings outfielder Hugh Duffy. An eventual Hall of Famer, Duffy was a rookie in 1888, with but 298 professional at bats to his name. He had had a nice year however, with a .282 batting average, possessed a reputation as a solid defensive player, and did not have an unsavory record in regards to alcohol or behavior. When he found out Nick Young rated him in Class C and he would therefore get \$2,000 just as he had the year before, Duffy felt underappreciated and inclined to protest his classification. Chicago management agreed with his own assessment of his worth, as the team turned down a reported offer of \$8,000 for his sale over the winter.⁴²

One reason Chicago offered for its behavior in the Duffy case was that, because Nick Young put Duffy in Class C, its hand were tied in the matter. This was not always true, however, as the classification scheme was malleable when the situation required it. At least, it was for Philadelphia Quakers first baseman Sid Farrar. Farrar, slotted into Class C, held out because he believed he deserved better. As April moved along and opening day of the 1889 season approached with Farrar still not in the fold, Quakers management started getting desperate. “Col. Rogers and Manager Wright then promised to use their united influences with President Nick Young to have Farrar placed in Class B this year. This won Sidney over and he

⁴¹ “Notes And Comments” NA, *The Sporting Life*, April 3, 1889, 4.

⁴² Ibid.

signed.” Farrar himself said, “If the club wants to pay me \$2,250 you can bet Old Nick will put me in Class B.”⁴³

As for Al Spalding, his attitude toward the Brush Plan depended upon when you asked him the question. When he “first” heard about the situation on his tour, he stated he disliked the plan. Once back in Chicago, however, and with no further need to keep the All-American team happy and well disposed towards him personally, his views underwent a radical change, and he stated his intent to support the new scheme fully. (As mentioned earlier, some historians believe he was the true architect of the Brush Plan all along. Given that nothing happened in the National League without his blessing, it seems almost inconceivable that his fellow owners would have taken such a drastic measure without his knowledge and approval.)

One final problem with this plan was that, when actually implemented, it did not always reward baseball players for being good baseball players, which is, after all, what wins games. For instance, National League president Nick Young classified Boston’s John Morrill, a man acknowledged by all observers as a gentleman with excellent personal habits, in Class A. Jerry Denny of Indianapolis ended up in Class B. Yet, Denny was a far more effective baseball player than Morrill by 1889. About to turn thirty-four years old, Morrill was coming off a dismal season in which he hit .198, posting an OPS+ of 79 and 1.4 WAR, his WAR landing that high only because of his defensive skill. Denny, on the other hand, was still in the prime of his career, had just finished a nice season with a 115 OPS+, a WAR of 2.4, and he was the acknowledged king of defensive third baseman as well. Yes, he drank from time to time, while Morrill never did. Despite this, Denny was still more valuable to his team than Morrill was. The difference in contributions on the field was even greater during the 1889 season. Morrill, on his last legs as an

⁴³ “Sid Farrar Signs” NA, *The Sporting News*, April 13, 1889, 1.

active player, limped home with 0.1 WAR after playing in only 44 games for Washington (he was still with Boston when Nick Young decided his classification, but Boston transferred him to the Nationals before the season began). Denny, on the other hand, essentially reproduced his 1888 season, posting 2.3 WAR for Indianapolis.

Observers at the time did not necessarily see things this way, however. Not privy to such statistical concepts, many heralded Morrill's move to Washington as a masterstroke that might finally elevate the Nationals to respectability in the National League. "Every body knows that under so capable, efficient and practically experienced manager and Captain as John Morrill is known to be, the Washington Club, will make things mighty interesting in the League this season. . . . In Morrill the club gets a man who is known throughout the land, as a manager who possesses the requisite qualifications, and as an honorable and upright player."⁴⁴ Even though Washington acquired shortstop Sam Wise from Boston along with Morrill, and catcher Tom Daly from Chicago, as well after Al Spalding released him in anger over his drinking on the Spalding tour, it still did not help the Nationals be a better baseball team. In fact, they were worse in 1889 than they had been in 1888, their win total falling from 48 to 41, and by midseason, Morrill had to step down as manager with the club standing at 13 wins versus 38 losses. As another sportswriter wrote in lament when the club started slowly and he began realizing Morrill was not the answer by himself, "John Morrill, as captain, was expected to infuse new life and vigor into their movements, and many of the wise men interested in the game put them down for sixth or seventh place sure. Some were enthusiastic enough to predict that they would wind up fifth or better." Instead, by June, "He is exceedingly weak at the bat, and

⁴⁴ "Joy In Washington" Sam, *The Sporting News*, April 13, 1886, 3.

while I know that he does the best he can under all circumstances, I am convinced that his best days on the ball field have passed.⁴⁵

This is but one example of how the Brush Plan did not always reward players for being good players. It forced Washington to pay Morrill much more money than the value he actually produced on the field. Its supporters claimed it would inspire players to greater performance, but as it actually played out, that was not the purpose of the plan, only an incidental benefit the League hoped it might realize. The real purpose was to inspire players to better personal habits. Recall that Nick Young had said, “intelligent players will recognize it and it depends upon their own exertions whether they shall be benefited by it.” Yet, if classification depended as much or more on a man’s deportment off the field as it did on his performance on the field, this diluted or almost eliminated the incentive to greater exertion. Clearly, the exertion the National League had in mind was that players not exert themselves in having a good time during the late hours.

This is not really a surprise, however, and it fits perfectly with the National League’s record of relating to its players all through the later 1880s. As was true in regards to player fitness, gambling, or violence in baseball, League owners did not care much how they made money, so long as they made money. Spalding and others expressed, frequently, a desire to elevate baseball’s image amongst the “better class” of people, and believed that finding more moral players, or failing that, upgrading the morals of existing players, was the surest path to this goal. Of course, players that drank less would most likely play better, and the team would win more games if that happened, but winning was not as important to most owners as profiting. This behavior on the part of the National League also demonstrates the paternalistic attitude it so often took towards the players. If the players would not shape up on their own, the League must

⁴⁵ “Senators Scorched” R.M. Larner, *The Sporting Life*, June 5, 1889, 2.

make them shape up. At heart, most were no better than irresponsible children, so the League was actually doing them a favor by reducing their pay and preventing them from wasting their own money.

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On the surface, despite a few little arguments here and there, things seemed more or less serene for the National League in the middle of March. The opening of the season was little more than a month away, enthusiasm amongst the fans was on the rise, some teams had assembled their men already to get in shape for the coming campaign, and most NL players seemed content with their contract situation. True, there were still a few holdouts and complaints, the League had not yet resolved the Rowe-White matter, and a few other legal questions hung in the air regarding the Brush Plan, such as whether some teams, New York for instance, had evaded.

Still, by the standards of most off-seasons in 1880s baseball, this was not especially dramatic. The League settled its membership issue quickly and easily, with Cleveland firmly in place of Detroit. It had overcome the financial problems of Indianapolis, and the Hoosiers were good to play at least one more season. From all published reports save the vindictive ones appearing in *The Sporting News*, Al Spalding and his tourists had achieved a host of successes booming America's national game abroad. Baseball's leaders had every reason to look forward to the new season.

It seems the reason things were relatively calm is that, even though the Brotherhood had made public comments here and there regarding the National League's perfidy, the BPBP really

did need its president, Ward, in order to coordinate its response. That is why player objections to the Brush Plan had been individual ones rather than the Brotherhood making any complaint on behalf of its members. Perhaps this gave the National League's owners a false sense of security heading into the 1889 season as well. When no coordinated response was forthcoming from the BPBP, the owners might have concluded that the Brush Plan was a success and that the organization was not as strong as rumors claimed. The apparent acquiescence of the players in the Brush Plan by the spring of 1889 contributed to this perceived feeling of success.

They had overlooked one thing, however. On March 14, newspapers in the US revealed that one player on Spalding's tour planned to end his odyssey a little early. "Capt. John M. Ward's intention of leaving the Spalding base-ball party and sailing for New York tomorrow has been no secret among the members of the two teams or to Mr. Spalding for some days." Like the rest of the tourists, Ward had had no inkling of what was going on in the US since leaving San Francisco the prior November. Upon arrival in Europe, however, the ball tossers finally had the opportunity to receive mail, and Ward decided to alter his plans immediately. When asked why Ward planned to steam home early, one member of the All-American team simply said, "Johnny Ward knows that the Brotherhood of American Ball-Players wants him at home and he is going there; that is all there is to the matter."⁴⁶

⁴⁶ "Mr. Ward's Return Home" NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, March 14, 1889, 2.

Chapter 18

The Beginning of the End of the American Association

Most histories of 1880s baseball and the Players League of 1890 note the fact that after the PL failed to establish itself in 1890, the National League's other rival, the American Association, also fell apart and played its last season in 1891. The general storyline is that, with the Players League out of the way, the National League was free to deal with a weakened American Association in its own time and finish off its rival. While true in its way, this does not do justice to all the maneuvers that brought this denouement about. In fact, we can trace the real reasons for the American Association's destruction to the 1888 season and its aftermath.

All through the 1880s, baseball writers generally observed that of the two major leagues, the National League seemed to have the more effective and harmonious group of leaders. Al Spalding led the way, certainly, but in addition John Day of New York and John Rogers in Philadelphia were some of the most powerful and influential men in the game. As a result, the League always seemed to outmaneuver the Association at critical times, as when it lured Pittsburgh away from the Association for the 1887 season to fill one of its vacancies in the place of Kansas City and St. Louis. As one sportswriter put it, "the business of the League is kept from the public, while the Association 'circle' has no secrets . . . the Association grinds more axes in public in one year than the League will in a dozen. The Association magnates are always quarreling among themselves and talking of dirty ball, etc., while the League people have their

little spats in some quiet nook, and the public is none the wiser.”¹ Baseball was popular enough, however, that the Association always seemed to muddle through. This was true up through the 1887 season. In 1888, however, things started to change. The issue that initiated the eventual demise of the American Association was, perhaps not surprisingly, the interlocked questions regarding player salaries and ticket prices.

Even by 1887, there were a few cracks showing in the Association’s armor. In St. Louis, Chris Von der Ahe was always a wild card. No one knew what he might do next, and his moods swung wildly depending on the current fortunes of his beloved Browns. However, as he had the best team in the Association and its best drawing card, other owners had to humor him, and Von der Ahe often persuaded them to go along with whatever he had in mind, regardless of the consequences. The problem with this situation was that the other owner who cut the largest figure in the Association, Charles Byrne in Brooklyn, usually opposed whatever Von der Ahe wanted to do, and as Byrne also had a top team by 1888 and resided in the second largest market the Association had left after the Metropolitans retired from New York, his word counted for a great deal as well.²

Besides his clashes with Von der Ahe, which became increasingly frequent in 1888, Byrne was also partly responsible for another of the Association’s mistakes of 1887. At a late-season Association meeting, he combined with Billy Barnie of Baltimore to convince his fellow representatives to exclude O.P. Caylor from the meeting. Caylor was the manager of the New York Metropolitans, and had every right to be there, but Barnie and Byrne convinced their brethren that Caylor was, first and foremost, a newspaper writer (he wrote a weekly column for

¹ “St. Louis Siftings” Joe Pritchard, *The Sporting Life*, August 8, 1888, 6.

² As the American Association actually split the Philadelphia market with the National League, one could even make a case that Brooklyn was the largest market remaining to the Association.

The Sporting Life, as anyone who has read the footnotes of this dissertation knows well by this point), and thus had no place in their councils.

Perhaps now would be the proper time for a few words concerning Caylor. Oliver Perry Caylor wore many hats and was involved with professional baseball in many different guises throughout the 1880s. When he kept his sarcasm within bounds, he was among the most entertaining baseball writers for any of the national publications of the day, and one of the most courageous as well. He even participated in the launch of a daily paper that discussed nothing but baseball, the *Daily Baseball Gazette*, although the paper put out only a few issues before going under. More important to our story is Caylor's historic relationship with the American Association. He had been part of the organization from its birth. Caylor, along with Horace Phillips, late of Pittsburgh, was among the men most prominent in starting the league in the winter of 1881-1882. He had also managed two Association clubs, Cincinnati and New York. As a result, he was deep in the councils of the Association and knew most of its dirty secrets. When Association owners ostracized him from their affairs at that fateful 1887 meeting, he turned against them in the press, and some of those secrets came into the light.³ Caylor knew enough about baseball and its history that, when the Brotherhood War began and Al Spalding purchased a New York paper called the *Sporting Times* as his organ to combat the players, Spalding tabbed Caylor, along with Harry Palmer, as the editors. His acid wit and biting prose helped to undermine the position of the Brotherhood as the 1890 season unfolded.⁴

Caylor, however potent his pen, had no formal role in the American Association after 1887. The men who did, however, often made decisions that left the group careening from one

³ Phillips' story has a rather sad ending. Midway through the 1889 season he developed a mental illness diagnosed as acute paresis, and ended up in an asylum in New Jersey. He did eventually recover his wits, however. "Phillips' Misfortune" NA, *The Sporting Life*, August 14, 1889, 1.

⁴ Lamster, *Spalding's World Tour*, 257-258.

near-disaster to the next. This was true both on the field and off. Up until 1888, the National League charged fifty cents for its cheapest tickets and seventy-five for the better seats in the grandstand. In the Association, teams charged twenty-five cents for the bleaching boards and fifty for the grandstand. In that year, however, the Association decided to try to operate on the same financial level as the League, and increased its ticket prices to the League standard, as described in chapter eleven. The Association believed it played just as a good a brand of baseball as the League did, which was more or less true, and that as the salaries of players had risen steadily in the past five years, it needed to jump its ticket prices to League levels to make sure it could compete for talent.

By midseason, however, many regretted the change. By that point, baseball observers generally believed that Brooklyn was doing well and Cincinnati reasonably well under the new rate. Cincinnati owner Aaron Stern told sportswriter Ren Mulford, Jr., “the season, outside of Cincinnati and Brooklyn, has been a financial disappointment. We have been credited with making money. A few thousand dollars signifies what our profits have been, and if any man wants to buy out the Cincinnati Club I am willing to treat with him.” Cleveland seemed to be in decent shape as well, but the other Association cities were kicking hard against the fifty-cent ticket plan. As we will see, it is not a coincidence that by 1890, all three of these clubs were in the National League, replacing Detroit, Indianapolis, and Washington. As Mulford wrote, “the Association prospects are not cheering—that is certain. St. Louis is a dead rabbit town, and the club that is such a magnet away from home cannot draw more than mosquitoes and Joe Pritchard in its own bailiwick. The high tariff has crippled Baltimore, and would have killed Philadelphia. Louisville is struggling along, thinking much and saying little, while Cleveland is nearer a paying basis . . .” Rumors that Cincinnati and Brooklyn planned to jilt the Association and join

the League had been in the air for nearly a year already, and the rumors only increased as the American Association debated what to do about its ticket prices.⁵

The experiment lasted only into July. Surprisingly, however, a National League team caved first. That the team was Philadelphia is not a surprise, as a combination of owner Rogers' loyalty to quarter admissions, the death of top pitcher Charlie Ferguson, a rainy spring, a disappointing 26-24 record at the end of June, and the resulting weak patronage of the club made Rogers decide to return to his comfort zone and resume offering twenty-five cent tickets.⁶ The Philadelphia Athletics of the American Association had the right to drop their prices should this occur. They did so, but when the Association met in early summer to discuss retrograde action on the part of the entire Association, they elected to stay with fifty-cent admissions for the time being, Philadelphia excepted. Cleveland, Brooklyn, and Cincinnati wanted to keep the current tariff, while St. Louis, Baltimore, Louisville, and Philadelphia did not, and Kansas City abstained. Needing a two-thirds vote to change their collective minds, the fifty-cent policy stood for the time being.⁷

This is not to say that, by its close, 1888 was a financial failure for all Association teams. In addition to Cincinnati and Brooklyn, Philadelphia did just fine according to its treasurer, Whittaker, in part because of the combination of quarter tickets and a late-season surge in the standings that had some observers believing, at least for a time, that the team might overtake the mighty Browns. Whittaker said, "Financially the season has been very pleasant to us. We will close with quite a large profit. We are in favor of using all our profits and more besides to

⁵ "Cincinnati Chips" Ren Mulford, Jr., *The Sporting Life*, August 1, 1888, 7. Recall that Joe Pritchard was Mulford's St. Louis counterpart writer for *The Sporting Life*. A dead rabbit town was one with little action taking place.

⁶ "A Break In The Association High Tariff Line" Francis Richter, *The Sporting Life*, July 4, 1888, 1.

⁷ "The Fifty Cent Rate" NA, *The Sporting News*, July 7, 1888, 1.

improve the surroundings of the team for next season. We are now considering the question of a new ground, and it is about decided that we will have new quarters next year.”⁸

For the clubs that were struggling to draw patrons, however, keeping the fifty-cent minimum ticket price was an albatross dragging them down to the financial depths. As a result, some clubs tried to find loopholes. In Baltimore, for instance, manager Billy Barnie announced that while tickets sold at the team’s box office remained fifty cents, patrons could purchase their tickets at the old price at certain business establishments in the Monumental City.⁹ Clearly, this was against Association policy, but one observer asked, “what are the other magnates going to do about it? Louisville will do the same thing when she gets back. Von der Ahe will stand by Barnie and the Athletics will not vote against him. There you have it. That’s what the Association constitution is worth.”¹⁰ As a result, the American Association called an emergency meeting for August 7, 1888, to try to work out a plan regarding the issue of admission price.¹¹

The executives met in Parlor C of the Continental Hotel in Philadelphia. Surprisingly, they did reach agreement on the tariff question. Unexpectedly, Byrne sided with the quarter-admissions faction, giving them five votes out of six (Cleveland and Cincinnati were not present to vote), as Kansas City announced its willingness to side with the majority. Considerable politicking accompanied the decision, however. The Kansas City management was hoping to get on the good side of the rest of the Association because their franchise was a conditional one. The other owners of the AA retained the right to vote them out of the league at the conclusion of the season, so naturally enough, Cowboys management sought to make as many friends as

⁸ “In The Quaker City” HWL, *The Sporting News*, October 20, 1888, 5.

⁹ “Baltimore Bulletin” TTT, *The Sporting Life*, August 1, 1888, 3.

¹⁰ “Caylor’s Comment” O.P. Caylor, *The Sporting Life*, August 8, 1888, 7.

¹¹ “Will Meet At Last” NA, *The Sporting News*, August 4, 1888, 1.

possible whenever the opportunity arose.¹² In exchange for his vote, Brooklyn's Byrne extorted a concession in return. The Association must return to the guarantee plan for distributing revenue to the visiting clubs, and abandon giving the visitors a percentage of the gate. Of course, this would materially improve Brooklyn's finances, as it was the most patronized team in the Association (in just thirteen Sunday games, it drew 59,841 spectators to Ridgewood Park, including over 10,000 on June 3¹³), and it would no longer have to give a percentage of its gate to the rest of the league. Some teams made side deals around this issue, however, such as the St. Louis Browns agreeing to continue paying Louisville the percentage whenever the Colonels came to town. Still, even with the occasional exception, this was a steep price to pay, but the other members of the Association were desperate, so they agreed. It is also conceivable, but impossible to prove, that Byrne also extorted a player from Baltimore in return for his vote. Coincidence or not, within a few days, Baltimore's Tom "Oyster" Burns was a member of Byrne's nine in Brooklyn.¹⁴

Everyone seemed happy at that point. Except for Cleveland. The Blues had done reasonably well with fifty-cent tickets, and given the rising expenses of fielding a nine, management there believed the only way to make baseball a permanent institution was to keep ticket prices at a half dollar. Following the meeting, the team's president, Robinson, took the extreme step of telegraphing all other teams in the Association that he meant to put all his men on waivers, so that he might sell them to the highest bidder, and asking them not to claim any of the players so he could dispose of his roster profitably and put together a new team to play in the

¹² "Indiscreet Mr. Byrne" NA, *The Sporting News*, August 11, 1888, 1.

¹³ "Chadwick's Chat" Henry Chadwick, *The Sporting Life*, August 22, 1888, 4.

¹⁴ "The Association" NA, *The Sporting Life*, August 15, 1888, 1; "Caylor's Comment" O.P. Caylor, *The Sporting Life*, August 22, 1888, 2; "Brunell's Budget" F.H. Brunell, *The Sporting Life*, November 21, 1888, 3.

National League in 1889. Cincinnati refused to go along, however, and claimed some of the players in an effort to strengthen its nine for the stretch run in 1888, so Cleveland called off its plan. This led Robinson to state, “This is a good fifty-cent ball town, and a League club would draw better here than in any other city in the country except Chicago, New York, and Boston. The Association has struck us a foul and cowardly blow and I am in favor of quitting.” The new agreement did allow Cleveland to keep their fifty-cent ticket rate intact, which they did.¹⁵ By the end of the season, they ran a modest \$3,000 in the red, and believed that 1889, once they were ensconced in the National League and could draw fans with new faces to compete against, would be a much better season.¹⁶

Some writers wondered how Cleveland could scheme to enter the National League when the League had no vacancies. Others knew better that to believe such an inconvenient truth would hamper National League owners. There had been no vacancy in the League before 1887, either, yet that had not stopped Spalding and company from booting Kansas City from its ranks and replacing the Cowboys with a Pittsburgh franchise when opportunity favored such a course. If Cleveland wanted to come in, and the League’s owners wanted Cleveland in their ranks, they would find a way. There were also rumors that Pittsburgh’s management disliked the half dollar admission policy of the National League, as the team was not drawing very well. The club’s secretary, Scandrett, stated in an interview that the club might return to the American Association if given the opportunity, now that the AA had returned its ticket prices to their

¹⁵ “Is It Only A Bluff?” JRR, *The Sporting News*, August 11, 1888, 1.

¹⁶ “Brunell’s Budget” F.H. Brunell, *The Sporting Life*, December 12, 1888, 5.

former level.¹⁷ The team's president contradicted Scandrett, however, leaving baseball observers in suspense as to just what would happen.¹⁸

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Cleveland's anger over the proceedings came back to haunt the Association before long. In October, even as the New York-St. Louis World Series was still in progress, the Detroit Wolverines decided to pack it in and drop out of the National League. Cleveland jumped on the opportunity to buy the Detroit franchise, acquiring a few young and unproven players in the process, and switched leagues without hesitation. In place of Cleveland, with its respectable reputation as a baseball town and its population of 261,000 people (1890 census) the American Association fell back on Columbus, Ohio, a city with roughly one-third of Cleveland's population (with about 88,000 souls, it ranked thirtieth in the nation in population in 1890) and a largely unsuccessful previous history of just two years in major league baseball, after which the team transferred its location to Pittsburgh.

Still, things could have been worse. In November, Baltimore's chief owner, Harry Vonderhorst, reassured Oriole fans that their city would field a team for the coming season, despite rumors that that Baltimore was on the brink of dissolution after a lousy season financially. Some observers even believed that attendance had dropped into the double-digits at times in 1888. Although team management had to admit, "next season the Baltimore management will have the balance on the right side of the book, a little thing that did not occur

¹⁷ "Poor Old Pittsburgs" Reddy, *The Sporting News*, August 18, 1888, 1.

¹⁸ "Notes And Comments" NA, *The Sporting Life*, August 22, 1888, 2.

last season,”¹⁹ Vonderhorst said, “we will show people a team next season as strong as any in the Association. It will be a decided improvement on that of last season.” Vonderhorst was a man of his word, in this case. The Orioles bounced back from 1888’s 57-80 disaster to go a respectable 70-65 in 1889, largely thanks to pitcher Matt Kilroy.²⁰ Vonderhorst did not get to experience the comeback in person, however, as he sold most of his interest in the team to Baltimore oyster packers B.F. Farren and Fred Booth in January, 1889.²¹

At the same time, Brooklyn reaffirmed its loyalty, for 1889 at least, which meant that Cincinnati would remain in the fold, as well. The primary reason for Brooklyn’s return, besides Byrne’s pledge not to leave without a championship in his possession, was that leaving the Association for the League would mean the end of Sunday baseball in the City of Churches, a step that Byrne was not yet prepared to take, even for the fifty-cent general admissions charge in the League.²² There was also the possibility that, if Brooklyn did apply to the National League, the New York Giants might object at having a competitor so near their home territory. The Giants would need two other franchises to vote with them to block a Brooklyn application, the National League requiring a two-thirds vote to change its membership, and if Cincinnati tied its fate to that of Brooklyn, two existing National League franchises would get the boot. These two franchises, typically rumored to be Washington and Indianapolis, could then combine their votes with that of the Giants to block Brooklyn’s admission, which would also stymie Cincinnati and prevent their own dismissal. Given that New York Giants owner John Day publicly expressed his opposition to seeing Brooklyn in the League, stating, “We want no gamblers in our

¹⁹ “Baltimore News” Job Lots, *The Sporting News*, November 24, 1888, 1.

