

Baseball: Made in New York

by Keith J. Reilly

“I see great things in baseball. It’s our game - the American game.” – Walt Whitman

Every June, Civil War Re-enactors from the 150th New York visit the seventh grade Social Studies classes at George Fischer Middle School in Carmel, New York and discuss the life of the common soldier. A re-enactor carrying a baseball bat in his knapsack along with his other equipment explains how baseball was played during the Civil War.

In 2008, I join the Gotham Club of New York, a Vintage baseball team that plays by the 1860 rules. With the playing experience and wealth of documentation available, I received permission from the Carmel Central School District to start the Living History Club. Seventh and eighth grade students research 19th century rules and recreated games as part of an afterschool club. In 2009, the Club receives a grant from FreeLife International, a health and wellness company that is devoted to helping children with its GojiKids Foundation. With the funds, the club is outfitted in period correct uniforms and equipment. The Club meets afterschool every two weeks to research and practice the game. The members of the Living History Club find relevant documents about baseball topics from the 19th century. The club members are tested on their knowledge and are taught to conduct themselves as proper 19th century “gentlemen.” The Club challenges the three seventh grade teams to participate in the Excelsior Cup Tournament. In June, the Gotham Club competes against representatives from the Mutual Club), the Union Club, and the Brooklyn Stars for the prized Excelsior Cup. The club runs the tournament, teaches the other teams the rules, and presents the game to observers. The tournament provides an accurate backdrop for the Civil War Stations that the 150th New York Re-enactors present to the classes.

19th century baseball can be incorporated into a Social Studies curriculum simply with a bat, a ball, and an 1860 rulebook. The early games of the 19th century were groups of young people who wanted to be exercise and enjoyed healthy competition. The clubs create a sense of comradely and acceptance. In a Social Studies curriculum, a recreation of the game provides a similar outlet for students. The 19th century values encourage young people to work together and cooperate. These values are equally important for young people to be successful in the 21st century.

The 19th century baseball has many connections to the Social Studies Curriculum. The game becomes organized with the Knickerbockers’ Club of New York City writing the rules down in the 1840s. During the Civil War, baseball was spread throughout the Union Army and played in Confederate prisons. Baseball games became fundraisers to help Union soldiers during the war and in 1864 the tradition of playing the national anthem at the start of the game began. After the Civil War, the game became very popular throughout America and also become segregated at the time of the Jim Crow laws.

New York State was the center of the baseball world in the mid-19th century. The Knickerbockers

Club and Alexander Cartwright set the rules in 1845. The National Association of Base Ball Players Convention was established in New York City in 1857. The Excelsior Club toured New York State as ambassadors of the game in 1860. New York soldiers spread the game around the country during the Civil War. Women formed the first team in Vassar College in Poughkeepsie, NY in 1876. The tradition and passion of baseball continued throughout the 20th century and is still strong in New York today. Most New Yorkers are aware of the baseball traditions since the time of Babe Ruth in the 1920s but it is equally important that the students and citizens understand the roots of this great New York baseball tradition.

Sports are very motivational to students in the classroom. By utilizing the game of baseball's rich New York State history, teachers make new connections to Social Studies. The link between baseball and American history inspire students to research documents from the past to gain a deeper understanding of American culture and history. For more information, visit the site at <http://www.livinghistoryed.org>.

In 19th century fashion, a challenge is issued to your school to begin a 19th century ball club and compete for the Excelsior State Championship! May the best team win! Hip! Hip! Huzzah!

Baseball: Made in New York (Intermediate-Level Document-Based Essay)

Historical Context: Baseball is the oldest organized sport in the United States. The game was first referred to as the “national pastime” in 1856. It has a rich and colorful history that has often reflected the development of the country. Since its creation, many of the rules, rituals, and customs of the game have remained the same. From the game’s origins in the 19th century, New York has been at the center of its development.

Task: Using the information from the documents and your knowledge of history, answer the questions that follow each document. Your answers to the questions will help you write an essay in which you discuss New York State’s contributions to the creation of the game of baseball. In your essay explain how the actions of New Yorkers created a game that emphasizes teamwork, patriotism, sportsmanship, and competition.

Document 1: Alexander J. Cartwright developed the twenty rules of the game that evolved into modern day baseball. They were formally adopted on September 23, 1845 by a team known as the Knickerbockers. They are often referred to as the