²⁰ “They Will All Stick” NA, *The Sporting News*, November 17, 1888, 1.

²¹ “A Baltimore Deal” NA, *The Sporting Life*, January 9, 1889, 1.

²² “Brooklyn Aims True” NA, *The Sporting News*, November 17, 1888, 1.

organization, and Byrne will never get in with his club as long as I am in it,” this was a serious potential roadblock.²³

Even with this temporary affirmation, however, there was no guarantee for Brooklyn beyond 1889. That is one reason why other Association teams grew extremely concerned as the Bridegrooms stockpiled talent as the 1888 season wound down. Not only did this contribute to general salary inflation throughout baseball, it made it more likely that Brooklyn would prevail and win the 1889 championship (which it did), which made it more likely Brooklyn would leave the Association for the League (which it did), and if that happened, it would take all its star players to the League, leaving the Association that much poorer in terms of the drawing power of its players.

* * * * *

Another of the American Association’s great mistakes was not replacing the New York Metropolitans franchise after Brooklyn’s Byrne bought the existing players before the 1888 season. Rather than replace that club with another New York team, the Association went through the farce of claiming that the New York Metropolitans franchise still existed, even though there was no actual team playing in New York. Only when it was obvious that no grounds were available that would suit the needs of an Association franchise did the Association end its charade. One consequence of this choice is obvious; the league had no team playing in the nation’s largest market, with the negative financial consequences one would expect. Instead of New York, the Association put a team in Kansas City. This disrupted the Association in a

²³ “Day Speaks Of Byrne” Gotham, *The Sporting News*, September 21, 1889, 1. Byrne was the owner of some gambling interests, thus Day’s reference.

couple ways. First, it unbalanced the league geographically, leaving it with five western teams, Kansas City, Cleveland, St. Louis, Louisville, and Cincinnati, and only three eastern ones, Brooklyn, Baltimore, and Philadelphia. This necessitated classing Cleveland with the eastern teams for scheduling purposes, adding to that club's travel mileage and expenses, while also increasing everyone's expenses in time and money for the long train ride to Kansas City. While this probably played a minimal role in Cleveland's decision to jump to the National League after the season, it could not have helped retain the Forest City club's loyalty, either.

The other obvious problem the loss of the Metropolitans created was the resultant speculation over how to replace them and put another team in New York. Many advanced the idea of relocating the best team in the Association, the St. Louis Browns, who despite their enormous success in the standings were not drawing great crowds in the Mound City because of the decision to move to fifty-cent tickets in 1888. Supporters of this plan believed that a team of the Browns' quality, with the New York market to support it, would rake in the cash. There were problems with such an idea, however, not least of which was that Brooklyn's Charles Byrne and St. Louis's Chris Von der Ahe did not see eye to eye very often. While never friends to begin with, things grew much worse between the two men in 1888, when Von der Ahe accused Byrne of tampering with one of his outfielders, Tip O'Neill, believing Byrne had encouraged O'Neill to play poorly so the Browns would let him go. Byrne countered that he had simply stated his desire to acquire the prodigious hitter, and had done nothing underhanded.²⁴

Consequently, the Association did nothing in 1888, to its collective detriment. The decision to grant a conditional franchise to Kansas City, meanwhile, created a new problem that continued festering. In some respects, the situation became that of a dog chasing its own tail.

²⁴ "The American Association" NA, *The Sporting Life*, August 8, 1888, 1.

Kansas City management was willing to spend money to bolster its ranks with better players but was only willing to do so if granted permanent status. Association owners wanted to make sure the Cowboys had a better ballpark before granting that status. The team countered that it was afraid of the large expense necessary to secure better grounds if the Association did not guarantee a place in the league the following season. And so it went, round and round.²⁵

The indecision resulted in other cities at least considering throwing their hats into the ring for Kansas City's spot after 1888, which could not have inspired the players, fans, or owners in Kansas City with much confidence in the team's future. Now that ticket prices were back to a quarter, Milwaukee and Buffalo had renewed interest. Even Omaha, billing itself as the best baseball city west of St. Louis, considered making a move, although the team's manager, Frank Selee, later denied such intent. He admitted he spoke with some of the Association's leading men about the possibility, but that the conversations were just discussions, not negotiations.²⁶

A late-September American Association meeting resolved the quandary at last. Kansas City finally persuaded the rest of the Association to grant it permanent status. A businessperson interested in cable railways from the Cowboy City, Mr. Holmes, stepped forward to resolve the difficulties. He owned the controlling interest in the Kansas City Western Association franchise, which had far better grounds than did the American Association team. Holmes proposed to merge the two teams, giving the Association Cowboys about thirty players from which to form a competitive team, plus the best ballpark in the city, as well as end the costly financial competition between the rival Kansas City clubs. With this promise made, the rest of the Association voted Kansas City a permanent franchise.²⁷

²⁵ "The Eighth Association Club" NA, *The Sporting Life*, August 22, 1888, 1.

²⁶ Ibid.; "Omaha Not Overly Anxious" NA, *The Sporting Life*, August 29, 1888, 5.

²⁷ "Results Of The Association Special Meeting" L.J.K., *The Sporting Life*, October 3, 1888, 1.

Things were looking up in Kansas City finally, but as 1888 turned to 1889, the future remained muddled for the American Association. Its winter meeting in December “was chiefly remarkable from the fact that for almost the first time in the history of the organization no glaring blunder was perpetrated.” On the down side, however, “the prospect is not of the brightest, with no limit to salaries and expenses, probably reduced income, an awkward circuit and a lopsided contest in view.”²⁸ Furthermore, while the organization made no significant blunders, it was a close call. There was a dispute when Zach Phelps, former majority shareholder of the Louisville Colonels but since replaced in that capacity by Mordecai Davidson, tried to marshal his former friends and have himself elected president of the Association, replacing the man currently in that position, Wheeler Wikoff. President Wikoff may not have been a perfect leader, but contemporaries described him as one who, “if not a brilliant man, had for years shown himself to be a safe, honest, correct, and every way deserving official.” When Phelps made his move, four clubs stood with him, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Louisville, and Kansas City, while St. Louis, Cincinnati, and Brooklyn stood opposed. The Association had not yet admitted Columbus to its ranks, but that city had pledged to support Wikoff, so the Phelps faction attempted to delay the admission of Columbus until they could force their man upon the other three clubs. This nearly produced a rift, as Columbus sensibly enough protested against being a hostage for the sake of one man’s ambitions, and threatened to withdraw its application for membership. This made things very dicey, as no other cities stood ready to apply, and the league could not function with seven members. Only some adroit maneuvering by the Wikoff faction managed to gain their point and admit Columbus to their ranks before taking a vote on a new president, and the Phelps groups saw that they had lost their battle at that time and relented.

²⁸ “The Association Meeting” NA, *The Sporting Life*, December 12, 1888, 2.

The harsh feelings generated, however, did nothing to foster greater brotherhood and cooperation in the Association ranks.²⁹

This is not to say that Phelps' defeat was necessarily a good thing. Referring again to Wikoff, his saving traits seem to have been his pedestrian talents and ability to do paperwork. As Baltimore's Albert Mott wrote, "there are men in the Association who prefer mediocrity to brilliancy in order to give their own talents for leadership full swing. They might be arrested in their career of selfishness by abler minds, and that is a result strenuously fought against. All that is desired by them is an honest, faithful clerk, and Mr. Wikoff fills that bill." Mott compared this to Phelps, writing, "Mr. Phelps gave promise of being an able and honest president, fearless, firm and equitable; but that, of course, would never do for those who wish by their talents to gain advantage over weaker vessels. . . . The title of president in the Association is merely ornamental, and analogous to a clerk of a corporation." Mott preferred that his league find a man "who could also be a wise counselor, a firm upholder of the weak and the right, a peacemaker, a diplomat, a master of syntax and definition, but that would be an Association millennium."³⁰

The differences between Wikoff and National League leaders like Nick Young and Al Spalding were as pronounced as could be, and men like Mott knew it. They realized that the Association suffered thereby, as men afraid of quality leadership were unlikely to work together effectively.

* * * * *

The American Association allowed yet another poisonous practice to seep into its veins during the 1887 campaign, which became even more pronounced in 1888. In an effort to make

²⁹ "Association Presidency" NA, *The Sporting Life*, December 19, 1888, 6.

³⁰ "Baltimore Bulletin" TTT, *The Sporting Life*, December 26, 1888, 5.

more money, some of the weaker teams with light attendance began transferring home games from their grounds to cities with better patronage. The following tables, with the teams listed in their order of finish for each season, tell the selfish tale. (Not all teams have the same number of games, due to rainouts, ties because of darkness, etc. The Association schedule called for 140 championship season games, so each team would have 70 each at home and on the road if everything went perfectly.)

Table 4 American Association Home and Away Games in 1887

<u>Team</u>	<u>Home Games</u>	<u>Away Games</u>
St. Louis Browns	73	62
Cincinnati Red Stockings	73	62
Baltimore Orioles	63	72
Louisville Colonels	68	68
Philadelphia Athletics	69	64
Brooklyn Grays	73	61
New York Metropolitans	59	74
Cleveland Blues	58	73

Table 5 American Association Home and Away Games in 1888

<u>Team</u>	<u>Home Games</u>	<u>Away Games</u>
St. Louis Browns	81	54
Brooklyn Bridegrooms	73	67
Philadelphia Athletics	75	58
Cincinnati Red Stockings	81	53
Baltimore Orioles	56	81
Cleveland Blues	60	72
Louisville Colonels	56	79
Kansas City Cowboys	57	75

The consequences were predictable. The better teams drew more fans because they won more often. Home teams won more often than road teams, for the reasons explained in chapter

eight. Therefore, the teams already doing well did even better, and the ones doing poorly, even worse. This might have paid short term financial dividends in 1888, but surely hurt the league for 1889 and beyond, because fans of the teams at the bottom of the standings were less likely to attend games in the years to come, knowing that their home club was unlikely to succeed. Realizing this, the Association officially “banned” the practice at its next winter meeting in 1889, but the so-called ban did not hold up when Louisville transferred scheduled home games to Cincinnati early in the 1889 season.

When one writer asked Cincinnati owner Aaron Stern about the wisdom of this practice, seeing that such an imbalance could affect the integrity of the pennant race, once again Stern demonstrated that such things as the integrity of the game, or the integrity of the American Association, were secondary to the bottom line. The writer, Joe Pritchard, asked, “Do you think that this thing of transferring so many games to Cincinnati, is the proper thing to do?” Stern answered, “Why not? The Cincinnati Club has given these clubs large guarantees to come to Cincinnati, and we have done this because we know we will make money by the operation.” Pritchard countered, “The American Association ought not to allow anything of the kind, especially at this stage of the game, when the race is so close.” Stern finished by responding, “I don’t think that the Association would meddle with anything that is none of its business. If two clubs agree mutually to change games whose business is it? And as for the Association, I don’t know as I will be in the Association next year, and I am not certain that I will be in the base ball business at all in 1889.”³¹

Stern was not the only owner of questionable loyalty, as the Cleveland example shows, but he at least was smart enough not to interfere with his team and manager, Gus Schmelz.

³¹ “St. Louis Siftings” Joe Pritchard, *The Sporting Life*, August 29, 1888, 7.

Louisville was not so lucky. The new owner in the Falls City, Mordecai Davidson, was very active in the day-to-day operations of the Colonels. The result was that a team that had always been respectable became, over just the 1888-1889 off-season, the first team in history to lose 100 games in a year. They were so poor, they also became the first team in history to lose 110 games as they stumbled to a 27-111 record. In fairness, Davidson had to depend for success on two players who were utterly undependable, Pete Browning and Tom Ramsey, but his constant, and poor, personnel moves simply ran Louisville into the ground. This weakened the Association as a whole because, with Louisville going an entire month (May 22 to June 22, 25 straight losses) without winning a single game, they simply could not draw spectators to their grounds at Eclipse Park. This meant the Association ended the 1889 season with two of its best clubs leaving the circuit, Cincinnati and Brooklyn, and another in tenuous financial shape, tottering on the verge of dissolution.

Davidson's knowledge of baseball was rather weak, and demonstrates the importance, even in the 1880s, of finding qualified men to run an operation if that operation is going to function successfully. The team Davidson took over had been respectable, although short of championship caliber. After about six months of his management, however, one Falls City writer described the state of the team by proclaiming, "the Louisville nine now has few stars in it. There are only one or two men whom another club would desire to possess." The team's greatest weakness was the infield, both offensively and defensively. In comparison to the Chicago White Stockings, with their "stone wall" infield, "our infield at the close of last season was denominated the 'rail fence' infield, and it certainly deserves the title."³²

³² "Louisville Laconics" JA, *The Sporting Life*, January 23, 1889, 5.

Davidson pretended that a team could win baseball games without paying for quality players. As April of 1889 neared its end and the championship season began, he kept up the fiction that hard work and individual initiative could take the place of spending money to acquire talent. “I have fifteen men under contract, and I am better satisfied with them every day. My plans are working out well in every respect, and while I shall make no brags, I want to repeat that we will make a showing that will astonish some people. I am running my team on business principles this season. The men are being worked harder than they ever were before, both in the games and at practice exercises.”³³

Perhaps it is too easy to run down Davidson in particular, when other owners did similarly unwise things but in a less obvious and dramatic way, but as the 1889 season opened, he continued to do silly things. Even before the first road trip of 1889 was complete, Davidson contemplated releasing his team’s captain, Dude Esterbrook, for being unpopular with the men. “Esterbrook has made some enemies among certain members of the club who are inclined to shirk, by requiring them to play ball and take all chances. These, in revenge have in divers ways incited the bleaching boards and some of the know-all dudes that occupy the grandstand to jeer and guy Esterbrook on every occasion that there was a possible chance.” Not only did releasing Esterbrook call Davidson’s judgment into question, as he was the one who appointed the Dude captain in the first place, but in addition, he dismissed Esterbrook for demanding the team do the very things that Davidson had just said he wanted his team to do.³⁴

Furthermore, when Davidson made the move and cut the Dude loose, he attempted to shift the blame for the team’s poor start to Esterbrook as well, one writer stating, “The main

³³ “Davidson Of Louisville” RWL, *The Sporting News*, April 20, 1889, 1.

³⁴ “A Rumor That Louisville Will Release Esterbrook” NA, *The Sporting News*, April 27, 1889, 1.

cause, in fact, of Esterbrook's decapitation was the poor showing of the team." Given no resources to work with, and unable to pull a rabbit out of a hat, Esterbrook became the first fall guy for Davidson's ineptitude. It is true Esterbrook may not have been the perfect captain, as he had a tendency to scold his men on the field for their shortcomings. He kept up the same behavior when the London, Ontario team tabbed him for their captaincy after his release from Louisville. "In the last games here with Detroit, Esterbrook gave such an exhibition of bad temper and tyranny on the field that the sympathies of the audience were turned to the visitors, and most of the spectators showed their aversion to Esterbrook's methods very plainly."³⁵ This begs the question, however, of why Davidson made him captain in the first place. Esterbrook first appeared in the major leagues all the way back in 1880, so it was not as if no one knew what his personality was like.³⁶

The nightmare of Davidson's ownership for the fans in the Falls City was, mercifully, over before the midway point of 1889, but by then it was far too late to do anything that year. To finish the story of Davidson's follies, consider his choices in early May. Tiring of Phil Tomney's performance at shortstop, he released Tomney (then changed his mind and resigned him within a week) and moved right fielder Chicken Wolf to that position. Wolf, who often received negative press for his healthy paunch and lack of physical conditioning, made eight errors in ten games. Just to cite two references to Wolf's gastronomical prowess, in 1889 we read, "The Louisville team has a leader in at least one particular. Jimmie Wolf has the reputation of being the biggest eater in the profession."³⁷ Similarly, in 1887 teammates said of Wolf,

³⁵ "Esterbrook's Ebullitions" NA, *The Sporting Life*, June 26, 1889, 6.

³⁶ "The Dude Dethroned" NA, *The Sporting News*, May 4, 1889, 1.

³⁷ "Notes And Comments" NA, *The Sporting Life*, September 11, 1889, 4.

“When the fat boy is hungry he will often enter a restaurant and eat as many as four chickens.”³⁸

Wolf’s transfer to shortstop from right field meant that Red Ehret, normally a pitcher, ended up in the Louisville outfield, where he posted an abysmal .756 fielding percentage, meaning he made an error on every fourth ball hit to him. With Louisville’s ship taking on water at an alarming rate, Davidson next announced his intention to sell his controlling interest in the franchise, further threatening that if a buyer did not step forward within a few days, he would disband the team, sell the players individually, and leave the American Association with just seven teams less than one month into the season.³⁹

Davidson’s putrid career in Louisville is an example of pure greed, nothing more and nothing less. He bought a controlling interest in the team in late 1888 and, before that season ended, sold some of his best players, most notably Hub Collins and Elton Chamberlain, for cash so that the management realized a profit. Making no move to sign any player of value before the next season, Davidson pretended that hard work and rigid discipline would win games. The team just happened to perform respectably in its preseason exhibition games, allowing Davidson to feign disappointment with his players once the championship season began and team’s lack of talent began showing through. He then shifted the blame to them rather than putting it squarely on his own shoulders where it belonged. In mid-May, Davidson then held an entire city hostage while he demanded someone take his lousy team off his hands.

At least the American Association had countermeasures for such a contingency. If Davidson were to try to disband the team, the Association’s constitution stated that the league could step in and run the team jointly until a new purchaser appeared. Milwaukee appeared

³⁸ “From The Falls City” XX, *The Sporting Life*, September 7, 1887, 4.

³⁹ “Who Wants To Buy?” NA, *The Sporting News*, May 11, 1889, 1.

ready to come on board, should things go that far, with Worcester also in the field.⁴⁰ After a week, however, the story became even more surreal, as Davidson declared the franchise off the market. When no one would meet his inflated price for purchasing the team, he decided to keep possession himself. In a feeble attempt to keep up attendance and the waning enthusiasm in the Colonels, he said, “I might as well lose money one way as another so I will hold on for a while, at least. I will make a change or two that I think will put the club in pretty good shape.”⁴¹

When that failed to help much, in June he began making arrangements for Louisville to transfer a series of home games with the Red Stockings from Louisville to Cincinnati, initiating a practice of transforming the Colonels into sacrificial lambs in order to mitigate his financial losses. Soon, he made similar arrangements with other ball clubs.⁴² This led *The Sporting Life* to editorialize

It also means more than the death of the Louisville Club; in plain words, it threatens the integrity of the game. To permit clubs to change their scheduled dates at will and to move about from city to city in search of gate receipts, like tramps, is positively insulting to the city which the peregrinating club is supposed to represent, and absolutely unfair to the leading clubs in the race, as some of them must reap undue advantage from such transfers. In short, such transferring is nothing more or less than hippodroming, and the quicker the practice which was started last fall by Baltimore, and is already cropping out this year with the season so young, is stamped out the better for the game and the good repute of the Association.⁴³

With the situation falling apart rapidly, one writer described the state of local enthusiasm by comparing 1889 to previous seasons, writing, “Then when the club was away from home, crowds were around the bulletin boards to watch the score as it came in by innings, and if Louisville won there was a cheer of triumph, if she lost, everybody was blue; now nobody goes

⁴⁰ “Mr. Von der Ahe on Louisville” NA, *The Sporting News*, May 11, 1889, 1; “The Milwaukee’s Position” NA, *The Sporting News*, May 11, 1889, 1.

⁴¹ “Louisville Not to be Sold” NA, *The Sporting Life*, May 22, 1889, 1.

⁴² “Notes And Comments” NA, *The Sporting Life*, May 29, 1889, 4.

⁴³ “A Dangerous Innovation” NA, *The Sporting Life*, June 12, 1889, 4.

to any bulletin board. There isn't any bulletin board to go to. They were discontinued because nobody ever looked at the score. Even the saloons don't have them any longer."⁴⁴ This was an ill omen for a league trying to withstand many such omens by 1889.

In addition to depriving Louisville audiences of a chance of even seeing their team play, Davidson destroyed any semblance of cooperation with his players. Following Esterbrook's dismissal, Chicken Wolf became team captain, but immediately began berating his men in much the same manner as Esterbrook. By mid-June, with the team in the midst of a catastrophic losing streak, 23 straight games at that point, Davidson decided to begin fining his men for poor play. Failing to provide the team with quality players, he chose to mulct mediocre players when they played down to their limited potential. "Manager Davidson, enraged at the team's ill success, yesterday imposed a twenty-five-dollar fine on Second Baseman Shannon for fielding errors, and on Catcher Cook for stupid base running." The Louisville players, knowing it was only a matter of time before the rest of them saw the same treatment, revolted. "At this all the men protested by signing a round robin saying they would not play to-day unless this wrong was righted." Captain Wolf tried to talk Davidson out of this ill-considered course of action, but Davidson instead decided to leave Louisville and travel to New York. Before he left, however, he told his players that if the team did not play as scheduled, "he would fine every man \$100, and that in case they did play and lost he would impose \$25 on each man." After considering the best way to make their point, six of the Colonels decided to lay down their tools and strike, while the other six took the field against Baltimore, along with three semi-professional players native to the

⁴⁴ "Disgusted Louisville" JA, *The Sporting Life*, June 12, 1889, 1.

Monumental City to fill out their lineup. They played just one inning, however, before departing the grounds when rain began falling and the umpire called the game off.⁴⁵

The same six men, Chicken Wolf, Farmer Weaver, Scott Stratton, Bill Gleason, Farmer Vaughn, and Tom Ramsey, attempted to play with the help of the semi-pros against the Orioles in a doubleheader (to make up the rained out game) the next day. The rest of the team, Guy Hecker, Dan Shannon, Pete Browning, Harry Raymond, Paul Cook, and Red Ehret, stayed firm in their purpose to play no more games until Davidson remitted the fines, which he absolutely refused to do.⁴⁶ The situation was only resolved when both parties agreed to state their case to the directors of the American Association and abide by whatever decision that body made. In the meantime, “a kind of truce was patched up between the players and their erratic manager, and the men did the best they could to win under the disheartening circumstances of an uncertain future and the dead weight of the management.”⁴⁷

Eventually, those players who sat out the first game of the Baltimore series got their pay returned to them, but those who boycotted the second game in disregard of instructions to play from Association president Wheeler Wikoff saw their additional \$100 fines from that game upheld.⁴⁸ Davidson finally ended the nightmare by selling his controlling interest in the team to a collection of Louisville capitalists in early July. By then, of course, the team had few quality players and no shot at anything better than eighth place in 1889, but at least Louisville’s supporters could look to the future and envision better days.

⁴⁵ “Ball Players On Strike” NA, *New York Times*, June 15, 1889, 3; “The Louisville Strike” TTT, *The Sporting Life*, June 19, 1889, 1.

⁴⁶ “The Strikers Firm” TTT, *The Sporting Life*, June 19, 1889, 1.

⁴⁷ “Baltimore Bulletin” TTT, *The Sporting Life*, June 26, 1889, 6.

⁴⁸ “General Base-Ball News” NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, July 6, 1889, 3.

Once Davidson was finally out of the picture, Louisville players unburdened themselves to the press about just how tyrannically their former owner had treated them. Second baseman Dan Shannon said Davidson fined him an entire month's pay in May, and when he asked the owner how he was supposed to eat, Davidson replied that was not his concern. In a similar vein, pitcher John Ewing was going to accompany the team on a road trip, but Davidson instructed him to stay in Louisville, as he felt the team did not need Ewing's services and he wanted to save on travel expenses. Ewing did so, only to find that Davidson lied to the press, claiming Ewing was injured. Davidson then changed Ewing's status to a suspension without pay and did not intend to pay him for any of the twenty days the team spent on the road. Davidson hit his captain, Chicken Wolf, with a twenty-five dollar fine just for trying to get Pete Browning to play harder. When Wolf told the Gladiator, "I'll smash your face if you don't brace up and play ball," it cost him the fine. Not that Browning escaped censure, either. He said, regarding his own fines, "he has fined me \$335 and I find that after playing for the club for two months I am indebted to it \$225. At this rate I will soon owe the Louisville Club more money than I can pay back in a lifetime." When shortstop Phil Tomney made a throw that first baseman Guy Hecker dropped, Davidson demanded twenty-five dollars from Hecker. Thinking he was on decent terms with the owner considering his quality play of late, Tomney tried to take responsibility by claiming it was his fault for a poor throw, and then Davidson soaked him the same amount. Hecker's salary for the month of May, after deductions for various fines, amounted to two dollars. In all, only three players on the team escaped fines during the month of June.⁴⁹ The drop in team morale and performance on the field, without question, reflected this disastrous policy emanating from Davidson.

⁴⁹ "Very Funny Stories" NA, *The Sporting News*, June 29, 1889, 1.

That was not all. By this time, some players, such as Browning, had seen no pay at all for three consecutive paydays (normally, players received their pay twice per month). When the team set out on one of its western road trips, one player related, “We had no money on all the trip, and Manager McKinney had received orders from Mr. Davidson to not even give us money with which to have our uniforms washed. Nearly all of the players were compelled to borrow money from the Kansas City and St. Louis players, and several of the boys had to pawn their jewelry to pay their laundry bills.”⁵⁰

The new manager this player described, Buck McKinney, was a curious hire to say the least. His main qualification for the job appears to have been his physical stature, as he reportedly stood six-foot, weighed 225 pounds, and was “a great big double-fisted fellow” who had spent the past twenty-five years of his life as a “doorkeeper” at Louisville theaters and at Eclipse Park where Louisville played. He was, undoubtedly, a great fan of the game, and apparently was on good terms with the players, but given his utter lack of baseball experience, one writer charitably described the situation by stating, “but whether or not he will be a good base ball manager, of course, no one can venture a safe prediction.”⁵¹ The reason for his hire, ultimately, was to protect Davidson from his own players. Regarding Davidson, “The players hold the bitterest feelings against him, and he is constantly apprehending bodily harm from them. This is the reason he didn’t accompany the team on its last trip. He had to look around for some time before he could induce any one to go in charge of the men.”⁵²

While clearly Louisville management’s behavior was simply reprehensible when it came to assessing fines for poor play, other teams did so as well, with the expected results for team

⁵⁰ “Davidson Out” JA, *The Sporting Life*, July 10, 1889, 3.

⁵¹ “The Louisville Muddle” JA *The Sporting Life*, July 3, 1889, 3.

⁵² “Davidson Out” JA, *The Sporting Life*, July 10, 1889, 3.

morale. St. Louis president Von der Ahe fined players whenever his Browns hit the skids for more than a game or two. The Association's newest member in 1889, Columbus, also took up this sordid practice with relish by July. It released one of its players, catcher Jimmie Peoples, on July 26, and at the same time announced its intention to light a fire under the remaining players with threats. "This is supposed to mean that those who continue to play poor ball will be suspended without pay."⁵³ As usual, the main cause of the poor play was drinking. The club hired a detective to watch over its players, and in August, this detective reported, "that the first night had resulted in finding several of the men were filling up on beer, and one, especially, was reported as having drunk twenty-four glasses of the foaming amber. Upon being brought up to a strict account he . . . confessed to having surrounded twelve glasses of beer, but held up his hands in holy horror at the balance of the two dozen."⁵⁴ Regardless of the cause, when it came time for the players to receive their pay, "Columbus offers big salaries, but on pay days the men find a shortage, which amounts have been deducted in the shape of fines."⁵⁵

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As if these various examples of poor management were not enough on their own, fate, volcanic personalities, and public morality also served to damage the American Association at this critical time. The most prominent example of how public morality hurt the Association's cause was in 1889 when the Cincinnati Red Stockings, one of the Association's most profitable clubs, had to face a new Ohio law preventing baseball on Sunday. Team owner Aaron Stern

⁵³ "Jimmie Peoples Released" NA, *The Sporting News*, July 27, 1889, 1.

⁵⁴ "Columbus Chatter" F.W. Arnold, *The Sporting Life*, August 7, 1889, 5.

⁵⁵ "Salaries in Columbus" NA, *The Sporting News*, August 24, 1889, 1.

tried many strategies to evade the law, but all proved unsuccessful. This severed the main tie holding Cincinnati in the Association. Stern believed in playing Sunday baseball because large numbers of working class Porkopolitans attended on the Sabbath, being unable to make it to the ballpark any other day of the week. This helped the Red Stockings profit even though, with a minimum ticket price of twenty-five cents, they received less money per patron than they would as a member of the National League. If Ohio insisted on banning Sunday games, however, odds were that Stern would try to transfer Cincinnati's allegiance to the National League, where the Red Stockings could increase their take from selling tickets. The temptation proved too great to resist.⁵⁶ Immediately after he received the final verdict regarding Sunday baseball in the Queen City, reporters asked Stern what he planned to do. He replied, rather revealingly, "I can not say as yet. We have as yet received no word from the league. If they offer us a place, and we think we can better ourselves, we will jump."⁵⁷ O.P. Caylor, ruminating on the same question, was blunter. Regarding it as a near certainty, he wrote, "Will the Cincinnati Club go into the League? Will Pete Browning take a drink if you ask him?"⁵⁸

Things in the Association grew tense in September of 1889, due to the conflicting personalities of Charles Byrne and Chris Von der Ahe. These men owned the Brooklyn and St. Louis franchises, respectively, and these teams just happened to be the most powerful clubs in the Association that year. With their teams locked in mortal combat for the Association pennant, things took a surreal twist when, feeling wronged in the first game of a scheduled three-game series in Brooklyn, Von der Ahe became so enraged he ordered his nine not to take the field for the remaining two games of the series. He accused Byrne of, first, trying to bribe umpire John

⁵⁶ "No Sunday Games In Cincinnati" NA, *The Sporting News*, August 17, 1889, 1.

⁵⁷ "Cincinnati And The League" NA, *The Sporting News*, August 17, 1889, 1.

⁵⁸ "Caylor's Comment" O.P. Caylor, *The Sporting Life*, August 21, 1889, 3.

Kerins with both cash and a chance to earn more money umpiring in the World Series; second, of controlling all the umpires of the Association; and third, of trying to control the Association itself. These accusations constitute just a part of Von der Ahe's rant. His refusal to play meant that the Browns would forfeit two critical games in the heat of a fierce pennant race, and face a \$3,000 fine besides, just to appease the anger of their mercurial and borderline unstable owner. Furthermore, St. Louis would not receive any money from gate receipts at other games on its road trip until it paid up.⁵⁹

The circumstances of the controversial first game demonstrate much of what was wrong with baseball on the field in this era. Brooklyn led the game at Ridgewood Park, 2-0, in the early innings. The Browns therefore initiated stalling tactics immediately, hoping to stall so long that darkness might cancel the game and save them from defeat if it arrived before the teams finished five innings. The team, fully aware that umpire Fred Goldsmith did not rank among the most decisive of umpires, would frequently stop playing to conference with each other, doing things as extreme as calling in the left fielder for a conference at first base. However, when the Browns caught some good fortune and took the lead in the middle innings, then they stalled even worse, but for the opposite reason. Now, they hoped to delay the game so long that it would be impossible to play nine innings, looking for a darkness-assisted victory. They employed all the same tactics, repeating them after almost every pitch.⁶⁰

By the seventh, with a 4-2 lead, the Browns demanded the game cease due to darkness. They went so far as to purchase candles, array them about their bench and on the field, and light them to emphasize the point. In the process, there was almost a fire in the grandstand when disgusted spectators began hurling paper debris at the St. Louis bench, and finally, when

⁵⁹ "The Row Of The Season" J.F. Donnelly, *The Sporting Life*, September 18, 1889, 5.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

Goldsmith still refused to call the game in the ninth inning when one Brooklyn player reached base, team captain Charlie Comiskey simply ordered his men off the field. On their way off the diamond, one of the Browns, Tommy McCarthy, got in a bit of a tussle with a spectator, which numerous law enforcement officials on the scene blamed on McCarthy. This minor spat became Von der Ahe's official reason for declining to play the next day, feigning concern for the safety of his players. In the meantime, Goldsmith had not declared the game over. Therefore, he awarded the game to Brooklyn by forfeit.⁶¹

Predictably, writers outside of St. Louis lost no time upbraiding the Browns for their childish tantrums. Ren Mulford, Jr., described their boycott by writing, "The minority who wished St. Louis luck because they were partisan enough to want the pennant to remain in the West have sunk that desire in the later hope of seeing St. Louis' blindness, its foolhardiness, its asininity, its criminal disregard for existing regulations, rebuked as they deserve."⁶² Even those of a more charitable mind still believed that the Association must act to "curb Mr. Von der Ahe's tendency to make wild and unjustifiable charges against managers, umpires and players."⁶³ Gentlemanly Henry Chadwick, who only rarely had a harsh word for his contemporaries, wrote, "evidently the Heathen deities have got hold of Chris Von der Ahe, and have him on the slate for destruction. Not content with smirching the good name of our national game by his unwarranted charges of crooked play made against Latham, what must Von der Ahe do but impugn the

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² "Cincinnati Chips" Ren Mulford, Jr., *The Sporting Life*, September 18, 1889, 2.

⁶³ "New York News" W.I. Harris, *The Sporting Life*, September 18, 1889, 2.

integrity of Umpire Ferguson, whose character stands on a level with the best esteemed and honored players in the professional fraternity.”⁶⁴

By the time everyone involved was done appealing everything, the Association awarded St. Louis victory in the first game, upheld the forfeit to Brooklyn of the second, and fired umpire Goldsmith for not showing more resolve and better judgment. The Association replaced Goldsmith on its staff with Guy Hecker, recently released from the purgatory of laboring for Louisville. It also voided the fine that St. Louis earned by its refusal to finish on Saturday, although the fine for declining to play on Sunday stood.⁶⁵ Byrne was apoplectic at the decision to overrule Goldsmith’s authority. “Had the cases been considered on the weight of the evidence, we would have found no fault, but the whole thing was cut and dried, and it would have made no difference if we had had ten times as strong a case. The result would have been the same.”⁶⁶ It is a fact that the rules outlined in the National Agreement stated that the umpire had sole discretion over whether it was fit to play or not. The fact that the Association did not sustain Goldsmith in his judgment, however poor that judgment might have been, was a breach of the rules by which all teams were supposed to play. *The Sporting Life* easily saw through the charade, declaring, “It became a question of petty base ball politics and resulted in a weak and contemptible compromise, which reflects nothing but discredit upon the men who had a chance to show that laws are made to be respected and upheld, not violated with impunity.” The paper also placed some blame before the vacillating president of the Association, Wheeler Wikoff, stating, “It was painfully apparent throughout the proceedings that the Association needs a

⁶⁴ “Chadwick’s Chat” Henry Chadwick, *The Sporting Life*, September 18, 1889, 3. Chadwick referred to an earlier accusation made by Von der Ahe against umpire Bob Ferguson, who happened to be a native of Brooklyn.

⁶⁵ “The St. Louis-Brooklyn Dispute” NA, *The Chicago Daily Inter Ocean*, September 24, 1889, 2.

⁶⁶ “President Byrne Much Aggrieved” NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, September 27, 1889, 6.

competent head. A competent man in the chair would have doubtless brought the members of the Board to a realizing sense of their responsibilities.”⁶⁷ Likewise, the grizzled Henry Chadwick wrote that if the Association’s owners “had intended to give a severe blow to the future welfare of the Association and the national game, they could not have succeeded better than they have done in the decision they have rendered in the case of the disputed game at Washington Park between the St. Louis and Brooklyn clubs.”⁶⁸

The story did not end there. As fate would have it, Brooklyn and St. Louis fought all the way to the season’s final week for the American Association pennant. On the last day of the season, October 14, Brooklyn’s record stood at 93-44, St. Louis at 89-44, making Brooklyn the clear winner. Not ready to concede after such a bitter campaign, however, St. Louis engaged in some dubious maneuvers. Even though the championship season was over, according to the Association’s schedule, the Browns tried to arrange to play games cancelled by rain earlier in the season with both Cincinnati and Philadelphia, in hopes of winning all the games, raising their winning percentage (baseball awarded pennants based on winning percentage, rather than number of wins, at the time), and thus stealing the pennant away from Brooklyn by virtue of playing extra games. The Browns made plans to make up five games in this fashion—just enough that they would edge out Brooklyn if they won all five. To tempt the Red Stockings and Athletics into such perfidy, Chris Von der Ahe offered them the opportunity to keep all gate

⁶⁷ “The Association” NA, *The Sporting Life*, October 2, 1889, 2.

⁶⁸ “Chadwick’s Chat” Henry Chadwick, *The Sporting Life*, October 2, 1889, 6. Chadwick, as a longtime resident of Brooklyn and a frequent attendee of Brooklyn’s games, often commented upon things concerning the Bridegrooms, although he was free to write upon any subject he chose.

receipts from the bonus games, rather than taking the customary share to which visitors were entitled. With this extra boodle dangled as bait, both franchises accepted.⁶⁹

This was clearly outside the rules, but as demonstrated many times, that did not always matter when it came to decision making in the American Association. Therefore, on October 15, the Red Stockings and Browns took the field for a double header. Not to be outdone, Brooklyn took measures that, while not exactly illegal, were shady at best, although no shadier than what St. Louis was trying to do. Prior to the first of the October 15 games in the Queen City, Brooklyn catcher Doc Bushong arrived at the grounds. As soon as he learned that the Red Stockings planned to use pitcher Jesse Duryea and catcher Jim Keenan as their battery for one game, Bushong offered both men a \$100 bonus, courtesy of his owner, if they would be so kind as to help the Bridegrooms win the pennant by defeating St. Louis that day. They did, and the men got their money, while St. Louis screamed theft and bribery. The rest of the Cincinnati nine received orders for fur overcoats and cigars courtesy of the good doctor and his Brooklyn employer.⁷⁰ (We should note that the same thing happened in the National League's pennant race. Boston manager Jim Hart and pitcher John Clarkson offered the round sum of \$1,000 to Cleveland if they beat the New York Giants in the season's final series [they did not] while New York's manager, Jim Mutrie, offered undisclosed presents to Pittsburgh's players if they did the same to Boston. The Alleghenies did defeat Boston once.⁷¹)

The Brown Stockings also accused the Association's umpiring staff of being on Brooklyn's payroll and favoring the Bridegrooms all along, citing as evidence that they had both out-hit and out-pitched Brooklyn all year. Furthermore, the Browns raised suspicion that a few

⁶⁹ "Chadwick's Chat" Henry Chadwick, *The Sporting Life*, October 23, 1889, 3.

⁷⁰ "Bushong Distributing Booodle" NA, *The Sporting News*, October 19, 1889, 3; "Silent Influence" NA, *The Sporting Life*, October 23, 1889, 1.

⁷¹ "New York News" W.I. Harris, *The Sporting Life*, October 23, 1889, 4.

members of the Columbus Solons might have received some boodle of their own for losing to Brooklyn on October 14, citing four errors by Solon third baseman Lefty Marr to make their case. Lastly, as Bushong was an old teammate who still had several friends in the Mound City, the Browns claimed he had treated their second baseman, Yank Robinson, to drinks all night to be sure that he arrived at the grounds hung over and unable to play his best ball.⁷² It was true that Robinson failed to get a hit in either game, although he did draw some walks from the Cincinnati pitchers.

This series of incidents between Brooklyn and St. Louis had serious blowback for the Association. While it would be absurd to say these controversies alone prompted Brooklyn to leave the Association for the National League for the 1890 season, it certainly did not give Brooklyn cause for greater loyalty to the Association. As one Brooklynite declared, after the Association failed to uphold Umpire Goldsmith, “I have to add that this rank act of imposition has put a keen edge on the desire for jumping out of the American Association and given a new zest to the discussion of the possibility of Brooklyn entering the League.”⁷³ Even if Brooklyn had gotten its way in that case, the prospects of dealing with such an unstable personality as Von der Ahe, after everything that happened in the waning days of 1889, cannot have appealed to the Bridegrooms or their cranks. When piled atop all the other things discussed in this chapter, the evidence presents many reasons why Brooklyn might desire a change of scenery.

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⁷² “Wolves!” NA, *The Sporting News*, October 19, 1889, 3.

⁷³ “Brooklyn Boiling Over” J.F. Donnolly, *The Sporting Life*, October 2, 1889, 3.

Following the end of the 1889 season, it did not take long for the Association to fall apart, albeit temporarily. As the Brotherhood announced its independence from the National League in early November, and the League debated how to respond at its meeting a week later, the American Association also held its conference in New York at the same time. One thing the National League *had* decided on was that this was its opportunity to snare Brooklyn and Cincinnati and bring them into the League. As the Association haggled over replacing its president, Wheeler Wikoff, a League spy informed the League delegates of the proceedings, and those delegates lost no time in offering spots to the discontented owners in Cincinnati and Brooklyn. Further motivated by the actual or impending loss of Sunday baseball in both cities, and the fact that they had already signed some key players and were thus in a strong position to compete in the National League in 1890, both Aaron Stern and Charles Byrne accepted the offer. The next day, Kansas City defected back to the Western League, and before November was over, Baltimore threw in the towel as well and joined the Atlantic Association.⁷⁴

Even though the American Association still had two more years of life remaining, this was really the end of that body as a major league caliber organization. With the situation rapidly deteriorating, on December 6 the Association was desperate enough to send out feelers regarding a merger with the Brotherhood. With the BPBP fully confident of ultimate success at that time, it answered in the negative.⁷⁵ Meeting with failure on that front, the Association instead replaced the departed teams with Syracuse, Toledo, Rochester, and a new Brooklyn team. This new Brooklyn aggregation did not even complete the season, folding on August 26, and Baltimore jumped back from the Atlantic Association to replace them for the last thirty-four games on the

⁷⁴ Nemecek, *The Beer and Whiskey League*, 186-187. The calculations that they could compete in the weakened National League proved correct, as Brooklyn won the pennant with an 86-43 record while Cincinnati posted a quite respectable 77-55 mark.

⁷⁵ Alexander, *Turbulent Seasons*, 17.

schedule. In place of Brooklyn, Baltimore, Cincinnati, and Kansas City, towns ranking fourth, seventh, ninth, and twenty-fourth in the 1890 census, the Association ended up with Rochester (twenty-second), Syracuse (thirty-first), Toledo (thirty-fourth) and the Brooklyn-Baltimore hybrid.⁷⁶

Of course, it did not help matters when the Brotherhood began taking Association players into its ranks before the 1890 season. With drastically reduced markets and drastically reduced talent, the American Association was in poor condition even before the 1890 season began. How drastic was its decline? The Louisville club, which posted a 27-111 record and finished a titanic 66.5 games back of first place in 1889, vaulted to an 88-44 record in 1890, fully ten games better than any other team in the Association. This increase in winning percentage, from .196 to .667, has no equal as a one-season turnaround in major league baseball history for a team playing a schedule of modern length. No other team would complete this feat of moving from last place to first place within a single season until the Atlanta Braves did so in 1991.

It is important to stress that the decline of the American Association was not due to the beginning of the Players' League. The coincidence of the timing makes this very tempting, and clearly, the Brotherhood had something to do with the loss of the Association's prestige when the BPBP began taking luring away its players. Clearly, however, there is so much evidence here that predates these events, it would be simplistic at best and inaccurate at worst to say the failure of the Players' League caused the failure of the American Association. The Brotherhood had nothing to do with the three key reasons that Brooklyn and Cincinnati left the Association after the 1889 season, followed by Baltimore and Kansas City. The end or probable end of Sunday baseball in Brooklyn and Cincinnati, the desire of the National League to replace weak

⁷⁶ Nemeck, *The Beer and Whiskey League*, 188, 197.

franchises in Indianapolis and Washington with two stronger ones, and the erratic behavior of Chris Von der Ahe late in the 1889 season each would have happened even had the Brotherhood never existed.

As these events demonstrate, even though the American Association continued play until 1891, by the end of 1889 it was in rapid decline with little hope of rejuvenation. The foibles described in this chapter are the greatest reason why. There were still maneuvers to come, and tactics employed to keep the Association going, but one did not need a crystal ball to figure out what probably lay in store by the end of the 1889 season.

Chapter 19

The Storm Gathers

When John Ward announced his decision to leave the Spalding tour early, it was a sign that there might be trouble ahead for the National League after all. As Ward's ship plowed the waves of the Atlantic, the American baseball press speculated on what would happen when he reached New York. The Brotherhood's Secretary-Treasurer, Tim Keefe, issued a call for a meeting of the Brotherhood's officers and team representatives upon Ward's arrival, although given that the organization had a meeting scheduled for the spring anyway, there was not much difference between a special meeting and the regular one. The question was what course the organization would take. Most of its men had signed contracts for 1889. A few had not. As March was nearing its end, there was little time to raise grievances or to try to negotiate. The more ominous question was whether the BPBP might consider more drastic measures, perhaps even a strike.

Some papers feared the worst. The *Chicago Daily Tribune* offered, "Tim Keefe has sent out a call for a meeting of that organization to be held in New York next Tuesday. There is little doubt but this means a fight, and it looks as if the players would have all the best of it if they stick for a short time. The classification clause in the contract looks weaker as its defects are coming to light."¹ New York's George Stackhouse wrote, "that the Brotherhood players, as a

¹ "Ball News From Boston" T.H. Murnane, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, March 24, 1889, 6.

body, are decidedly opposed to the classification rule recently passed by the club owners of the League, is assured.” Stackhouse quoted Tim Keefe on the Brotherhood’s current stance:

I have read with considerable amusement about how all the troubles between players and managers had been settled. But that don’t make it so by long odds. Only a few have reached an amicable settlement. Some of the misunderstandings have been heard little of, for the men have been reserved and have not stated their troubles through the newspapers. I am not at liberty to say just what will be done, although all that the players will ask will be simply justice.

Another, unnamed, League player told Stackhouse,

I think that there will be some lively times in base ball before the season opens a few weeks from now. I don’t think the Brotherhood will countenance that classification clause for several reasons. First, if it was an absolute necessity for the welfare of base ball that players should be classified and salaries reduced, the men would take their medicine calmly, and quietly submit. But there is no such necessity. That rule as originally drawn up and since enforced is a fraud, and it will not stand. It was made to protect one or two clubs, and the rule will only be enforced in one or two clubs. Why should the players of the New York, Boston and Chicago clubs have their salaries tampered with, simply because the Indianapolis, Cleveland and Washington clubs may live. . . . When the Brotherhood had its hearing before the League, the League promised to make certain concessions. Those promises have not been kept.²

In the meantime, however, rumors flew about what might happen. With Ward now back to head the Brotherhood’s affairs, the organization could coordinate what information it wanted revealed and when to reveal it, and so prior to the meeting, the sporting press could only offer guesses. Ward and his brothers decided to play things close to the vest, and as a result, “just what will be done at this meeting can only be conjectured, as the members of the order are unusually secretive about their intentions.”³

Members of the Brotherhood embraced Ward the moment he stepped off the gang plank in New York Harbor, some apparently even waiting overnight in order to meet him as quickly as they could. Reporters flocked to interview the BPBP’s president to try and get the latest baseball

² “New York News” George Stackhouse, *The Sporting Life*, March 27, 1889, 3.

³ “John Ward’s Nerve” Gotham, *The Sporting News*, March 30, 1889, 1.

scoop as well, so much so that the world-renowned pianist who was also aboard the steamer *Saale*, Hans von Bülow, all but escaped notice, other than from a few German friends. He remarked, “What is the use of playing the piano in this country? I am too old to play ball, therefore I am nobody. I do not understand the game at all, but it must be something splendid, and I cannot complain if no one comes to my concerts.”⁴

It took Ward some time to meet with other Brotherhood leaders and form a strategy regarding what they should do about the Brush Plan and other issues. In fact, he moved so deliberately that some papers prophesied the early demise of the BPBP. While such a development certainly would please National League owners, it was not the case. After some discussion with fellow New Yorkers like Tim Keefe, he next moved to Boston. Former Detroit Brotherhood representative Dan Brouthers now played there, in addition to all the Boston men already members of the Brotherhood, and they held discussions at the Park Avenue Hotel, where “subjects of much importance were discussed.” The one important decision they arrived at during this meeting was the idea of trying to negotiate with baseball’s magnates during the upcoming season, rather than waiting until the winter of 1889-1890.⁵

If true, this meant that the Brotherhood’s official May 19 meeting would be one of great significance. Despite the efforts of Ward and others to keep things quiet until that time, rumors began to seep out that the BPBP might challenge the League on certain issues. Besides the Brush Plan, another issue rankling with some Brothers was the fate of the four Chicago players, Mark Baldwin, Tom Daly, Bob Pettit, and Marty Sullivan, who traveled all the way around the world on the Spalding Tour, only to receive their releases from Chicago when the tourists finally

⁴ From the *New York Herald*, quoted in “Chadwick’s Chat” Henry Chadwick, *The Sporting Life*, April 3, 1889, 3.

⁵ “Ball-Tossers In Conference” NA, *New York Evening World*, April 26, 1889, 1.

reached their home city. Some members of the BPBP felt that, if Chicago planned to release these men, it should have done so immediately upon reaching the United States, so that the quartet would have had a decent opportunity to catch on with another club. They also objected to the fact that Chicago continued to use these players in their exhibition games in the US in April, thus making money from their services, while all the time planning to dispense with them as soon as the tour concluded.⁶ (Baldwin, by a stroke of luck, actually did well in this transaction. All other National League teams refused to sign him, at Spalding's request, so he was able to escape the Brush Plan and sign in the American Association with the Columbus Solons for \$3,500.⁷)

Spalding put little stock in any of the rumors, however. He said, referring to the BPBP, "I should say that a battle with the League would be the last thing it would undertake." Regarding any challenge to the Brush Plan, he stated, "I do not think any members of the brotherhood possessed of influence enough to embroil that organization in a difficulty with the league have suffered from it in the least." Furthermore, "In truth, the same dire rumor has been circulated before, but you see that both the league and the brotherhood continue to do business at the old stands." When his interviewer asked what the League might do if worst came to worst and the rumored scheme that the Brotherhood planned to challenge the League with teams of its own came to pass, Spalding concluded by saying, "That is the sheerest nonsense."⁸

The reason that the BPBP wanted to make its requests during the 1889 season, rather than waiting until afterwards, was no mystery. Any threat of action it might make, including a possible strike, was only effective in the summer when baseball games took place. Such threats

⁶ "Rumors Of Trouble In The League" NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, May 7, 1889, 3.

⁷ "Columbus Gets Pitcher Baldwin" NA, *The Sporting Life*, May 8, 1889, 1.

⁸ "Rumors Of Trouble In The League" NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, May 7, 1889, 3.

had no force behind them once the season was over. In addition, the playing season was the only time when each chapter of the Brotherhood could meet as a group. Once the season ended, and players dispersed to their homes, it was exponentially more difficult to contact members, conduct business, and make decisions. Therefore, not caring to forfeit its bargaining power, the Brotherhood planned to meet in mid-May.

* * * * *

When the big day in New York came around, the initial news was less than earth shattering. The group, represented by John Ward and Tim Keefe of New York, Dan Brouthers for Boston, Ned Hanlon for Pittsburgh, John “Egyptian” Healy of Washington, George Myers of Indianapolis, Jeff Pfeffer of Chicago, Ben Sanders of Philadelphia, and Larry Twitchell of Cleveland, respectively, nominated new officers. Many other Brotherhood members attended as well, and discovered that the organization’s treasury was in fine condition. They also learned that almost every player in the National League was now a member, as all players from the NL’s newest member, Cleveland, applied for and received membership, and ten new players from Chicago did the same. The only immediate action the BPBP planned was to contest Indianapolis’s act of fining Brother Henry Boyle \$100 late in the 1888 season. Boyle became very ill, and although the team refused to pay him during his illness, which was within its rights, it also fined him for getting sick, which was not.⁹

When it came to the big question on everyone’s mind, what to do regarding the Brush Classification Plan, the organization went on record as being against the plan, of course, but did

⁹ “The Base-Ball Brotherhood” NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, May 20, 1889, 3; “Ball Players In Session” NA, *New York Times*, May 20, 1889, 8.

not announce exactly what it planned to do. The Brothers ruled out any possibility of an immediate strike, however, sensibly deciding to try negotiating first.¹⁰ The outline of their plan, however, was that no player should sign a League contract before the League's next meeting, at which time the BPBP would present its grievances.¹¹

As might be expected from such a moderate stance, the meeting produced little immediate outrage amongst followers of the game. Even most League owners did not seem overly perturbed. The next day, New York Giants owner John Day submitted to an interview to give his thoughts on the situation. Day, often a relative supporter of player rights, saw no reason for alarm. He said, "All this talk of a strike is nonsense . . . The Brotherhood is strong—strong enough not to fear the League, and the League does not fear the Brotherhood. If there is any cause for dissatisfaction among the players as against the League, the two bodies, having a common interest, certainly will meet and by discussion come to an agreement." Asked about the justice of the players' cause, Day said, "If the players demand what is unreasonable the public will not support them, and if the League refuses to grant a just request, the players will have all the backing they can want."¹²

Day then continued with some interesting statements concerning the current state of things between the League and Brotherhood. After reviewing how each side had resolved their difference in the past, he claimed, "This time the causes which are to lead to the alleged coming strike, seem to be the Salary Limit law [of 1886], the classification system and the sale of players by one club to another." He added, "I, for one, am utterly opposed to all three. The first two laws are dead letters, and of no value whatever to any one." Regarding the 1886 salary limit,

¹⁰ "The Baseball Brotherhood" NA, *Los Angeles Daily Herald*, May 20, 1889, 4; "Baseball Brotherhood" NA, *Pittsburgh Dispatch*, May 20, 1889, 6.

¹¹ "The Players" NA, *The Sporting Life*, May 29, 1889, 1.

¹² "A Baseball Strike?" NA, *New York Evening World*, May 21, 1889, 1.

“The salary limit law was made for the benefit of the Louisville Club, and the wrecked condition of that organization shows of what little benefit the law has been.” Furthermore, “The classification law was a wrong in the beginning, has been of no use whatever, and is now to all purposes dead. It has injured no one that I am aware of, but it has certainly benefited none.” He then concluded by stating his opposition to selling players as well, noting the only time he had ever done so was when requested to by one of his men. “This sale of players is, I think, the thing which the Brotherhood will ask to have rectified, and I think the request would be a just one and would receive the support of all fair-minded people.” (Day later corrected one part of this statement, as he called the classification plan a “dead rabbit,” meaning a bad rule, rather than a “dead letter,” meaning that others were not following the rule.)¹³

Other League magnates spoke soon after Day. In Philadelphia, Al Reach believed “Whatever differences there may be between the players and the proprietors, will be amicably adjusted. The players who have grievances will be granted a respectful hearing and full justice done them. Both sides have a common interest.” He stated optimistically, but also naively, “the number of dissatisfied players is exceedingly small and their grievance is more imaginary than real.” Still, he believed the classification plan a good thing, and pledged his franchise to stand by it, come what may.¹⁴

Arthur Soden in Boston felt about the same. Regarding perceived grievances, he stated, “I should favor giving them a hearing and think matters could be arranged satisfactorily. But as for anticipating that they would demand an abolishment of the classification or would think of striking, why, I think that is absurd.” Like Reach, Soden favored keeping the classification scheme, citing his belief that only a few League teams appeared likely to make any money in

¹³ Ibid. Day’s correction in “League Views” NA, *The Sporting Life*, May 29, 1889, 1.

¹⁴ “League Views” NA, *The Sporting Life*, May 29, 1889, 1.

1889. The rest of the League's owners voiced similar thoughts. Pittsburgh, Cleveland, and Washington announced they considered the plan the only measure that would allow them to continue in baseball, while of course Indianapolis, primary author of the plan, remained in favor.¹⁵

While many downplayed the possibilities of what might happen, a few writers seem to have had their fingers on the pulse of the situation. One New Yorker, who probably had some inside information, considering so many prominent Brotherhood members played in his city, stated, "What the players will demand will be an agreement on the part of the clubs to divide with the player the money received for his release and the abolition of the classification rule," although he too believed "All talk about a strike during the present base ball season is idle gossip." His next statement hit the mark directly. "The alternative the League will have to face will be the desertion of the entire Brotherhood, the formation of a new league, and the liveliest competition. The magnates will, of course, laugh heartily at this programme, but their hilarity will not last after an investigation of the means at the command of the players."¹⁶

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Ward and the Brotherhood took a few measures to test the waters with the League over the summer. In early June, Ward, Hanlon, and Brouthers sent a letter to National League president Nick Young stating their grievances, most prominently the classification plan and the practice of selling players.¹⁷ About a week later, John Ward gave an interview in which he

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ "New York News" W.I. Harris, *The Sporting Life*, May 22, 1889, 4.

¹⁷ "League Vs. Players" NA, *The Sporting Life*, June 5, 1889, 1.

debunked some of the reasons given in support of the Brush Plan. He again pointed out that it amounted to a breach of contract on the part of the National League. “Of those classified the great majority have been held at a figure less than that received last season, and the fact that two or three have been given an advance is a blind too transparent to deceive anyone as to the true character of the steal.” To arguments that the smaller cities of the League, places like Washington and Indianapolis, needed the classification plan to compete, Ward responded, “If Indianapolis and Washington cannot afford the rate of salaries their associate clubs play, then they are not entitled to the same class of ball. They are in too fast company, and they ought to get out.” He used an example to show why limiting the players to the expense that their city could stand was not fair. “Indianapolis has about as much right in the National League as Oshkosh. Yet if the League admitted the latter city, would it be fair to ask Denny, Myers, Boyle, Glasscock, etc., to play there at figures which would allow Oshkosh to clear expenses?”¹⁸

Ward believed that the real problem in baseball was not a lack of profit, but poor distribution of profits. If teams decided to group themselves together into a league, and play games for their mutual profit, they should divide their revenue between themselves, rather than some taking more than others did, just because they played in larger cities. In other words, if the National League really was an association or league of clubs, it should act like one, rather than acting like eight disaggregated individuals.

It is a fact that cannot be gainsaid that taking all the clubs together there is a great deal of money made each year from base ball. The Boston, New York and Chicago clubs pay immense dividends. The low-salaried Philadelphia Club, notwithstanding the wails of its owners, pays largely. Pittsburg makes something, and Detroit, which was said to have lost last season, is now settling up its affairs and publicly chuckling over the division of \$54,000 profit derived from somewhere. Now, if the National League wishes to carry several weak cities along, why did it not devise some scheme by which the deficiencies in

¹⁸ “Ward ‘Agin’ It” NA, *The Sporting Life*, June 12, 1889, 1.

those clubs would be made up out of this enormous profit, instead of taking it out of the pockets of the players in those clubs?¹⁹

Unintentionally, perhaps, *The Sporting Life* reinforced Ward's point in the article following his front-page interview. It provided a table showing that eighteen Boston home games saw 97,111 fans in attendance, while almost that many cranks, 90,532, had shown up for just twelve games in Brooklyn through early June, despite the uncertain weather of spring in those locales. The five clubs that had played in Boston to that point "have taken away from Boston \$12,000 in cold cash, and the triumvirs' net receipts for admission and grand stand have already reached \$50,000. The three directors are sure to divide between them over \$100,000 as the profit of the season."²⁰

In response to Ward's letter to National League headquarters, Nick Young disseminated the missive to other League owners, and they agreed to appoint a committee to study the matter. The membership of the committee was very important, of course. John Day of New York, John Rogers of Philadelphia, and, of course, Al Spalding of Chicago composed the group. Of the three, Day appeared most favorably disposed towards compromise, Rogers least so, with Spalding in the middle. It was true that Spalding had been one of the owners willing to recognize the Brotherhood in 1887, and had worked with them to revise the contract at that time. Since then, however, he had declared himself strongly in favor of the Brush Plan, so anything was possible, in terms of how the committee would decide to proceed. Granted, such a committee had no power to actually do anything regarding the Brotherhood's complaints, but

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ "Great Ball Towns" NA, *The Sporting Life*, June 12, 1889, 1.

given the influence of its members, whatever the three men decided might well become official policy.²¹

The meeting with Ward occurred on June 24, a private conference lasting a full two hours. Despite the lengthy discussions, the interview ended inconclusively. “President Ward is desirous of arranging a meeting between the two committees at once, and President Spalding has not fully made up his mind that the questions at issue are of a sufficiently urgent nature to warrant such action.” Ward stated simply that Spalding, as the chairman of the National League’s commission, “is now in possession of the brotherhood’s views, and has been informed as to the questions we wish to discuss in joint meeting. . . . I anticipate hearing from him at an early day; thus the matter stands.”²² Temporarily, this calmed all the rumors circulating about a strike by the BPBP on Independence Day, or potential measures even more extreme.

Still, the announcement was enough to send sportswriters scurrying to the presidents of their respective teams to get a reaction to the news. Washington planned to stand firm. The Nationals wanted to keep the classification plan, or replace it with something equally beneficial, such as a guarantee of half the gate receipts at all games. Boston’s reaction was interesting, given that Arthur Soden had joined John Day in opposing the classification plan in the first place. While he and the other triumvirs still believed a strike highly unlikely, he pledged that if things did come to that, the Beaneaters would sign new players and move forward from there. Soden also said he was inclined to grant most of the things the Brotherhood asked, because they were not an issue for Boston. This seemed scurrilous, given how many players Boston had purchased from other teams in recent years, but the reasoning was typically Soden-esque. “I am

²¹ “The Brotherhood’s Demands” NA, *Pittsburgh Dispatch*, June 23, 1889, 14; “Mr. Brush’s Views” A.G. Ovens, *Pittsburgh Dispatch*, June 23, 1889, 14.

²² “The League Vs. The Brotherhood” NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, June 25, 1889, 3.

willing to do away with the sale of players; we have none to sell, and we do not want to buy any more.” John Brush of Indianapolis, as the plan’s author, of course supported keeping the current status quo, maintaining that the players had nothing significant about which to complain. John Day in New York, as we have seen, wanted no part of any rule that limited what a club might pay its players, essentially agreeing with Ward that if a team could not compete with what it could afford, then the team should relocate to a league where it could compete and still make money. Al Spalding in Chicago was noncommittal beyond the comments stated above, reminding his interlocutor that the National League did not conduct its business through the newspapers. Cleveland signaled a willingness to stand by and await the outcome of negotiations between the Brotherhood and the League committee. Pittsburgh vowed to stand by Washington and Indianapolis and support classification, and Philadelphia did the same.²³

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Spalding got around to answering Ward about two weeks later. He informed Ward, Keefe, Hanlon, and the other Brothers that, “It is the unanimous opinion of this committee that it is inadvisable to hold a meeting with the Brotherhood committee at present for the reason that no material interests will suffer by postponing this meeting . . . it is contrary to the past policy of the League to call a special meeting in mid-season except for some extraordinary emergency, and we fail to discover any necessity for immediate action.”²⁴ This was a risky decision on the part of the League’s committee. The benefit was that with the players dispersed and gone home for the

²³ “Sentiment of the Clubs” Lerner, Mugwump, A.G. Ovens, Harris, Harry Palmer, Brunell, and Circle, *The Sporting Life*, June 26, 1889, 1.

²⁴ “In No Hurry” Harry Palmer, *The Sporting Life*, July 10, 1889, 1.

winter, collective action on the Brotherhood's part was less likely. The risk was that the players might decide to do something drastic before then, and prove harder to placate whenever the meeting finally took place.

The Brothers were boiling mad at their rebuff, and lost no time in accusing the League of hypocrisy on multiple fronts. As Tim Keefe said, "Spalding says they can't call a meeting in summer. Why, didn't they hold one at Asbury Park last summer and consider a trifling matter? There is one thing certain, they won't classify as many men this fall as they think. Why, this talk about Nick Young classifying the men is rot. The clubs send in the salaries and he puts them in classes to correspond."²⁵ In actuality, the meeting at Asbury Park took place in 1887, but considering the fact that the "emergency" was merely to decide the outcome of a protested game between New York and Detroit with little impact on the standings, Keefe's first point remained valid. Other proof corroborates Keefe's second claim, that the teams, not the League, classified the players. Jay Faatz, first baseman and captain of the Cleveland Spiders, wrote a letter to Nick Young in the off-season, complaining that his classification was unjust. Young wrote back "to the effect that the clubs, not the President of the league, classed the players."²⁶

Various members of the League also continued doing things to call their own integrity into question. Just a couple days later, when Washington sold second baseman Al Myers to Philadelphia, which needed a replacement for the injured Ed Delahanty, Washington paid Myers \$600 out of the sale price to keep him happy and gain his willing acceptance of the transaction.²⁷ Considering that official League policy was dead set against sharing any of the profits from sales with players, this raised a few eyebrows.

²⁵ "Brotherhood Sentiment" NA, *The Sporting Life*, July 10, 1889, 1.

²⁶ "They've Struck The Slide" NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, July 14, 1889, 12.

²⁷ "Washington Whispers" R.M. Larner, *The Sporting Life*, July 10, 1889, 2.

Ward was plainspoken on the issues when interviewed. “They know that they have broken faith with their players and dared not face the issue.” Spalding’s reasons for refusal were “amusing and simply absurd.” In answer to the question of the moment, what the Brotherhood would do next, Ward was more reserved. “On that question just at the present time I am neither able nor at liberty to say. There is one thing, however, of which you may be certain. The players have asked only what is right, and they will not rest until they get it. The men who are playing ball nowadays are not of the caliber to be hoodwinked or talked out of their rights.”²⁸

Spalding, meanwhile, began hatching some plans of his own. In a letter to Nick Young, he laid out his thoughts, which called for a plan setting up a universal salary structure in baseball. His scheme divided all minor leagues into four categories, A, B, C, and D. Class D was for the weakest minor leagues, and called for a team salary cap of \$600 per month, and an individual player cap of \$60 per month. Minor league teams of superior classification could obtain players from Class D clubs for \$250. Those leagues in Class C would have a team salary limit of \$1,000 each month and an individual limit of \$100. Teams from a higher classification could obtain players from Class C teams for a \$500 payment. Clubs in Class B had monthly salary limits of \$1,500 for the team and \$150 for individuals, and Class A and major league teams could acquire their players for a \$1,000 payment. Finally, those minor leagues grouped in Class A had a monthly limit of \$2,000 and an individual limit of \$200, and would receive \$1,500 in payment should a major league team want one of their men. Spalding’s plan also called for modifying the Brush Plan by ignoring it for players with exceptional personal habits and three years of service on their present team. Spalding favored some concessions to the Brotherhood on the issue of player sales, although his plan did not go as far as the Brotherhood wished. He believed that half

²⁸ “Great Joy In New York” NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, July 14, 1889, 12.

of the sale price should go to the selling team, one quarter to the player, and the final quarter to the league of which the selling team was a member, presumably to give the weaker teams in each league a bit more financial support. Finally, he wanted to see a so-called “Supreme Court” of baseball created that would rule on all matters in dispute that might arise between the major leagues, the minor leagues, individual teams, players, interpretations of the rules of play, and so forth. This court’s membership would consist of the presidents of the National League and American Association, plus one man outside the game (probably he had A.G. Mills in mind) whom all parties recognized as interested in the good of the game.²⁹

The plan, which contained elements of the Millennium Plan, met with approval, although often qualified approval, from most of Spalding’s colleagues. Unsurprisingly, its money-saving features drew the greatest acclaim. Al Reach in Philadelphia liked the fact that minor league teams could cut their expenses, and thereby they would fold less often. In addition, major league teams would need fewer players on their rosters. If they could reach down into the minor leagues and acquire needed players at will, there would be no need for them to carry extra men in case of injury. Reach also believed the scheme provided incentive for minor league players to hone their skills, so they might advance up the chain and earn a greater salary. Cleveland approved of the idea, as its management believed some type of classification a good idea, but with reservations about dividing the money for player sales. Washington favored an equal division of gate receipts, if any changes to the current system took place. Pittsburgh was uncertain regarding purchasing minor league players, but heartily approved of a baseball Supreme Court. Indianapolis owner John Brush, as the author of the existing Brush Plan, remained in favor of his own scheme, naturally, while Boston offered no immediate comment.

²⁹ “A Draft System” A.G. Spalding, *The Sporting Life*, July 17, 1889, 1.

New York's John Day, finally, approved of any scheme that would help the minor leagues stay afloat.³⁰

Others, however, were not so impressed. The scheme clearly meant to make the minor leagues subservient to the needs of major league teams. The fact that a minor league team might lose its star player or players at a critical time in its own league pennant race was an obvious flaw in the plan. The loss of such men certainly had the potential to cost the team more money than it would receive in payment. The other primary drawback was that minor league players, if purchased by a team in a superior classification, had no say in whether or not they actually wanted to move. What if, for example, a player had the chance to play in his hometown, was satisfied with his pay, and did not want to go elsewhere?

One of the merits of Spalding's plan was that it set in motion some serious discussion of how to improve the general state of baseball. Boston manager Jim Hart, a longtime baseball man, published a plan of his own soon afterward. In fact, he had sent this plan to Spalding for comment, and thus the Chicago owner's own work was in many respects derivative of Hart's plan, particularly in its call for a board to oversee all technical aspects of the game such as disputes, contracts, and the like. Other noteworthy features of Hart's scheme were to give players an option if they wished to assent to be being sold and transferred to another team, and to keep most of the features of the pre-Brush Plan contract between the League and the Brotherhood. He also called for grading cities in categories A through G, with set contract sizes, prices for attending games, and many other managerial details precisely worked out for each category. The one other notable aspect of the plan, however, that virtually guaranteed a poor universal reception, was that Hart's plan transferred Cincinnati and Brooklyn to the National

³⁰ "Spalding's Idea" NA, *The Sporting Life*, July 24, 1889, 1.

League at the expense of Washington and Indianapolis, and then relegated the diminished American Association to a status below that of the National League.³¹

What each of these plans had in common was to look at the situation from the perspective of the owners and their quest for profit. This was natural enough, considering the plans' authorship. What that also meant, however, was that no matter how the owners tweaked these various plans of classification, each was unpalatable to the players in most respects, no matter how much the magnates claimed otherwise, and did little to ward off the coming dispute, except perhaps for scoring a few minor public relations points. Why bother with working out such schemes, then? As was always true when Al Spalding took public action, there was more to the story. Even though July 4 had come and gone with no strike, Spalding was doing his best to find out what the Brotherhood was up to, so he could anticipate their actions at the post-season meeting. He sent detectives to shadow key members of the Brotherhood. Spalding knew, therefore, that the BPBP had held a meeting on July 14 (this was the meeting where they made the final decision to initiate plans for their own league) but did not know exactly what decisions the organization had made. The fact that July 14 was also Bastille Day, however, did not escape his notice. This was the background behind his decision to lay out his new plan as a trial balloon.³²

This is where the situation stood as the 1889 campaign wound through the dog days of August. The Brotherhood, still simmering after the League's rebuff, continued its work and

³¹ "Another Scheme" Jim Hart, *The Sporting Life*, July 31, 1889, 5.

³² Stevens, *Baseball' Radical for All Seasons*, 87. Bastille Day marked the well-known event from the French Revolution where the people of Paris stormed the Bastille, a fortress in Paris that stood for the arbitrary rule of the Bourbon dynasty. The fact that the Brotherhood met on this day was purely coincidence, however. It was a Sunday, the only day of the week that the players had free from games when they could meet, and the chances of the schedule just happened to have most BPBP members near enough that they could attend a meeting on that day.

planning behind the scenes. The owners, on the other hand, remained serene in their belief that their position was impregnable, that the players would not dare such a dramatic move as to challenge them directly, and that all they needed to do was continue refining a plan that would pad all of their pockets more consistently.

Meanwhile, the pennant races of both the League and Association turned into great ones. Four teams, two in each league, battled down to the last week of the season to see which would end up in the World Series. We might forgive baseball observers, therefore, if the action on the field took up most of their attention. As September dwindled and turned to October, however, concrete and tangible things began replacing the rumors that observers had spent the summer sifting and evaluating. It was time for a final showdown.

Chapter 20

The Storm Breaks

The first hints that something big might be afoot in baseball began to leak out in September of 1889. Of course, various rumors concerning what the Brotherhood might do had circulated all season long. However, with the games on the field distracting everyone's attention, the players included, the summer saw many rumors but few definitive facts or decisions that would either prove or disprove those rumors. At least, few decisions that reached the press or the public.

Before describing what happened, however, we should take a moment to describe how the scheme for a new league organized by the Brotherhood originated in the first place. According to Al Johnson, the original financier behind the plan, it was Ned Hanlon, rather than John Ward, who first approached him with the idea. Hanlon and Ward, along with Fred Pfeffer and Jim Fogarty, had been companions on the Spalding Tour of 1888-1889. These four men, with nothing better to do on the long ocean voyage around the world, worked up a plan to liberate the players from the control of the National League. They believed that their fellows in the Brotherhood would support the plan, but the organization lacked the capital to attempt it without outside help.

That is why Hanlon approached Johnson. Johnson, based in Cleveland, was a big baseball fan and somewhat of an idealist who hated the lopsidedness of baseball contracts. He

also, admittedly, saw visions of huge profits if he located a successful baseball park on the route of some of his streetcar lines. He socialized with ballplayers often, and became sympathetic to their cause. After meeting Hanlon, he then discussed possibilities with various members of the Spiders. One by one, as the other teams of the National League came through Cleveland, Johnson met the members of each chapter and discussed plans with them. “So as each visiting club came we held meeting after meeting, until every league player had heard our views and had been given a chance to express himself and suggest whatever he thought would be for the best interests of such an organization.” As an example of how completely these players all backed the plan, Johnson then said, “To show how they feel I will state what happened at one of our meetings. Every player of both New York and Cleveland had attended three evenings in succession, and our sessions were never less than three hours’ duration.”¹ Johnson also took the appropriate precautions to avoid anyone catching on to the true nature of what he was contemplating, perhaps aware of the penchant of National League owners to spy on players with detectives. Not only did he station a burly employee in the hallway with instructions to bounce anyone who tried to interrupt his meeting with the players, he also bribed the police who worked the beat outside the hotel to keep quiet, just to make sure that no one knew the identity of the men going in and out of his meetings.²

After these early-season sessions, the players decided to ask for a meeting with the National League. This was the meeting mentioned in the preceding chapter that Spalding, Day, and Rogers refused to schedule. The chapters of the Brotherhood then voted on whether to hold a strike on July 4 or attempt a “reorganization,” meaning their own league, after the season. The men voted in favor of reorganization by a decisive margin. At that point, Johnson and some of

¹ “Albert Johnson Talks” NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, October 30, 1889, 6.

² Seymour, *Baseball*, 226.

the BPBP's leaders began working towards contacting additional financial backing, finding grounds for play, and so forth. The fact that they did so without drawing any notice or leaking any of their plans until September, when those plans were nearly mature, was a phenomenal achievement.³

It was not quite a perfect achievement, however. A few stories appeared by September that presaged the cataclysm to come. The *Chicago Daily Tribune* interviewed an unnamed Indianapolis Brother, and learned that the plan to challenge the National League with the creation of an independent league featuring Brotherhood members remained alive and well. It was at this time that the public also learned that Cleveland capitalist Johnson was the leader of the scheme on the ownership side. This correspondent wrote, "When the various league clubs offer their players contracts for 1890 they will be rejected. The players signed by Johnson are to be apportioned among the present league towns Pittsburg and Indianapolis. A new national league is to be formed." While the writer had a couple of the cities wrong, the rest of the statement was an accurate indication of what was about to happen.⁴

Even though the statement was true, still, in early September most did not believe such a thing would ever happen. Most continued to think it was a bluff on the part of the Brotherhood, similar to the bluff (or was it really a bluff?) it had used in 1887 to gain concessions on the contract issue, when Erastus Wiman was supposedly the money behind the operation. Even the interviewer did not really believe it. He admitted, "Johnson is well known in baseball circles. He is a businessman of a good many interests. There is little of the visionary about him. While he might be induced to handle the Cleveland corner of the trust if there was a promise of financial success, he certainly would not handle it nationally." The writer concluded, however,

³ "That Baseball Combine" NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, September 10, 1889, 6.

⁴ Ibid.

“The more the story is probed the more it assumes spectral hue.” Rather, “The Johnson plan is the last device in the way of a sledgehammer on this classification law. It will be used during the winter and may serve its purpose.”⁵

Others were less certain. They noted that Al Johnson, under the cover of looking after his St. Louis street railway interests, had spent the past several weeks in New York City and other eastern League cities, presumably in conference with John Ward and other Brotherhood members. One of Al Johnson’s brothers, Will Johnson, was also good friends with Fred Dunlap, and speculation centered on the ability of the Johnson brothers (older brother Tom was also a wealthy businessman who dabbled in politics) to supply the baseball Brothers with ballparks in which to play in case they decided to challenge the League.⁶ When asked about his intentions regarding baseball, Al was noncommittal, but shortly afterwards reports spied him dining at the Continental Hotel with Brotherhood members Ned Hanlon of Pittsburgh and Jim Fogarty and George Wood of Philadelphia. He later met with Arthur Irwin of Washington as well.⁷

Leaks of more information dribbled in to the press in mid-September. Soon, baseball fans learned of plans that, if put into practice, would materially transform the business of baseball. Profits would go to a pool, and each team would share in them equally, to avoid the constant hobgoblin menacing competition in the League and Association, that of some teams being weaker financially than others, and thus creating Brush Plans and others schemes to compensate for their weakness. Not only that, the players would share in the profits, splitting them equally with their financial backers, to supplement their salaries, which would be smaller in

⁵ Ibid. While the *Daily Tribune* did not print the authorship of individual articles on baseball at this time, the person supplying the information can be none other than A.G. Ovens, Indianapolis correspondent for both that paper and *The Sporting Life*.

⁶ “The League Strike” NA, *The Sporting News*, September 14, 1889, 1.

⁷ “The Rumored Trust” NA, *The Sporting Life*, September 18, 1889, 6.

up front money. The new league would adopt prizes for finishing in the top of the standings, and like the National League (at least officially), would eschew Sunday games and liquor sales at the ballpark.⁸

As is clear by now, if anything major did happen, Al Spalding would be the point man for the League, whether in negotiations or war, with the Brotherhood. For Spalding, one of the first signs that something serious was in the offing came when he tried to locate new grounds for his White Stockings. He allowed the lease on his old grounds on the corner of Congress and Loomis streets to lapse and purchased a new site, where he planned a new park modeled on the Victorian Grounds in Melbourne, Australia, that he and his tourists visited the previous winter. However, when the construction plans bogged down and Spalding learned they would not be ready for the next season, he attempted to renew his option on the old site, just in case. It was almost too late, as someone else, an agent for the backers of the Brotherhood, tried preempting Spalding by purchasing an option on the grounds.⁹

Nor was Chicago the only place where Brotherhood backers were trying to outmaneuver the League bosses. On September 20, Al Johnson told an interviewer that backers had also acquired leases on the old Polo Grounds site in New York and one of the city of Brooklyn's parks (although not either of the Bridegrooms' two parks, Washington and Ridgewood. Brooklyn played in two parks in order to help dodge the always thorny issue of Sunday baseball in Brooklyn, Ridgewood being the designated Sunday site.), as well as two other locations. In securing the Polo Grounds, the Brotherhood had the help of James Coogan, a prominent New York baseball figure. Johnson also disclosed the lineup of cities for the new league, those being

⁸ "The Baseball Business to be Reorganized" NA, *Los Angeles Daily Herald*, September 15, 1889, 7.

⁹ "Revolutionizing Ball Playing" NA, *Milwaukee Sentinel*, September 15, 1889, 4.

New York, Boston, Brooklyn, and Philadelphia in the East, and Chicago, Cleveland, Pittsburgh, and Buffalo in the West. Securing grounds in Buffalo was quite simple, as Jack Rowe was both a Brother and the part owner of the existing Buffalo franchise of the International League (see the Rowe-White controversy in chapter sixteen for more.) Finally, Johnson stated that every single National League player, with Cap Anson of Chicago as the singular exception, was on board with the plans of the Brotherhood.¹⁰

Spalding's concern no doubt deepened when the press reported that one of his own men, stalwart second baseman Fred Pfeffer, was the likely manager of a rival Chicago team. Pfeffer, who not only authored a book about baseball, but frequently cornered the concession for printing scorecards at Chicago games throughout the 1880s as well, had saved a tidy sum from his combination of ball playing and entrepreneurial activities.¹¹ Ward, meanwhile, while not giving out what the Brotherhood ultimately planned to do, did say, "The Brotherhood will show the League that it means business. We have temporized enough. We shall be put off no longer. The League has got to consider our complaints and rectify them." When asked if that was a declaration of a new league and war, Ward did not commit, simply adding, "That is a question that will come afterwards. I do not care to say what steps we will take."¹²

It was not long before the public discovered what those steps were. Within a week, the Chicago *Daily Tribune* and other papers reported the revolutionary financial plan agreed on by the Brotherhood and its backers. Player contracts would change little from what each man earned in 1889. However, out of whatever profits the league made, the first \$10,000 went to the teams finishing first through fourth, in a distribution scheme of \$5,000-\$2,500-\$1,500-\$1,000.

¹⁰ "The Brotherhood" NA, *The Sporting News*, September 21, 1889, 1; "A Baseball Scheme" *Pittsburg Dispatch*, September 21, 1889, 7.

¹¹ "Revolutionizing Ball Playing" NA, *Milwaukee Sentinel*, September 15, 1889, 4.

¹² "New York News" W.I. Harris, *The Sporting Life*, September 18, 1889, 2.

The next \$80,000 of profit went to the backers, divided evenly among the eight clubs. Additional profits up to the next \$80,000 went to the players in the same distribution arrangement. After that, the players and backers split any further profits fifty-fifty.¹³ The plan underwent modifications in time, but such a profit-sharing format was radical for Gilded Age America, no matter what the exact details eventually became.

That plan, while revolutionary enough, was not nearly all. Team management was also a joint venture between the players and owners. Each ball club had a board of eight men, four players and four backers, while the league as a whole had a senate of sixteen members, two from each team, one player and one backer.¹⁴ The players and their backers even tried to answer the longstanding umpire question, deciding on the long-desired double umpire system, and they tried to get together a staff that would include the most prestigious officials in the game, including Gaffney, Ferguson, McQuaid, and John Kelly.¹⁵

With the scheme now out in the open, baseball reporters rushed to Al Spalding first to get his take on the explosive story. The Chicago magnate first declared that he would keep his ballpark, contrary to earlier reports, and it turned out he was as good as his word on that matter. The Brotherhood's maneuvers cost him a great deal of money, however. His previous lease called for a payment of just \$1,000 per year; in order to renew the lease for 1890, he had to part with \$10,000 per year for three years, as the owners of the grounds used the Brotherhood's offer as leverage against him.¹⁶ As he had done so many times previously, he immediately worked the propaganda angle by portraying the League as the responsible father to the unruly and ungrateful

¹³ "A Great Baseball Trust" NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, September 22, 1889, 9.

¹⁴ Ibid. While sportswriters for the *Daily Tribune* did not sign their articles, the author was Frank Brunell, who had recently moved from Cleveland to Chicago and joined the staff of the *Daily Tribune*.

¹⁵ "The Ball Players' Revolt" NA, *New York Times*, September 23, 1889, 2.

¹⁶ "The Chicago Grounds" NA, *The Sporting News*, October 19, 1889, 3.

children of the Brotherhood. “The league has existed for fifteen years. It wiped out the gambling element in baseball and cleared it of crooked playing . . . Now that the game is clean and on a healthy basis all the purifying work is forgotten by the players, and ‘long chance’ capitalists are ready to step in and assume the possible profits that may come through the game.” Furthermore, the BPBP was suddenly “an oathbound, secret organization of strikers which has plotted against the life of the league, through the care of which it became a possibility.”¹⁷

Spalding finished the interview with both a carrot and a stick. While some League teams might struggle against this challenge, others would fight on, to the death if necessary. However, despite a general feeling in the press that conciliation might be too late, he intended to try that route first. “New York, Boston, Chicago, Philadelphia, and Pittsburg will fight hard and go on with teams made up of the best players they can secure. It is a tremendous plot, and I hope for the good of the game that all the differences between the league and its players may be overcome and the threatened break averted.”¹⁸

His next move was reconnaissance. He needed to know what the BPBP really planned to do. Accordingly, on September 28 Spalding sent a public letter to Ward (despite his earlier statements about not doing business through the newspapers) asking the Brotherhood’s president to name a date following the season to hold the conference he had put off during the summer. Ward’s response, while not proclaiming a definitive break, was certainly not conciliatory, either. Referring to the BPBP’s negotiating committee appointed to meet with the League during the summer, Ward wrote, “the committee was, however, unable to obtain a hearing from the league and it so reported at a subsequent meeting of the brotherhood held July 14, and was accordingly discharged. It was not a standing committee. I will refer your communication, therefore, to the

¹⁷ “League Men Will Fight” NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, September 23, 1889, 3.

¹⁸ Ibid.

entire brotherhood.” In theory, this meant the BPBP might still treat with the League. Given the reports from various newspapers that during the season, however, in which the Brotherhood had chosen reorganization (its own league) over a July 4 strike as its preferred method of retaliation for being stood up by Spalding, Day, and Rogers, this gave Spalding a good idea of where the situation was headed.¹⁹ The same day, the New York members of the Brotherhood’s financial support purchased land adjoining John Day’s new Polo Grounds for the purpose of constructing a Brotherhood ball park. Included in the group was James Coogan, owner of both properties, and Erastus Wiman, former New York Metropolitans owner. The syndicate also purchased the lease on Day’s existing Polo Grounds after Day’s current lease expired, which would be following the 1891 season.²⁰

There was also the issue of the 1887 Brotherhood contract negotiated with the League, specifically as it related to the reserve rule. Recall that in this contract, the Brotherhood explicitly recognized the reserve rule, because it wanted the exact obligations of both parties to the contract written into the contract. Section eighteen of the contract said that the player agreed to give his club the right to reserve his services for the following season. Some concluded, therefore, that the Brotherhood would be guilty of contract breaking, should the players refuse to sign with their League team for 1890, because the courts would consider this a binding agreement. Others believed that this argument did not hold water, however, because the reserve rule merely gave teams the option to renew the contract of the previous season. It did not obligate the player to sign the contract, although it did bar the player from playing on or against any team party to the National Agreement if they chose not to.

¹⁹ “The Brotherhood’s Position” NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, September 29, 1889, 14.

²⁰ “The New League at Work” NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, September 29, 1889, 14; “New Syndicate’s Grounds” NA, *Los Angeles Daily Herald*, September 29, 1889, 8.

An additional consideration, from the National League's view, was that if the League did end up in court trying to enforce this contract, it might create the opportunity for the players to challenge the reserve rule's legality in the courts. Many lawyers considered the legality of the rule questionable, at best, so this was a possibility that the League wanted to avoid if possible. John Ward pointed out another weakness in the argument, stating, "If they had any such right why haven't they prevented men playing outside the League before to-day, as there have been several instances where men have broken contracts and gone to California and other outside places. This whole question hinges on the meaning of that one little word, 'reserve.' It is all one-sided and could not hold a player who wanted to go outside."²¹ Furthermore, Ward said, "The League can reserve players from year to year, within League limits, but they can no more prevent a player from playing with another organization than they can prevent him from earning a living by keeping a hotel or driving a dray. The Brotherhood is, of course, interested in protecting the players. That is its sole and only object."²²

As the proposed new league did not plan to recognize the reserve rule or be a party to the National Agreement in any case, this would only matter if the courts decided in the League's favor. As it turned out, they did not. National League clubs brought injunctions against both John Ward and Buck Ewing. In Ewing's case, Judge William Wallace denied the injunction, writing, "In a legal sense it [the baseball contract] is merely a contract to make a contract if the parties agree."²³

More relevant in determining what was happening in the present was Section 2(a) of the National Agreement, which stated that no player could sign a contract for longer than seven

²¹ "Ward's Reply" John Ward, *Pittsburgh Dispatch*, October 24, 1889, 6.

²² "The Players To Meet" NA, *The Sporting Life*, October 30, 1889, 5.

²³ Thorn, *Baseball in the Garden of Eden*, 240-241.

months, that contracts expired, at the latest, on October 31, and that negotiations for new contracts could not occur prior to October 20 without the club's permission. If the men in the Brotherhood had already signed an agreement to play for a new Brotherhood team during the month of September, they were in violation of this last provision. If true, there was no point in negotiating with the League, as no compromise was possible at that point, not to mention that if any player went back on their Brotherhood contract to sign another agreement with the League, the Brotherhood could prevent this through court action. Thus, informed observers concluded that the Brotherhood must be in earnest, and that both sides must prepare for battle. Later events proved that both players and clubs would ignore such legal niceties in the heat of combat, but in late September, such arguments helped clarify the position of both the players and the League.²⁴

* * * * *

There were various reasons why the Brotherhood succeeded in attracting capital from interested parties. Clearly, many investors thought that there was money in baseball, if only there was an even distribution of that money so that financial success did not wholly depend on the city where one's team played. Others had personal motives. According to Tim Murnane, a number of Boston capitalists wanted to back the new league, because when they were stockholders in the Boston Beaneaters, the Triumvirs' heavy-handed financial manipulations had deprived them of their stock and frozen them out of the organization. These investors wanted nothing better than to get revenge on the haughty trio.²⁵

²⁴ "The Latest Development" NA, *The Sporting Life*, October 2, 1889, 5.

²⁵ "The Sporting World" NA, *Galveston Daily News*, September 22, 1889, 4.

Besides the owners, several players and ex-players of means joined the rebellion. In addition to Fred Pfeffer in Chicago, Boston's John Morrill, although no longer playing, joined the investors in Beantown. George Wright, a true baseball pioneer who had played professional baseball even before the National Association formed in 1871, joined Morrill as a Boston stockholder. His old teammate, Ross Barnes, joined the Chicago investors, while New York's Mayor Hugh Grant bought stock in the proposed New York club.²⁶ Current players financially involved in the venture included Tim Keefe and John Ward in New York, Dan Brouthers and John Clarkson in Boston, Chief Zimmer and Jay Faatz of Cleveland, Jack Rowe, Deacon White, and George Myers for the new Buffalo team, and Fred Dunlap and Ned Hanlon in Pittsburgh. Keefe also was part owner of a moderately capitalized sporting goods establishment, and to no one's surprise, got the contract to supply baseballs for the Brotherhood's 1890 campaign. They eventually proved somewhat livelier than the baseballs used in previous years.²⁷

The only players hesitant about joining were, ironically, some of the New York players who founded the BPBP in the first place. The main reason for their reluctance was their fondness for their owner, John Day. As discussed many times, Day, more than any other National League owner, tried to do right by his players. He paid them well, did not try to sell them, opposed the Brush Plan, never issued fines for poor play, and did not send detectives to monitor their after-hours behavior. Even with the storm clouds gathering over Gotham in October, he maintained that, "The players may, of course, have some fault to find with the present rules, and, for my part, I think there can be one or two changes made that would be beneficial to all. The classification rule, if lived up to, would be a good thing, but as it is it can

²⁶ "The Outlook in Boston" NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, September 23, 1889, 3; "What George Wright Says" NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, September 23, 1889, 3.

²⁷ "The Ball Players' Revolt" NA, *New York Times*, September 23, 1889, 2.

be dropped and never missed.” He also said, “In the case of Rowe and White, and similar cases, I don’t think that was right. No man should be compelled to play with a club that he did not want to join, and the rule was never made with the idea of sheltering such an evil. It is one of the things that has crept into the rules that were never intended.”²⁸

What the players really hoped was that they might persuade Day to join them in their new venture. Regardless, “the New York players feel badly about jumping from under President John B. Day’s management, but they feel that it must be all hands or nobody, and are figuring on President Day’s bobbing up in the new league.”²⁹ The saddest part of the whole rebellion, in fact, might be that Day, the man least deserving of the players’ enmity, ended up suffering the most from their actions. His financial situation deteriorated so badly in 1890, other National League owners had to prop up the New York franchise before the season was over. With his tobacco business also struggling, by 1893 he had almost no role in the New York Giants organization, resigning in February. He continued in major league baseball in positions of ever-diminishing importance, falling so far that by 1910, his only source of income was the five dollars per day he made taking tickets at the Polo Grounds for the team he used to own.³⁰

There was the potential for more allies outside of the financial world as well. Samuel Leffingwell, a prominent leader in the trade union movement, encouraged the Brotherhood to apply for membership in the American Federation of Trades and Labor Unions, the Knights of Labor, or both. He believed that baseball players certainly qualified as skilled workers, and mentioned that the players would then “be allied to organizations representing over 1,000,000 of skilled mechanics.” He added, “As the Brotherhood will have all the skilled players, and as the

²⁸ “News, Notes And Gossip” NA, *The Sporting Life*, October 16, 1889, 5.

²⁹ “What George Wright Says” NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, September 23, 1889, 3.

³⁰ For more on Day’s tragic career in baseball, see his SABR biography at <http://sabr.org/bioproj/person/c281a493>, accessed March 22, 2015.

main support comes from the workingmen, it will be seen whether mere capital is to rule with despotic sway over the masses of the people in baseball as it would like to do in many other leading industries in the country. Oh, yes, the workingmen are in sympathy with the Brotherhood.”³¹

There was one wildcard in the situation, and that was the American Association. In the fall of 1889, it had no strong brotherhood as the League players had, despite occasional rumors of attempts to form one. Yet, all knew that many Association players, those in St. Louis who had to play for Chris Von der Ahe especially, might well desert and join the Brotherhood League if given proper inducements. Although it was probably more by luck than design, the Association clubs had not adopted anything like the Brush Classification Plan, and so their players did not have a potential salary limit over which to chafe. There were still the reserve clause and player sales, however, from which Association players might want to escape. Not only that, the nightmare season just concluded in Louisville, the mercurial ownership in St. Louis, the constant worry about which Association team might switch to the National League, and the long train rides to reach Kansas City for games were all reasons that Association players might want to play elsewhere.

The Brotherhood’s initial policy towards the American Association was one of non-interference. It made no effort to woo Association stars into its proposed league or to interfere with Association operations. The Brotherhood League’s structure, however, made it difficult to imagine the Association would stay neutral forever. If the Brotherhood League proved a success, without player reserves and player sales, it would certainly be more attractive to up and coming young players than an American Association that did have them, especially if the

³¹ “To Aid The Brotherhood” NA, *New York Times*, November 5, 1889, 8.

Brotherhood League succeeded in displacing the National League from the major markets the League possessed in 1889. It was probably unavoidable, therefore, that the Association would line up with the National League against the Brotherhood eventually, and that the Brotherhood would respond by raiding Association rosters for more talent.

Although this is what happened eventually, it was no certainty in September and October of 1889. At that time, both an exciting pennant race and the fallout from the recent St. Louis-Brooklyn imbroglio (see chapter seventeen) distracted the American Association, giving its leaders little time to formulate a coherent policy regarding the Brotherhood. In addition, given the unpredictability of the Association's decisions in the past, no one in the Brotherhood could be absolutely certain that the Association would become hostile. It seemed best, therefore, to be cautious and wait to see what stance the junior major league would take.

* * * * *

In the last week of September, matters became rather confusing as to what was actually going to happen. Some Brotherhood members gave reports to the press about the new league, other Brothers, including the officers of the organization, denied those same reports. The names of various capitalists besides the Johnson brothers circulated as well; some of these men gave details of the scheme, others denied being part of it. Certain National League owners started taking precautions while others voiced their disbelief that there was any plan for secession afoot at all. While sportswriters went to immense lengths to dissect the details of the proposed plan that they knew about, and raced to interview team owners whenever the latest rumor reached

them, few writers seemed to know anything for certain, either. Even *The Sporting Life* proclaimed its coverage of the situation a combination of news, gossip, and rumor.

Part of the reason for all the uncertainty was that, sadly for the Brotherhood, details of its plan leaked too early. Writers at the *Chicago Daily Tribune*, including both Harry Palmer and Frank Brunell by this time, learned the details of the plan and published them in late September, before the BPBP had the chance to perfect all its arrangements. The fact that National League owners had such a wide array of responses, from the deep concern of Al Spalding to the nonchalance of several of his fellow magnates, is a good indication that as a group, they were oblivious to the full scope of what the Brotherhood intended to do, even in late September. It is a good bet that the reason Spalding was most concerned is that his hometown newspapermen knew the story, he learned it from them, and realized just how dire things were. The other reason the BPBP tried to stall as long as possible was fear. Not fear of their new leagues' failure, but fear that if National League owners realized how earnest they were, those owners would terminate the contracts of Brotherhood players immediately, thus depriving them of a bit of pay at the end of the season.³² That is why Ned Williamson remarked, "I understand that the Chicago Club has not as yet settled in full with its players. As soon as that is done I think some facts will be made public that have heretofore been kept quiet."³³

Spalding and the Boston Triumvirs took the most active approach to fending off a potential Brotherhood challenge. Spalding began signing players from Western League franchises almost immediately. Boston tried to do him one better, opening negotiations for the entire franchise of the Western League's Omaha club. At the very least, they hoped to gain up and coming pitcher Kid Nichols, whether the Brotherhood carried out its threat or not, but just in

³² "Some Corrections" NA, *The Sporting Life*, October 16, 1889, 5.

³³ "Ed Williamson Does Some Talking" NA, *The Sporting News*, October 26, 1889, 1.

case, wanted to be ready to import an entire team to fill their ranks, should any desertions occur.³⁴

This actually proved a profitable development for the stronger minor league circuits. With their men suddenly in great demand, visions of greenbacks danced in the heads of minor league executives. As Sam Morton, manager of the Western Association's Minneapolis franchise put it, "It will not be long before base-ball managers will be climbing over each other's shoulders in this section to get hold of good Western Association timber for their clubs next year. We may or may not sell. We are like all other people in business, if somebody offers our price we are pretty sure to sell."³⁵

The game of bluff between the players and the League continued into the middle of October. On the 11th of that month, Tim Keefe mentioned that the BPBP would hold a meeting and appoint a new committee to treat with the National League in an effort to resolve the "vital grievances" held by the players.³⁶ Keefe also mentioned, more ominously, that the Brotherhood did not trust the League, especially after last year's decisions to implement the Brush Plan. Queried on what the BPBP wanted, he said, "We want the abolition of the classification of players and want the sale of players entirely done away with. It is not true that we want a share in the purchase money."³⁷

In the meantime, however, sources began confirming which Brotherhood players would serve in each city as its key organizers. The men listed, most of whom already played in the city they represented, were as follows:

³⁴ "A Confession" NA, *The Sporting Life*, October 9, 1889, 6.

³⁵ "Sam Morton's Views" NA, *The Chicago Daily Inter Ocean*, October 10, 1889, 6.

³⁶ "League And Brotherhood" NA, *Milwaukee Daily Journal*, October 11, 1889, 6.

³⁷ "Tim's View Of It" NA, *Pittsburgh Dispatch*, October 12, 1889, 6.

Philadelphia – Fred Dunlap, Hardie Richardson, Jim Fogarty, and George Wood.

New York – John Ward, Tim Keefe, Roger Conner, and Buck Ewing.

Boston – Dan Brouthers, Billy Nash, John Morrill, and Dick Johnston.

Washington – Arthur Irwin, John Irwin, and Sam Wise.

Pittsburgh – Ned Hanlon, Deacon White, Jack Rowe, and Fred Carroll.

Chicago – Fred Pfeffer.

Indianapolis – Jack Glasscock, Jerry Denny, Ed Andrews, and Henry Boyle.

Cleveland – Jay Faatz, Cub Stricker, Paul Radford, and Charles Snyder.³⁸

Based on such reports, others in the know continued to insist that the BPBP had no interest in negotiation, and that this was a smokescreen to buy time. Fred Pfeffer, Chicago's crack second baseman, said as much in one interview. Frank Brunell did, too, stating he had seen many Brotherhood contracts already signed, and that one entire team (presumably Cleveland) was already in the fold. Brunell also confirmed the League's intent to fight. Its plan was for its teams to sign as many talented players from the stronger minor leagues as possible, cut prices to undersell the Brotherhood league, and pull out all legal strategies to harass the new organization and, if possible, drive its teams into debt through escalating legal costs. The National League would also do its best to entice two or three key players from each club back into its ranks through healthy raises or similar methods of bribery.³⁹

It was also in mid-October that other National League team executives began acknowledging that the players were in earnest. Tom Loftus, the manager who had just finished

³⁸ "And Here You Are" Gotham, *The Sporting News*, October 12, 1889, 1.

³⁹ "Mr. Fred Pfeffer" NA, *The Sporting News*, October 12, 1889, 3; "The League's Fighting Plan" Brunell, *The Sporting News*, October 12, 1889, 3; "George Wright's Views" NA, *The Sporting News*, October 12, 1889, 3.

leading Cleveland to a respectable finish in its first season in the National League, shocked everyone when he agreed to leave the Cleveland club in order to manage in Cincinnati. His reason was that every player on his roster planned to desert the team for the Brotherhood's new league. The players held no ill will against Loftus, however, which is why they warned him in advance so that he could find a more promising position while his baseball reputation remained solid. He did not actually sign the contract until a bit later, which called for him to receive \$3,500 and 100 shares of Cincinnati stock, but it does not appear he seriously reconsidered his decision.⁴⁰ Further proof that something was afoot in the Forest City came in late October when Al Johnson purchased a lease on grounds on Wilson Avenue and set men to work on grading the field and constructing a grandstand.⁴¹

Similarly, John Rogers in Philadelphia started to believe some of the reports of what the BPBP planned to do. He also hoped for reconciliation, and stated his willingness to abandon the Brush Plan, although in exchange he wanted the Brotherhood to agree to a rule requiring players to report in prime condition to play on April 1 each year. Because he did not like to see men arrive in April out of shape while paying them as if they were performing at the peak of their talents. When asked about his knowledge of the Brotherhood's plans, Rogers stated, "I hear that the brotherhood league will surely be organized, and I am ready to believe that it will. I am told that five men in this city have agreed to put in \$2,500 each."⁴²

Rogers' fellow Philadelphian, Al Reach, also began to see what was happening by mid-October. When a reporter asked him if he believed the BPBP was serious about its plans, Reach said, "Why, of course I do. That is, to this extent: If Ward and others who are the leading spirits

⁴⁰ "Loftus And Schmelz" J.S. McDonald, *The Sporting News*, October 12, 1889, 1; "Stern Talks" NA, *The Sporting Life*, October 30, 1889, 1.

⁴¹ "Brotherhood At Cleveland" NA, *The Chicago Daily Inter Ocean*, October 26, 1889, 2.

⁴² "Asked Of The Brotherhood" NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, October 21, 1889, 6.

in this move can induce enough players to follow them to accomplish their purpose, I believe that the attempt to establish a Brotherhood league will be made. If, on the other hand, enough signatures cannot be secured to warrant success, then the brotherhood men will try to get big concessions from the league.”⁴³

October 20 was a very important day. That was the first day that League teams could negotiate with players for 1890, and the day on which League teams could send new contracts to their reserved men. If that day came and went, and the players took no action or returned the contracts unsigned, it was not quite a sign that the revolt had begun, but it did signify a plan to take action of some kind. At that point, the only things standing in the way of a baseball rebellion against the National League was the Brotherhood meeting scheduled for November 4 and the National League meeting planned for November 13-14. If the two sides could not reconcile by that point, there would be war.

* * * * *

When October 20 came, National League owners sent contracts to their players, as usual. Baseball observers everywhere were about to find out what the players really meant to do. The initial returns were not promising for the League. In Chicago, Al Spalding received but one signature, that of Cap Anson. Typical of the response of Chicago players was that of outfielder George Van Haltren. When a writer asked him where he would play next year, he answered, “In Chicago.” Then came the inevitable follow-up question, “Under Anson?” Van Haltren replied,

⁴³ “World Of Sports” NA, *Milwaukee Sentinel*, October 21, 1889, 8.

“I can’t say about that.”⁴⁴ When a reporter asked Al Spalding whether he would try court injunctions to make sure players like Van Haltren suited up for the White Stockings in 1890, he backtracked a bit from earlier statements, claiming, “We may decide to let such of our reserved players as may refuse to sign play their string out as they see fit. I don’t say we will enjoin them, and I don’t say we will not. At any rate, such action would not be taken before next spring.”⁴⁵

In Pittsburgh, meanwhile, team president William Nimick could not muster even that many commitments to play on his nine in 1890. When Nimick met outfielder Billy Sunday and asked if he was ready to sign, Sunday answered, “if the Brotherhood matter is settled satisfactorily I will; otherwise I will stick by the Brotherhood.” His teammates agreed, stating their intent to abstain from signing anything until the League met with the Brotherhood in November. One unnamed Brother told the press, “If our requests are complied with then I suppose that will end the matter. If not, why, then I guess the League will be shown that the Brotherhood means business.”⁴⁶ Nimick responded by stating, “Well, the brotherhood has shown its teeth at last. I was expecting it or something similar all along. Sunday was the only man I asked to sign. The rest of them will have to come to me when they are ready to do business.”⁴⁷

No other National League presidents reported signing their reserved men, either, although the Indianapolis club did sign a new face, pitcher Ed Eiteljorge, who had turned only eighteen years old a few days prior, while Boston signed Bobby Lowe. In the Quaker City, when the fateful day passed and management was bereft of signed contracts, Philadelphia management finally began taking precautions, signing a trio of new men, catcher Jake Virtue, outfielder Eddie

⁴⁴ “Spalding Says They Will Sign” NA, *The Sporting News*, October 26, 1889, 3.

⁴⁵ “Does He Want To Sell” NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, October 27, 1889, 3.

⁴⁶ “Baseball Matters” NA, *New York Times*, October 22, 1889, 3.

⁴⁷ “The Pittsburg Recalcitrants” Reddy, *The Sporting News*, October 26, 1889, 3.

Burke, and pitcher Tom Vickery, although Virtue ended up in Cleveland by the time the 1890 season began.⁴⁸

The League's leading men soon began to suspect that their worse fears might come true. While the Brotherhood's leaders continued to repeat their intentions to meet with the League in November, a few members of the organization struggled to keep the cat in the bag. One Chicago Brother, unable to hold back, stated, "The brotherhood will not make any demands of the league at the league meeting . . . because one week from tomorrow . . . the brotherhood will hold its meeting at the same hotel, uncover its work, declare its intentions and begin business on its own account. These men will be astonished at the magnitude of the scheme." The unnamed source also confirmed another rumor that had circulated over the last week, saying that while Anson was unlikely to join the Brotherhood's league, "It is true that one of the best men in the association is to take Anson's place on first base for the Chicago team next season."⁴⁹ Nor was it too hard to guess who that man might be. The most highly regarded captain and first baseman in the American Association was Charlie Comiskey of St. Louis. The players in St. Louis disliked their owner, Von der Ahe, intensely. Comiskey was from Chicago as well.

In addition to claims that the Brotherhood might not even open negotiations after all, another unnamed member of the BPBP declared they might up their demands, almost as if they wanted to make sure the League would never agree to a deal. Although the players agreed that the reserve rule should remain, now this source said the Brotherhood wanted the right of reserve

⁴⁸ "Quaker City Gossip" H.W.L., *The Sporting News*, October 26, 1889, 1; "Just One Contract for Indianapolis" NA, *The Sporting News*, October 26, 1889, 3; "Soden Scores Von Der Ahe" NA, *The Chicago Daily Inter Ocean*, October 27, 1889, 2. Eiteljorge was an interesting signing, certainly. Because Indianapolis did not retain its National League franchise for the 1890 season, he ended up in Chicago with Anson's White Stockings, who renamed themselves the Colts that year. He pitched but two innings for Chicago, got a trial with Washington the next season, and was out of baseball before even turning twenty years old.

⁴⁹ "No Compromise" NA, *Boston Daily Advertiser*, October 29, 1889, 5.

to last four years only, at which point the player could either leave his club or negotiate to stay, and at that point the club might reserve him up to four more years. Furthermore, having completed the initial four year period, any player released by his team in mid-season would still get the pay called for in the rest of the contract, instead of only what he had earned up to that point.⁵⁰

On November 1, just a few days before the Brotherhood's meeting, Tim Keefe announced its program to the baseball world. One writer summed up the program by stating, "The League magnates will not be consulted. In other words, the players intend to go it alone."⁵¹ Keefe made an official statement to that effect just a couple days later, remarking, "Yes, the players are through with the present owners of the League clubs, and will have no further intercourse with them. We have gone too far to retreat now, so we will carry, or at least try to carry, our plans through."⁵² Papers also announced the distribution of players for the teams of the new league, and while some individual assignments eventually proved wrong due to the occasional defection from the ranks and because many American Association players eventually joined the revolt, for the most part the lists were on the mark.⁵³

There was a bit more to the plan, of course. The players needed to decide on a name. Their choice might not have been very original, but they decided to go with the Players National League. Brotherhood contracts stated that players would receive their 1889 salary for the next two seasons, plus a percentage of the profits as outline above. The distribution of players also attempted to equalize the playing strengths of the clubs as much as possible, so that all cities

⁵⁰ "This Seems Truthful" NA, *Pittsburgh Dispatch*, October 30, 1889, 6.

⁵¹ "The Brotherhood Plans" NA, *New York Times*, November 2, 1889, 6.

⁵² "Keefe's Latest" NA, *Pittsburgh Dispatch*, November 3, 1889, 6.

⁵³ For the original listings, see "Brotherhood Assignments" NA, *The Chicago Daily Inter Ocean*, November 1, 1889, 6.

might have a chance at a quality team that would draw spectators and make some money.⁵⁴

Another departure from the practices of either existing league was that the home and visiting teams would split gate receipts on a fifty-fifty basis, which replaced the previously reported plan to pool all receipts of the entire league and redistribute them. There was also talk of using a key feature of the Millennium Plan: the redistributing of the players after each season to make sure the strength of the teams remained equal from one year to the next.⁵⁵

One interesting choice was that the BPBP decided to locate a team in Brooklyn, because Brooklyn was an Association city. They reasoned that Brooklyn was big enough to support two teams, based on the Bridegrooms drawing more than 350,000 fans in 1889, but in so doing, they made a powerful enemy in Brooklyn owner Charles Byrne. Still, they decided it was worth the risk, rather than locating their last franchise in either Washington DC or Indianapolis. Neither of those cities had fared well as National League cities even without competition, and so if the Brotherhood tried to compete with the League in those locations, those teams were almost certain to fail financially.⁵⁶

Even if informed baseball observers knew it would be anti-climatic, the BPBP held its grand conference in New York on November 4 and 5 as scheduled. Imitating the authors of the Declaration of Independence, the Brotherhood issued a statement because, “in taking this step we feel that we owe it to the public and to ourselves to explain briefly some of the reasons by which we have been moved.” Some observers also noted that the second day of the meeting, November

⁵⁴ “The Brotherhood Plans” NA, *New York Times*, November 2, 1889, 6.

⁵⁵ “The Sporting World” NA, *Galveston Daily News*, November 2, 1889, 6.

⁵⁶ “No Use For The League” NA, *The Chicago Daily Inter Ocean*, November 2, 1889, 2.

5, was Guy Fawkes Day, the anniversary of the 1605 plot by English rebels to blow up the House of Lords.⁵⁷ Whether the Brotherhood planned the dates to coincide or not, its statement read:

There was a time when the league stood for integrity and fair dealing; today it stands for dollars and cents. Once it looked to the elevation of the game and an honest exhibition of the sport; today its eyes are upon the turnstile. Men have come into the business from no other motive than to exploit it for every dollar in sight. Measures originally intended for the good of the game have been perverted to instruments for wrong; the reserve rule and the provisions of the national agreement gave the managers unlimited power, and they have not hesitated to use this in the most arbitrary and incendiary way, and players have been bought, sold, and exchanged as though they were sheep instead of American citizens! 'Reservations' became with them another name for property of right in the player, and by a combination among themselves, stronger than the strongest trust, they were able to enforce the most arbitrary measures, and the player had either to submit or get out of the profession in which he had spent years in attaining proficiency.

Even the disbandment and retirement of a club did not force the players from the octopus clutch, for they were then peddled around to the highest bidder. That the player sometimes profited by the sale has nothing to do with the case, but only proves the injustice of his previous restraint. Two years ago we met the league and attempted to remedy some of these evils, but through what has been politely called 'league diplomacy' we completely failed. Unwilling longer to submit to such treatment we made a strong effort last spring to reach an understanding with the league.

To our application for a hearing they replied that the matter was not of sufficient importance to warrant a meeting, and suggested that it be put off until fall. Our committee replied that the players felt that the league had broken faith with them; that while the results might be of little importance to the managers they were of importance to the players; that if the league would not concede what was fair we would adopt other means to protect ourselves; that if postponed until fall we would be separated and at the mercy of the league, and that as the only course left us required time and labor to develop, we must therefore insist upon an immediate conference. Then, upon the final refusal to meet us, we began organizing for ourselves and are now in shape to go ahead next year under new management and new auspices.

We believe that it is possible to conduct our national game upon lines which will not infringe upon individual and natural rights. We ask to be judged solely by our work, and, believing that the game can be played more fairly and its business conducted more intelligently under a plan which excludes everything arbitrary and un-American, we look forward with confidence to the support of the public and the future of the national game.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Stevens, *Baseball's Radical for All Seasons*, 105.

⁵⁸ "Ball-Players' Meeting" NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, November 5, 1889, 6. Baseball historian John Thorn believes that the Nationalist Club in Boston might have inspired the

“Orator” Jim O’Rourke, true to his nickname, expressed these feelings with a somewhat more rhetorical flourish. Speaking in his home town of Bridgeport, Connecticut, he told his audience, “We have endeavored to build on a foundation even more substantial than Earth itself. Our ascension from thralldom is positive, uncoupled from all doubts, notwithstanding the warning of the master magnates and the snapping of their whip, which has no more terror for the players as they stand today shorn of all physical strength to use them.”⁵⁹

After this, there is little more to say. The Brotherhood cleared up a few more details, such as the exact plan for distributing profits, the language of the Brotherhood contract that all league members signed, and things of that nature. They also decided to change course in regards to their relationship with the American Association and make a play for some of the elite members of that body, as all the press reports concerning the attitude of the Association indicated it would cooperate with the League against the players.⁶⁰ Eventually, twenty-six American Association players joined the Brotherhood’s league.

With this proclamation, the story shifts from the causes of the Brotherhood War to the history of the war itself. That is a tale for others to tell. It has its heroes and villains; it is a tale of selfishness, greed, lying, cheating, bribery, backstabbing, money, and power, but also heroism, virtue, self-sacrifice, loyalty, and brotherhood. There is exciting action on the field, coupled with byzantine maneuverings off it. We know that, ultimately, the players lost their

wording of the document. The Nationalist Club was an organization recently formed by utopians such as Edward Bellamy, whose utopian novel *Looking Backward* first appeared in 1888, in an effort to change a society based on competition and individualism. Thorn, *Baseball in the Garden of Eden*, 238.

⁵⁹ Lowenfish, *The Imperfect Diamond*, 41.

⁶⁰ “Ball-Players’ Meeting” NA, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, November 5, 1889, 6.

battle with the National League. Now, we also know why they felt compelled to fight that battle in the first place.

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Appendix A

Navigating Baseball's Statistical Seas

Statistics, for better or worse, or perhaps for better and worse, greatly influence how players, fans, and team executives see the game of baseball. We might even say that for some fans, statistics dominate their interpretation of the game. Witness, for example, the explosion of fantasy baseball games, relying solely on statistics, over the past twenty-five years. Also consider the number of publications offering statistical analysis of all parts of baseball now available yearly. Everything from managerial performance to analysis of when to bunt to what the probability of achieving a hit might be on any given ball-strike count. Other researchers chart the number of runs a team can expect to score in a given inning when there is one out and baserunners on first and second base. The tables, charts, and numbers seem endless.

One of the godfathers of this statistical revolution is Bill James, who set off a trend when he began publishing his baseball abstracts yearly in the 1980s. There are many others, too numerous to name, who also contributed to the statistical revolution of the past generation. In the 2010s, however, the vast array of statistics might seem like a tidal wave to an average reader, ready to swamp their comprehension and drown them in an onrushing wall of WAR, VORP, wOBA, OPS, BABIP, and the like. For the sake of clarity, this appendix describes the main

statistical measures used in the following pages so the reader has an idea what all the numbers mean.

* * * * *

Prior to the 1990s, most baseball observers relied on a set of statistics, the old school statistics if you will, to measure the effectiveness of a player. For batters, that set included batting average, home runs, and runs batted in. To this day, a batter that leads the league in all three of these wins the “Triple Crown.” Other categories that observers valued included doubles, triples, run scored, and stolen bases. For pitchers, the key statistics were wins (for starting pitchers) and earned run average. Secondary pitching statistics included things such as innings pitched, walks allowed, and strikeouts. By the 1970s and 1980s, there was a new statistic to measure the contribution of relief pitchers, saves. Some might argue for including a few other stats, but baseball fans, players, sportswriters, and executives viewed all of these as important indicators of player quality.

Beginning in the 1980s, and accelerating in the 1990s, statistical analysis grew more complex. Some observers noted, for instance, that the number of times a hitter walked was important, because a walk meant a time on base, which meant an opportunity to score a run. Others noticed that the handedness of batters and pitchers was significant, and changed strategy accordingly. Baseball people had known for a long time that combinations with the same handedness (left-handed pitcher versus left-handed batter, right-handed pitcher versus right-handed batter) typically favored the pitcher and combinations of opposite handedness generally favored the batter. As far back as 1886, we have the statement, “It is said that Rochester will sell

Parsons, there not being enough left-hand batters in that League to make a left-handed pitcher desirable. He is in fine condition and pitching good ball.”¹

For decades, managers used this knowledge when filling out their lineup cards to start the game. One of the most famous examples was the 1929 World Series between the Philadelphia Athletics and the Chicago Cubs. Philadelphia manager Connie Mack banished all his left-handed pitchers, even the peerless Lefty Grove, to the bullpen, out of respect for a Cubs lineup overflowing with dangerous right-handed batters. It worked, as the Athletics won the series in five games, with left-handed pitchers Grove and Rube Walberg pitching just 12 2/3 innings combined. Starting in the late 1980s, however, strategic pioneers such as Oakland Athletics manager Tony LaRussa started using this knowledge in the middle of games, bringing in new pitchers in the middle of innings to try to gain the handedness advantage over the opposition. LaRussa’s Oakland teams were very successful in that era, and as a result, the trend caught on, and so statisticians began looking at how hitters fared against righties and lefties, and how pitchers performed versus right- and left-handed batters.

In the first half of the 2000s, a new concept revolutionized thinking about pitching in baseball. This was the realization that the ability of the pitcher only influenced three statistical outcomes. The pitcher influenced the number of home runs allowed, the number of walks allowed, and the number of strikeouts, and that was it. If the batter hit the ball, but the ball did not travel over the fence, the quality of the pitcher made *no difference at all*. Only the location of the struck ball and the ability of the defensive players mattered.² For baseball, this was somewhat akin to Darwin’s description of natural selection in biology. Baseball finally had an

¹ “Notes and Comments” NA, *The Sporting Life*, August 18, 1886, 5.

² There are a few exceptions to this basic statement, as later analysis showed that pitchers can exert some influence on a few other outcomes, but on the whole, the theory that once the ball is put into play the pitcher’s ability no longer matters is valid.

explanation for why some pitchers prevented hits better than others (batters who strike out cannot get a hit, so high-strikeout pitchers give up fewer hits), why the frequency of hits allowed by a pitcher could vary wildly from year to year (random chance of hit placement combined with the defensive skills of the fielders), and how to separate the pitcher's role in preventing runs from the fielders' role in preventing runs.

The second revolution in statistical thinking of that decade came in 2003 when author Michael Lewis published the book *Moneyball*. While not a statistician himself, Lewis spent time with members of the Oakland As front office, especially general manager Billy Beane and his staff, and described their mathematical approach to player evaluation. Lewis also detailed the systematic approach the Athletics used to evaluate the offensive and defensive contributions of players. The As relied heavily on non-traditional statistics, notably on-base percentage and slugging percentage, to build a roster that competed effectively (at least 87 wins every season between 1999 and 2006) against teams with vastly superior payrolls, reaching the playoffs in five of those seasons. The fact that Oakland accomplished so much with so few financial resources got baseball's attention, and their methods of player evaluation started to spread to at least some other franchises.

By the late 2000s, statistics continued evolving and becoming more descriptive. Statisticians realized, for instance, that a player might perform differently depending on the ballpark where they played their games. A player who hit twenty-five home runs in a smaller home ballpark with shorter fences might only hit twenty in a larger park. As a result, the statisticians created statistics adjusting a player's actual performance to what that performance would have been in a league-average ballpark. Ideas evolved rating the contribution to victory (or defeat) of every possible individual outcome that could happen in a game. For example, any

positive outcome (a single, double, successful stolen base, etc.) contributed a fraction of a run while any negative outcome (ground out, fly out, strikeout, time caught stealing, etc.) contributed a negative fraction of a run. The positive and negative fractions of a run that result from each play are the play's "expected run value."³ Using this measure, observers could add up everything a player did over the course of a season in order to see how much he contributed to the team that year. This allowed for an idea of what a player had accomplished, and soon people added the notion of comparing this performance to that of a replacement player.⁴ This resulted in statistics such as VORP (Value Over Replacement Player, a number that corresponds to how many more [or fewer] runs that player contributed than a replacement player would have) and WAR (Wins Above Replacement, a number that corresponds to how many more [or fewer]

³ Here is an example of how expected run values work. You begin with the fact that each year in baseball, all teams as a whole average a certain number of runs per game. Because some games go extra innings and not all teams play the same number of innings in a season, however, a more precise measure is to find how many runs the average team scores in an inning. For example, say that league-wide, teams score 0.55 runs per inning over the course of the season. That means that when each inning starts, no outs and no one on base, the inning has an expected run value of 0.55 runs. Pretend the first batter hits a double and reaches second base. For the situation of no outs and a baserunner on second base, the new expected run value for the inning is 1.1 runs. That means the double had a value of 0.55 runs. (1.1 for the new situation minus 0.55 for the old situation.) If, however, the first batter had struck out instead of hitting a double, the new expected run value for that inning, with one out and no one on base, would be 0.3 runs. That means that when the first batter of an inning makes an out, he costs his team about 0.25 runs. (0.55 runs for the old situation minus 0.3 runs for the new situation.) These numbers change from season to season, depending on the level of offensive production of the season under consideration. The numbers in this example come from Michael Lewis, *Moneyball*, (New York: WW Norton, 2003), 134.

⁴ A replacement player is one the team could acquire at little or no cost, by promoting the player from the minor leagues, trading a player of small value to another team to acquire the player, signing someone as a free agent during the season that no other team wanted, etc. Stat gurus consider comparing a player to a replacement player a better measure than comparing a player to an average major league player because average players are not freely available, and a team would have to part with something of value in order to gain an average player. Depending on which method of calculation you use, a team consisting solely of replacement players will win somewhere between twenty-nine and thirty-two percent of the time.

games the team won with a player compared to what they would have done with a replacement player).

Finally, taking the concept of expected run value even further, statisticians added the idea that not all runs are equivalent in terms of the chances of winning a game. The idea is that if a player hits a three-run homerun in the eighth inning of a game his team already leads 12-4, he has not improved the team's chance of winning all that much, because regardless of whether the score is 12-4 or 15-4, teams almost always win when they hold that large a lead late in the game. If, on the other hand, the score was 4-4 when the player hit the homerun, that is a valuable homerun indeed, because the chance of winning with a 7-4 lead late in the game is much higher than the chance of winning when tied late in the game. The same holds true for other events. If a player strikes out as the first batter in the game, the team's chance of winning declines slightly, but they still have a nearly fifty-fifty chance to win the game, because they still have twenty-six more outs to score runs. However, if the same player strikes out with baserunners at second and third base in the eighth inning of a game his team trails 3-2, it is a very costly out. Not only would any hit score at least one run and tie the game, the team does not have very many more chances to catch up, so this strikeout costs the team a great deal in terms of its percentage chance of winning the game. This concept, of using the leverage of a situation to determine how helpful or harmful an outcome is for the team's chances of winning, is similar to how a statistic like WAR uses run expectancies. WAR produces a number of expected wins by adding up all the run expectancies from the individual outcomes a player took part in, while leverage does the same by summing the effect on the percentage chance of winning of all individual outcomes.

* * * * *

Here is a list of the statistics commonly used in this dissertation, along with their abbreviations and explanations of what they are and how to calculate them, if required.

Batting Statistics

Games (G) – The number of games a player participated in.

At Bats (AB) – The number of times a player goes to bat, minus walks, times hit by pitch, and sacrifices.

Runs (R) – The number of times a player scores by crossing home plate.

Hits (H) – The number of times a player strikes the ball and the defense fails to put them out without committing an error.

Doubles (2B) – Hits where the player reaches second base.

Triples (3B) – Hits where the player reaches third base.

Home Runs (HR) – Hits where the player circles all four bases at once.

Runs Batted In (RBI) – The number of runs scored due to actions by the player at bat. One exception is that batters do not get credit for RBI if the batter strikes the ball and the defense commits an error(s).

Stolen Base (SB) – When a baserunner advances a base in the middle of an at bat without the batter putting the ball in play.

Caught Stealing (CS) – When the defense puts out a baserunner trying to advance a base without the batter putting the ball in play.

Walk or Base on Balls (BB) – When the pitcher throws too many errant pitches (balls) before the batter can put the ball in play, the batter gets a free trip to first base. For decades, the number

of errant pitches required for a walk has been four, but in some of the years of the 1880s, the pitcher could pitch as many as six or seven balls (depending on the season in question) before the hitter received a base on balls. In 1889, the major league standard became four balls.

Strikeout (SO or K) – When the batter fails to hit the ball within three accurate pitches (strikes) by the pitcher, the batter is out. The rules did not count a foul ball as a strike until 1901 in the National League and 1903 in the American League.

Batting Average (BA or AVG) – Percentage of the time the batter achieved a hit. Calculated by dividing hits by at bats.

On-base Percentage (OBP) – Percentage of the time the batter reaches base in some manner excepting when the defense commits an error. Calculated by adding hits, walks, and times hit by the pitch, and dividing this sum by the sum of the at bats, hits, walks, and times hit by the pitch.

Slugging Percentage (SLG) – The percentage of total bases the batter achieves per time at bat. Calculated by dividing total bases by at bats. The batter gets one total base for a single, two for a double, three for a triple, and four for a home run.

Often, a batter's batting average, on-base percentage, and slugging percentage will be listed together to give the reader an idea of how the batter performed in each regard, with the numbers separated by slashes. To take St. Louis outfielder Curt Welch as an example, in 1890 he batted .248, was on base .372, and slugged .332. His batting line for 1890 is .248/.372/.332.

On-base Plus Slugging (OPS) – On-base percentage added to slugging percentage.

On-base Plus Slugging Plus (OPS+) – The batter's OPS compared to the league average for that season. A score of 100 is exactly average. Scores greater than 100 are above average,

scores below 100 are below average. A score of 200 would mean the player was double the league average for that season.⁵

Wins Above Replacement (WAR) – The number of wins a player contributed above what a low cost or freely available player would have contributed. A negative WAR means the player cost his team potential victories. Generally speaking, a WAR above 2.0 indicates a respectable starter at the major league level, a WAR above 5.0 an all-star quality season, and a WAR in the 8.0 neighborhood or greater indicates a most valuable player quality season.⁶

Pitching Statistics

Wins (W) – The number of times the pitcher was the winning pitcher. To get a win, the pitcher's team must win the game, his team must be ahead when the pitcher leaves the game, his team must not lose the lead after he leaves the game, and the pitcher, if he started the game, must pitch at least five innings.

Losses (L) – The number of times the pitcher was the losing pitcher. To get a loss, the pitcher's team must lose, his team must trail when the pitcher leaves the game, and his team cannot tie or take the lead later in the game after the pitcher leaves.

⁵ This statistic is the one I will use most commonly in this dissertation to indicate the ability of offensive players. Why? In the late 1990s, Harvard graduate and future Oakland As executive Paul DePodesta used mathematical models and determined that there were two statistics, and two only, that correlated to winning games far more closely than any others. Those two were on-base percentage and slugging percentage. Of the two, DePodesta concluded that on-base percentage was the more important, but that these two were much more important than any others. Using OPS+ allows us to compare what OPS marks indicate about performance from one season to the next by showing how far above or below average a player was for that season. For more, see chapter six of Michael Lewis, *Moneyball*.

⁶ For the statistically curious reader, baseballreference.com explains how to calculate WAR on its website, available at http://www.baseball-reference.com/about/war_explained.shtml, accessed May 28, 2014.

It is possible that a pitcher is not the winning pitcher or losing pitcher. If, for instance, his team is ahead, he leaves the game, but subsequent pitchers lose the lead, the starting pitcher cannot get the win or the loss for that game. The relief pitcher who lost the lead would take the loss for that game unless the team rallied to tie or lead the game later in the action.

Earned Run Average (ERA) – The number of earned runs the pitcher allows per nine innings pitched. Calculated by dividing earned runs allowed by innings pitched, then multiplying by nine. An earned run is a run that scores without defensive errors helping the run to score.

Earned Run Average Plus (ERA+) – The pitcher's ERA compared to the league average for that season. A score of 100 is exactly average. Scores greater than 100 are above average, scores below 100 are below average.

Games (G) – The number of times a pitcher appears in a game.

Complete Games (CG) – The number of games a pitcher both starts and finishes without requiring relief.

Innings Pitched (IP) – The number of innings a pitcher completed.

Walks and Hits Per Inning Pitched (WHIP) – The number of baserunners a pitcher allows per inning pitched. Calculated by adding hits allowed to walks allowed and dividing that sum by the number of innings pitched.

Wins Above Replacement (WAR) – The number of wins a player contributed above what a low cost or freely available player would have contributed. A negative WAR means the player cost his team potential victories. Generally speaking, a WAR above 2.0 indicates a respectable starter at the major league level, a WAR above 5.0 an all-star quality season, and a WAR in the 8.0 neighborhood or greater indicates a most valuable player quality season.

Pitchers also have several of the same categories that batters do, such as hits allowed, home runs allowed, walks, strikeouts, and so forth. Often, to give an idea of how frequently a pitcher accomplished one of the above statistics, statisticians convert them into a number per nine innings pitched. For instance, in 1890 Bob Caruthers pitched exactly 300 innings, allowing 9 home runs, 87 walks, and getting 64 strikeouts. This translates to (and reads as) 0.3 HR/9, 2.6 BB/9, and 1.9 SO/9. This conversion allows for easy qualitative comparisons with other pitchers who compiled different totals of innings pitched.

* * * * *

Once the reader gets used to some of these new statistics that might not be familiar at first, their superiority to the traditional statistics should be clear. Their greatest advantage is that many of them work to compare player performance across eras. The game of the 2010s is vastly different from the game of the 1880s described in this dissertation. The fences are far closer today. The equipment is higher in quality. Players have better gloves now. They lift weights, train year round, and have better nutrition. If a player is hurt, there are MRI scans that help diagnose the nature of the injury, and advanced methods of treatment, rather than quack medicines. (Did you know that Actina cures blindness, hearing loss, paralysis, and more?) Electricity was a favorite treatment for a sore arm in the late 1880s. Detroit Wolverine left-hander Charles “Lady” Baldwin actually carried an electric battery around so he could apply some juice to his arm after every game.⁷ The rules of the late 1880s had only recently allowed

⁷ “The Southern Trip Over” MAT, *The Sporting Life*, April 20, 1887, 5.

pitchers to throw the ball fully overhand, so pitches such as the forkball and other exotic offerings did not even exist. Using a statistic like WAR, however, we can see that William van Winkle “Chicken” Wolf’s 1890 season (WAR of 5.2, a very nice season) was about as good as Buster Posey’s 2013 season (WAR of 5.5) even though Wolf had a .363 batting average while Posey hit .294. (Incidentally, Wolf got his nickname because he was so fond of chicken, eating it every day but eating no other meats.⁸)

A statistic like WAR or VORP also takes into account that some eras feature more offense, others less. For example, in 1894, Baltimore second baseman Heinie Reitz posted a .303 batting average, which by 2013 standards is very solid. In 1894, however, Reitz placed eighth in batting—on his own team. Every other regular player out hit him, and by a large margin—the next lowest batting average belonged to shortstop Hughie Jennings at .335. On the other hand, had Reitz posted the same batting average in the American League in 1968, a very strong year for pitchers, he would have had the top batting average in the entire league.

This is where statistics like OPS+ and ERA+ are useful, as well. These statistics with a plus sign compare the player’s performance to the league average in his league for that season after adjusting for ballpark. This last adjustment, for ballpark, makes a much larger difference in some cases than one would expect, and the combination of ballpark and the offensive environment of a particular year can influence statistics drastically. Just to give two examples, Hank Aaron hit 755 home runs in his career. Had he played his entire career in the environment and ballpark of the 2000 Colorado Rockies, he would have hit 1,030 home runs. Had he played his entire career as a 1968 Los Angeles Dodger, he would have just 653 home runs. For pitchers, Pedro Martinez posted a career ERA of 2.93 pitching in an offense-heavy era. However, if he

⁸ “From The Falls City” XX, *The Sporting Life*, September 7, 1887, 4.

had been a 1968 Dodger his entire career, that would drop his ERA to 1.75, which would be the lowest in baseball history. Had he pitched his whole baseball life for the 2000 Rockies, however, his ERA would have been 3.98, which is rather average.⁹ Comparing stats to the league average for a particular year, therefore, is a very valuable tool to help us understand how a player performed compared to others who played in the same environment that he did. To return to the example of Heinie Reitz given above, despite the fact his batting average of .303 would be a very productive total in most seasons, in 1894 his OPS+ was 106, or just a little better than an average player.

These are some very good reasons to use some of the newer statistics. Another is that the traditional statistics used prior to the 1990s were, for the most part, statistics of accumulation rather than quality. Therefore, players with many opportunities to acquire a particular stat would probably acquire more of that stat than players with fewer opportunities. In other words, one of the problems with a statistic like RBI is that it is dependent. Someone with quality teammates that reach base often will have more chances to drive in runs than a player with lousy offensive teammates who reach base sporadically.

A classic example of why this is important comes from the career of Joe Carter. Carter was an outfielder who played from 1983 to 1998. In those sixteen years, he amassed 396 home runs and 1,445 runs batted in, totals that rank fifty-fifth and sixty-first, respectively, in baseball history.¹⁰ Very impressive, by traditional standards. Yet, because of a mediocre career batting average of .259, a reluctance to walk (.306 lifetime on-base percentage), and some defensive deficiencies in the field, Carter accumulated a career WAR of just 19.3, meaning that in an

⁹ These projections are from http://www.baseball-reference.com/about/equiv_stats.shtml, accessed April 4, 2015.

¹⁰ As of May 24, 2014.

average season over the course of his career, he was only worth about 1.2 wins (the equivalent of about twelve runs) more than someone his team could have had for next to nothing. He managed to drive in all those runs because he always hit in the middle of his team's lineup, giving him many opportunities to drive in runs over the course of his career. Why did teams allow this respectable, but not great, player to bat in such important spots in their lineup? Partly it was because his team did not always have better options, the 1980s Cleveland Indians teams being rather weak, and partly it was because, by traditional standards, Carter was a productive player, with a career 162-game average of 29 home runs and 107 RBI. Some baseball observers were so taken with Carter's production of traditional statistics that in 1990, when he posted an OPS+ of 85, clearly below an average major league player, he still finished seventeenth in the voting for the Most Valuable Player Award in the National League, simply because he hit 24 home runs and had 115 runs batted in.

Compare this to the career of Dale Murphy, an outfielder roughly contemporary to Carter who played between 1976 and 1993. Carter had 9,154 at-bats, Murphy 9,041. Carter had 2,184 hits, Murphy 2,111. Home runs were 396 for Carter and 398 for Murphy, while Carter had a .259 career batting average to Murphy's .265. Carter posted a career slugging percentage of .464, while Murphy slugged .469 for his career. These two players seem extraordinarily similar, yet Murphy's career WAR of 46.2 is more than double that of Joe Carter. What accounts for this large difference? Partly it was Murphy's superior defensive ability, as his strong throwing arm in right field was one of baseball's best, but the primary reason was that Murphy walked 986 times in his career compared to Carter's 527. By earning nearly twice as many free times on base as Carter, Murphy greatly outdistanced Carter in career on-base percentage, .346 to .306, and all those extra times on base greatly enhanced his teams' chances of winning over the years.

The career OPS+ of both players also reflect this difference, Murphy with a quite respectable 121 career score, Carter with a modestly above average 105 mark.

The older statistics often misled the observer in other ways. Let us consider some examples from pitchers this time. As mentioned earlier, the two standard measures for starting pitchers were, traditionally, wins and earned run average. Using wins, or won-loss record, as a measure of performance presented many problems especially. One of the major flaws in this statistic is that, like RBI, it is not independent. Whether the pitcher wins or loses a game depends on many things besides the quality of the pitcher. A team with a strong offense will score more runs than a team with a poor offense, allowing the team, and thus the pitcher, to win more frequently. Conversely, a team with a poor defense will allow more runs to score than a team with a strong defense, hurting the pitcher's chance of winning. A team with weak relief pitchers is more likely to lose a game they once led, while a team with strong relief pitching will be more likely to hold a lead, and thus allow the pitcher to win more frequently.

As an example, consider the 1988 and 1989 seasons of Los Angeles Dodgers pitcher Orel Hershiser. Statistically, there is little difference between Hershiser's performances in these two campaigns. In 1988, he posted a 149 ERA+ and a WAR of 7.2, while in 1989 those numbers read 149 and 7.0. His won-lost record, however, was 23 wins versus 8 losses in 1988, but just 15 wins against 15 losses the following year. The difference was, of course, that his teammates gave him more help in 1988 than they did in 1989, because his actual pitching performance barely changed at all. As a reflection of how bound to traditional statistics baseball observers were in the late 1980s, however, his 1988 season earned him the Cy Young Award, given to the top pitcher in each league, while he finished fourth in the voting for that award in 1989. This despite the fact that he led the National League in WAR for pitchers in both seasons.

Earned run average is a superior statistic for measuring performance compared to wins, although it, too, has some drawbacks. ERA is less dependent on teammates than wins, but it still suffers from the fact that it includes things outside of the pitcher's control. For instance, a team with a porous defense will allow more runs than a team with a stingy defense, and the pitcher's ERA will inflate or deflate accordingly. In addition, the home ballpark where the pitcher performs is important to ERA. A small ballpark where homeruns are frequent will hurt a pitcher's ERA, while the same pitcher would benefit from a home ballpark where homeruns are relatively difficult to come by. Another drawback of ERA is that it does not account for differences in era, and thus is not a dependable statistic to compare pitchers across the decades. To demonstrate, let us compare the pitching of two of the best pitchers in baseball's history, Walter Johnson and Lefty Grove. In 1909, a pitching-dominated year, Johnson posted an ERA of 2.22, which in most seasons would be a fine mark. In 1909, however, it was only about ten percent better than the overall American League ERA of 2.47, meaning that Johnson's work that year was solid but hardly spectacular. In 1931, in contrast, Lefty Grove posted an ERA of 2.06, slightly, but only slightly, better than what Johnson had done in 1909. However, offense dominated the game in 1931, with the overall American League ERA climbing to 4.38, meaning that Grove's work was so dominant, he allowed fewer than half the earned runs of an average pitcher that season (ERA+ of 217, the twentieth best ERA+ in history).

Finally, the observer may note that this section does not contain any discussion of defensive statistics. The traditional defensive statistics include errors, assists, putouts, and double plays, as well as passed balls for catchers. An error occurs when a fielder gets to a ball but muffs it in some fashion, and does not put anyone out on a play where someone should have been out, or allows baserunners to take extra bases due to mishandling the ball. A fielder gets an

assist if he makes the throw immediately prior to putting out the baserunner. On a ground ball to the shortstop where he throws out the runner at first base, the shortstop gets the assist. A putout, as the name implies, goes to the person who puts out a baserunner. In the above example, the first baseman gets the putout, because he had the ball when the runner was out. A double play occurs when the defense records two outs on the same play.

The reason these statistics hardly appear in this dissertation is that they tell us very little about how good a player was on defense, with the exception of fielding percentage (calculated by taking the total chances minus errors made and dividing that number by total chances. Total chances are the sum of assists plus putouts plus errors). This is because, like the other traditional stats, they are dependent on many other things. An infielder's totals for assists and putouts depend on what kind of pitchers his team employs. If the pitchers record many strikeouts, infielders will have fewer chances for assists and putouts because the ball is in play less often to begin with. If, however, the team's pitchers do not get many strikeouts, but pitch to contact instead, the infielders will have many chances to make plays. It is also true that some pitchers tend to allow more fly balls, and others more ground balls, mainly due to pitch type and location. This also influences statistics like assists and putouts. As a result, for virtually all of baseball's history, traditional fielding stats gave observers very little solid data to work with. Just watching games and judging the quality of a player's defensive skills with your own eyes was about as good a rating system as anything else.

Only in the late 2000s have baseball observers refined defensive statistics to try to discover how many runs a player prevents on defense. Individual concepts such as zone rating, which uses the location and trajectory of a struck ball and rates how frequently a defensive player gets to a ball with any given location and trajectory, and how many runs the player

prevents thereby, show some promise. For teams as a whole, there is the statistic called defensive efficiency, which simply measures what percentage of balls put in play the defense turns into outs. In the coming decades, as teams increase their use of computer technology to refine measurements, the information teams have to work with will grow, and baseball observers should get a more detailed sense of the defensive abilities of individual players, and how much those abilities are worth. Clearly, however, no one kept track of such things in the 1880s. As a result, any commentary regarding defensive skill that appears in this dissertation comes from the remarks of contemporaries, an unfortunate but unavoidable situation.

This is not to say, however, that observers in the 1880s considered defense unimportant just because the statistics to measure it are crude by our standards. Indeed, in the 1880s fans and sportswriters paid a great deal of attention to defensive statistics, such as they were. Box scores that appeared in newspapers listed the assists, putouts, and errors of each player. When sporting papers published player statistics, they published defensive statistics as well as those for hitting and pitching. If a club acquired a new hitter, writers often informed fans of two statistics from his previous season or team: batting average and fielding percentage. Some players even brought down scorn upon themselves if the sporting press perceived that they were afraid to try for tough plays just because failure would lower their fielding statistics.

The reasons observers paid such attention to defense are not hard to understand. Errors were frequent in the 1880s, partly due to primitive equipment (many players still eschewed the use of a glove when the decade began, though most employed one by the end of the 1880s) and partly due to rough playing surfaces. One player, Jack Glasscock, earned the nickname “Pebble Jack” because he constantly tried to remove small stones from play, lessening the chance the ball would take a bad hop when hit to him. Therefore, players who excelled on defense were worth a

great deal to their team by cutting down the number of errors committed, and the baseball public recognized this fact.

Sportswriters often referred to a pitcher's performance as good or bad, but just as frequently mentioned whether his teammates had supported him well or not. Some did realize that teams with solid defenses did a great deal to prevent runs. New York Giants manager Jim Mutrie, while not a great field tactician or crack evaluator of talent, did demonstrate this knowledge regarding defense when describing Chicago first baseman Cap Anson's reputation as a field leader. Mutrie believed baseball observers overrated Anson because, "that Chicago infield is a remarkable one and those four men are a genuine stone-wall. . . . There is the success of the Chicago Club. Anson, Pfeffer, Williamson, and Burns win all the games for Chicago. . . . As long as he keeps that 'stone-wall' intact he can continue to sell \$10,000 pitchers, catchers, and outfielders as fast as there is a market for them."¹¹ It is clear, therefore, that baseball people knew that defense mattered in the 1880s; they just had no good statistical way, aside from fielding percentage, to quantify how much it mattered.

This is why I have chosen to use statistics that may be less familiar, but provide a better indication of player quality, alongside the more traditional statistics in this dissertation. The traditional statistics help explain why observers held some players in high (or low) regard at the time under discussion. The newer stats, however, help us to see whether these perceptions were accurate or not, and help illuminate what each player was really worth to his team. This is not, at heart, a statistical dissertation, but rather, a dissertation that occasionally uses statistics to offer a richer, more complete story of nineteenth century baseball. Or, as former infielder Toby Harrah

¹¹ "Mutrie On Anson" Jim Mutrie, *The Sporting Life*, July 4, 1888, 1.

reportedly said, “Baseball statistics are like a girl in a bikini. They show a lot, but not everything.”

Appendix B

Major League Baseball Standings, 1885-1890

Because there was quite a bit of franchise movement in the 1880s, both in and out of the major leagues and sometimes between the two leagues as well, I have included the year-by-year standings in major league baseball to help the reader keep straight which team was in what league at any given time. Generally, the narrative mentions which league each team is in as well, but I have added this appendix as a handy supplement.

1885 Season – American Association

<u>Team</u>	<u>Wins</u>	<u>Losses</u>	<u>Winning Percentage</u>	<u>Games Out of First</u>
St. Louis Browns	79	33	.705	--
Cincinnati Red Stockings	63	49	.562	16
Pittsburgh Alleghenys	56	55	.504	22.5
Philadelphia Athletics	55	57	.491	24
Brooklyn Grays	53	59	.473	26
Louisville Colonels	53	59	.473	26
New York Metropolitans	44	64	.407	33
Baltimore Orioles	41	68	.376	36.5

1885 Season – National League

<u>Team</u>	<u>Wins</u>	<u>Losses</u>	<u>Winning Percentage</u>	<u>Games Out of First</u>
Chicago White Stockings	87	25	.777	--
New York Giants	85	27	.759	2
Philadelphia Quakers	56	54	.509	30
Providence Grays	53	57	.482	33
Boston Beaneaters	46	66	.411	41
Detroit Wolverines	41	67	.380	44
Buffalo Bisons	38	74	.339	49
St. Louis Maroons	36	72	.333	49

1886 Season – American Association

<u>Team</u>	<u>Wins</u>	<u>Losses</u>	<u>Winning Percentage</u>	<u>Games Out of First</u>
St. Louis Browns	93	46	.669	--
Pittsburgh Alleghenys	80	57	.584	12
Brooklyn Grays	76	61	.555	20
Louisville Colonels	66	70	.485	25.5
Cincinnati Red Stockings	65	73	.471	27.5
Philadelphia Athletics	63	72	.467	28
New York Metropolitans	53	82	.393	38
Baltimore Orioles	48	83	.366	41

1886 Season – National League

<u>Team</u>	<u>Wins</u>	<u>Losses</u>	<u>Winning Percentage</u>	<u>Games Out of First</u>
Chicago White Stockings	90	34	.726	--
Detroit Wolverines	87	36	.707	2.5
New York Giants	75	44	.630	12.5
Philadelphia Quakers	71	43	.623	14
Boston Beaneaters	56	61	.479	30.5
St. Louis Maroons	43	79	.352	46
Kansas City Cowboys	30	91	.248	58.5
Washington Nationals	28	92	.233	60

1887 Season – American Association

<u>Team</u>	<u>Wins</u>	<u>Losses</u>	<u>Winning Percentage</u>	<u>Games Out of First</u>
St. Louis Browns	95	40	.704	--
Cincinnati Red Stockings	81	54	.600	14
Baltimore Orioles	77	58	.570	18
Louisville Colonels	76	60	.559	19.5
Philadelphia Athletics	64	69	.481	30
Brooklyn Grays	60	74	.448	34.5
New York Metropolitans	44	89	.331	50
Cleveland Blues	39	92	.298	54

1887 Season – National League

<u>Team</u>	<u>Wins</u>	<u>Losses</u>	<u>Winning Percentage</u>	<u>Games Out of First</u>
Detroit Wolverines	79	45	.637	--
Philadelphia Quakers	75	48	.610	3.5
Chicago White Stockings	71	50	.587	6.5
New York Giants	68	55	.553	10.5
Boston Beaneaters	61	60	.504	16.5
Pittsburgh Alleghenys	55	69	.444	24
Washington Nationals	46	76	.377	32
Indianapolis Hoosiers	37	89	.294	43

1888 Season – American Association

<u>Team</u>	<u>Wins</u>	<u>Losses</u>	<u>Winning Percentage</u>	<u>Games Out of First</u>
St. Louis Browns	92	43	.681	--
Brooklyn Bridegrooms	88	52	.629	6.5
Philadelphia Athletics	81	52	.609	10
Cincinnati Red Stockings	80	54	.597	11.5
Baltimore Orioles	57	80	.416	36
Cleveland Blues	50	82	.379	40.5
Louisville Colonels	48	87	.356	44
Kansas City Cowboys	43	89	.326	47.5

1888 Season – National League

<u>Team</u>	<u>Wins</u>	<u>Losses</u>	<u>Winning Percentage</u>	<u>Games Out of First</u>
New York Giants	84	47	.641	--
Chicago White Stockings	77	58	.570	9
Philadelphia Quakers	69	61	.531	14.5
Boston Beaneaters	70	64	.522	15.5
Detroit Wolverines	68	63	.519	16
Pittsburgh Alleghenys	66	68	.492	19.5
Indianapolis Hoosiers	50	85	.370	36
Washington Nationals	48	86	.358	37.5

1889 Season – American Association

<u>Team</u>	<u>Wins</u>	<u>Losses</u>	<u>Winning Percentage</u>	<u>Games Out of First</u>
Brooklyn Bridegrooms	93	44	.679	--
St. Louis Browns	90	45	.667	2
Philadelphia Athletics	75	58	.564	16
Cincinnati Red Stockings	76	63	.547	18
Baltimore Orioles	70	65	.518	22
Columbus Solons	60	78	.435	33.5
Kansas City Cowboys	55	82	.402	38
Louisville Colonels	27	111	.196	66.5

1889 Season – National League

<u>Team</u>	<u>Wins</u>	<u>Losses</u>	<u>Winning Percentage</u>	<u>Games Out of First</u>
New York Giants	83	43	.659	--
Boston Beaneaters	83	45	.648	1
Chicago White Stockings	67	65	.508	19
Philadelphia Quakers	65	64	.496	20.5
Pittsburgh Alleghenys	61	71	.462	25
Cleveland Spiders	61	72	.459	25.5
Indianapolis Hoosiers	59	75	.440	28
Washington Nationals	41	83	.331	41

1890 Season – American Association

<u>Team</u>	<u>Wins</u>	<u>Losses</u>	<u>Winning Percentage</u>	<u>Games Out of First</u>
Louisville Colonels	88	44	.667	--
Columbus Solons	79	55	.590	10
St. Louis Browns	77	58	.570	12.5
Toledo Maumees	68	64	.515	20
Rochester Broncos	63	63	.500	22
Baltimore Orioles	15	19	.441	24
Syracuse Stars	55	72	.433	30.5
Philadelphia Athletics	54	78	.409	34
Brooklyn Gladiators	26	72	.265	45

1890 Season – National League

<u>Team</u>	<u>Wins</u>	<u>Losses</u>	<u>Winning Percentage</u>	<u>Games Out of First</u>
Brooklyn Bridegrooms	86	43	.667	--
Chicago Colts	83	53	.610	6.5
Philadelphia Phillies	78	53	.595	9
Cincinnati Reds	77	55	.583	10.5
Boston Beaneaters	76	57	.571	12
New York Giants	63	68	.481	24
Cleveland Spiders	44	88	.333	43.5
Pittsburgh Alleghenys	23	113	.169	66.5

1890 Season – Players League

<u>Team</u>	<u>Wins</u>	<u>Losses</u>	<u>Winning Percentage</u>	<u>Games Out of First</u>
Boston Reds	81	48	.628	--
Brooklyn Ward's Wonders	76	56	.576	6.5
New York Giants	74	57	.565	8
Chicago Pirates	75	62	.547	10
Philadelphia Athletics	68	63	.519	14
Pittsburgh Burghers	60	68	.469	20.5
Cleveland Infants	55	75	.423	26.5
Buffalo Bisons	36	96	.273	46.5

Appendix C

Coda to the 1886 Salary Limit and the Contract Language Question

During the Brotherhood's negotiations with the League in the fall and winter of 1887, it pressed hard for modifications to the language of player contracts, and Ward and company left those negotiations feeling as though they had resolved this dispute amicably. In retrospect, however, they overlooked one important issue that caused a flare-up just prior to the opening of the 1888 championship season. Recall that clause eighteen of the new contract did two important things. It enlarged the number of men each team might reserve each season to fourteen, but also said that a reserved player must make at least the same salary as he had the prior season, unless he agreed to play for less. The club could not cut a player's salary unilaterally. In order for this second stipulation to work, of course, the contracting parties must write the player's actual salary into the contract.

This should have been inconsequential, but for one fact. The \$2,000 salary limit that both the National League and American Association agreed on prior to the 1886 season was still, technically, in effect. Everyone in baseball knew that the rule was a dead letter. Every single team, with the possible exception of Louisville, had broken the rule repeatedly, and some even bragged about how they had done it in order to muster up enthusiasm for their club by advertising the prices paid to acquire top players, as Boston had done with Mike Kelly or Brooklyn with Bob Caruthers. During the meetings between the two leagues in the winter of

1887-1888, there was a motion from New York Giants owner John Day to strike this rule from the National Agreement. Day knew as well as anyone that the rule was worthless because no one followed it, and so he favored jettisoning the salary limit rule altogether. Louisville, through its president, Zach Phelps, on the other hand, at least claimed that it had lived up to the letter of the salary law, and so favored keeping it. The other delegates did not provide Day with sufficient backing, and the rule remained a part of the National Agreement.

The matter rested right there until observers realized and pointed out that, because of the salary limit rule, technically National League president Nick Young could not approve any contract submitted to him for 1888 that called for paying a player more than \$2,000 for the upcoming season. At first, and for most of that winter, no one made a big deal over this issue. There was no reason to. This fact was true in 1887 as well, yet Young approved many contracts that paid players more than the limit, but in a roundabout way. The idea was that the team would, officially in the contract, pay players \$2,000 as the rule called for, and then pay the rest of whatever their agreement stipulated in some kind of personal services contract between the player and the team. Eventually, however, it began to dawn on people that National League owners could use a contract that paid just \$2,000 against the players the *next* season. Reading this requirement literally, they could offer players contracts for exactly \$2,000 each season thereafter without actually breaking their agreement.

This realization began a triangle of accusations between the Brotherhood, the League, and the Association. When the BPBP postulated that the owners of the National League had bargained in bad faith on this matter, the League's first response was to shift the blame to the American Association. League owners claimed that they had requested that the AA agree to strike the rule from the books during the winter of 1887-1888, but that the Association refused to

do so. The League also argued that it could not change this situation unilaterally because it was a part of the National Agreement between the two major leagues, and doing so required that both leagues agree to the change. The lack of approval from the Association tied its hands.

One theme that should be clear to the reader by now is that, when money was at stake in 1880s baseball, team owners would bend the rules almost any distance in order to pocket more greenbacks. Such concepts as honor and honesty were irrelevant, and owners felt bound to follow neither the letter nor the spirit of their own rules when it seemed against their interests to do so. This statement applies in this situation because, according to many observers, all these excuses offered by the National League were lies. As Cleveland's Frank Brunell relates,

it is an open secret that the League tricked the Brotherhood in the matter. . . . The League's recent assurance that it had made every effort to have the \$2,000 limit farce stricken from the National Agreement at the Cincinnati meeting is not true. It can, if necessary, be proven to Mr. Ward's satisfaction that one of the League committee lobbied against the amendment of the National Agreement in this way and that the refusal to so amend it was another piece of *courteous* and time-serving legislation, for which base ball is infamous. . . . There is no doubt about the \$2,000 limit rule being a farce, and no pretence that it is kept. . . . But from what I know of it, I never saw any stage of the game, as expounded by it, when morality stood in the way of cash. Witness the temperance clause in its constitution, openly and generally violated. . . . From the first, there was a desire on the part of the League to juggle with the Brotherhood and that the juggling process is now going on. And Mr. Phelps isn't the chief juggler. Mr. Ward can bet on that.¹

Further proof that team owners felt no duty to keep their word came the next week. Ed Andrews, a player who earned an outstanding defensive reputation for his work in center field with the Philadelphia Quakers, was involved in a long and acrimonious holdout with his rather parsimonious employer. Despairing of ever signing Andrews for 1888, the team agreed, in writing, to release him to the Boston Beaneaters in exchange for cash. Boston even sent Andrews a contract, but before it arrived, he unexpectedly accepted the last offer from the

¹ "Brunell's Budget" F.H. Brunell, *The Sporting Life*, March 28, 1888, 4.

Quakers and signed with them. Once they had Andrews' name on the dotted line, the Quakers then refused to honor their agreement with Boston.² Things looked different in the Quaker City, however, as they claimed that their agreement to release Andrews was conditional on the center fielder agreeing to terms with Boston. When the Beaneaters made Andrews an offer that insulted him, he agreed to return to Philadelphia, thus releasing his old club from its obligation.³

Once Ward and his Brothers received these reports of potential perfidy on the part of the National League, the BPBP decided to investigate matters. Again, in Brunell's view, "the Brotherhood believed that the League had acted in good faith. It now suspects that the League did not *honestly* try to secure the repeal of the obnoxious clause, and it suspects aright. Consequently there is a collection of facts going on, and a row will follow the discovery that the diplomacy of the League was so deftly used to nullify the concessions to the Brotherhood."⁴

At this point, the American Association also got involved in the dispute, not wanting the National League to sully its reputation with unjust accusations. Brunell was a correspondent for one of its members, Cleveland, and he wanted to get the truth into the light. He wrote a private letter to Ward, and Ward answered him, writing, "you have a reputation as a man who does not fear to tell the truth." He wished Brunell would put his information before the public in *The Sporting Life*, and the Forest City sportswriter decided to do so. Brunell wrote that, during baseball's Board of Arbitration meeting at Cincinnati that fall, it was John Rogers of Philadelphia, not Zack Phelps, who was the grand architect of the decision to keep the salary limit in the National Agreement. Although John Day of New York did attempt to strike out the salary limit, Rogers and Phelps convinced the rest of the board not to. Brunell concluded that his

² "Hub Happenings" Mugwump, *The Sporting Life*, April 4, 1888, 2.

³ "Philadelphia Pointers" NA, *The Sporting Life*, April 4, 1888, 4.

⁴ "A Coming Row" F.H. Brunell, *The Sporting Life*, April 25, 1888, 1.

facts “do not prove that the Association wanted to clean the \$2,000 clause off the books. It is not necessary to prove that. . . . But this does certainly prove that the League committee did not deal with the Brotherhood in the fullness of faith.”⁵

The Brotherhood decided to investigate further. During its annual meeting in New York in June, Ward and brothers Charlie Buffinton, Ed Morris, Fred Pfeffer, Jerry Denny, and George Shoch received a report from the Committee on Contracts stating that the National League had not lived up to its agreement to insert the official player salary into contracts.⁶ They also took action typical of brotherhoods in other industries, such as formalizing the process by which brothers in need could appeal to the organization for help, and they appointed a committee to revise their constitution in a more democratic direction, but the perceived faithlessness of the National League owners was their primary concern.⁷

After doing these things, the Brothers took no more action for the time being. In fact, the organization made barely a peep for the next three months. It was the calm before the storm. When the BPBP announced its next move, it started down a path that, in time, would shake baseball to its core.

⁵ “Salary Limit” F.H. Brunell, *The Sporting Life*, May 2, 1888, 1.

⁶ “The Baseball Brotherhood” NA, *New York Times*, June 11, 1888, 2.

⁷ “Brotherhood Meeting” Gotham, *The Sporting News*, June 16, 1888, 1.

Appendix D

The 1888 American Association Contract

If the reader is curious as to how this new contract differed from the older version analyzed in chapter two, here is the language of the agreement.

Contract Under The Rules Of The American Association Of Base Ball Clubs

This agreement made the _____ day of _____ eighteen hundred and _____ between _____ of the city of _____ and State of _____ a corporation created by, and existing under the laws of said State, being a member of the American Association of Base Ball Clubs, party of the first part, and _____ of _____ party of the second part.

Witnesseth, that the said party of the second part for and in consideration of the sum of _____ dollars, to be paid by the said party of the first party in equal semi-monthly installments, commencing April 15th _____ and for and in consideration of the mutual covenants hereinafter contained, has agreed to and with the party of the first part as follows, to wit:

First. That he, the said party of the second part, will play base ball and perform any and all other services that may be requested of him by the said party of the first part for and during the term or

period of _____ commencing on the _____ day of _____ A.D. 188__ and ending on the _____ day of _____ A.D. 188__ inclusive.

Second. That he will fully, faithfully and honestly perform and discharge all the duties required of him by the said party of the first part and comply with all the terms, conditions and provisions of the National Agreement, the Constitution and By-Laws of the American Association of Base Ball Clubs, and the constitution and by-laws of the said party of the first part, all of which are hereby incorporated in this agreement and made part hereof; and that he will also fully and faithfully comply with all the rules and regulations and all other directions and requirements of said party of the first part, and said party of the second part agrees that he will always keep himself in proper moral and physical condition.

Third. It is hereby mutually agreed by the parties hereto, that should the said party of the second part, at any time or times, or in any manner fail to comply with the covenants and agreements herein contained, or any of them, or with any of the rules and regulations of the said American Association of Base Ball Clubs, or with the rules and regulations of the party of the first part, which are now or may hereafter from time to time be made, or should the said party of the second part at any time or times be careless, indifferent or conduct himself in such a manner as to prejudice the interests of the said party of the first part, or should the said party of the second part become ill or otherwise unfit, from any cause whatever in the judgment of the said party of the first part, to fulfill in a satisfactory manner the duties which may be required of him by the said party of the first part, then the party of the first part shall have the right to discipline, suspend, fine or discharge the said party of the second part as to it the party of the first part shall

seem fit and proper; and the said party of the first part shall be the sole judge as to the sufficiency of the reason for such discipline, suspension or discharge, and in the case of fines imposed by said party of the first part, it is agreed by said party of the second part that he will pay the same amount for liquidated damages.

Fourth. It is further agreed that the said party of the second part shall at the beginning of his term of employment provide himself, at his own cost and expense, with a uniform to be selected and designated by said party of the first part consisting of the following articles, viz.: Two shirts, two pairs of pants, two belts, two pairs of stockings, two pairs of shoes (if needed) with spikes, two caps, one jacket, one necktie. All of which during the entire term of his employment he is to keep in thorough repair and replenish as required at his own expense; and he agrees to appear on the field at the beginning of each game in which he is to play in an entirely clean uniform, all cleaning of the same to be paid for by himself.

It is further agreed that while absent from _____ with the “nine” in other cities, and while traveling with the “nine” the sum of fifty cents per day shall be deducted from the player’s wages on account of his board. While in _____ he shall pay the whole of his own board and all other personal expenses.

Fifth. It is hereby expressly understood and agreed by the parties hereto that should the party of the second part be suspended at any time for any sufficient cause in the judgment of the party of the first part as aforesaid, then, and during the period of such said suspension, all money or salary as aforesaid shall cease to accrue to the said party of the second part under this agreement and such sums as would otherwise have accrued to said party of the second part shall be

deducted by the party of the first part from any sums due or to become due to said party of the second part; and further, should the said party of the second part be discharged at any time as aforesaid, then said party of the first part shall be released from all further payments of said money to the party of the second part and from all obligations and demands under this agreement, excepting, however, from the payment of such sums of money as shall have accrued before such dismissal; and further, that the said party of the first part shall deduct from any sums due or to become due as aforesaid, any fines payable by the party of the second part, by reason of the violation of any of the terms or conditions of this agreement.

Sixth. It is agreed by the parties hereto, that the National Agreement, the Constitution and By-Laws of the American Association of Base Ball Clubs and the constitution and by-laws of the party of the first part, as also the constitution and by-laws of all of the clubs, member of said American Association are made a part of this agreement and reference thereto is hereby had, and this agreement is made under and subject to the same.

In witness whereof the said party of the first part has hereto fixed its corporate name and seal, and the said party of the second part has put his hand and seal on the day and year first above written.

In presence of . . .¹

¹ “The New Form Of Contract” NA, *The Sporting Life*, April 13, 1887, 7.

Appendix E

The Terminology of the Game in the 1880s

All sports have their own terms and ways of referring to the action, and these terms often differ from the regular usage of the word. These words might also have changed meanings since their use on the baseball fields of the 1880s. Here is a short glossary of words used in this dissertation that fit this description.

Battery – The pitcher and catcher.

Box – In the 1880s, the pitcher delivered the ball from the pitcher’s box, rather than standing on the pitcher’s mound as they do today. We still have the phrase “knocked out of the box,” which refers to hitting a pitcher so hard that his team decides to remove the pitcher from the game, even though the pitcher’s box itself is no more.

Bulldoze – To argue angrily with, or otherwise try to intimidate, an umpire. Bulldozing was different than kicking, in that bulldozers did not just whine, but often threatened the umpire with his position. In the 1880s, the different leagues sometimes removed their umpires if powerful owners complained about the umpire’s work too vigorously.

Championship Season – Games in the championship season were what people today call regular season games. Observers called them championship season games because whoever won

the most won the league championship, and to differentiate them from the frequent exhibition games teams engaged in before, during, and after the championship season.

Chicagoed – A team was Chicagoed if it was shut out and did not score.

Coaching – When a player engaged in heckling, trash talking, or similar behaviors. Unlike today, coaching generally did not mean trying to improve a player's performance through instruction.

Condition – A general term describing a player's current state of physical well-being.

Crank – A fan or spectator. Some writers claim that the word crank was also spelled krank, but this was not the case between 1885 and 1889. I noticed the second version only twice in reading five years of sports newspapers. Perhaps the second term saw use in other parts of the nineteenth century, but it was not common usage in these years.

Grounds – The playing field.

Hippodroming – Dishonest playing, usually involving one team throwing a game to another to reward gamblers.

Jonah – A player or team that seemed to be back luck for another player or team was that team's Jonah.

Kicking – To argue or complain, especially about the umpire's decisions.

Nine – Used as a synonym for a team. Partly because there were nine players on the field at once, and partly because some spectators of the 1880s still remembered when teams had nine total players.

Phenomenal – As today, the word signified a player believed to have exceptional talent.

However, observers frequently applied it to up-and-coming young players surrounded by a great deal of hype. Writers sometimes changed the word from an adjective to a noun and used it as a

blanket term for such men, saying their team had signed a phenomenal. Baseball writers referred to one pitcher, John Smith, as a phenomenal so often that Phenomenal Smith became his name while he played ball.

Support – On the field, this meant that a team played quality defense to back up its pitcher. If a team played poor defense, people would write that the team did not support its pitcher.

Work – A reference to the quality of a player’s performance. Writers described a poor or uninspired performance by writing that a player had done indifferent work.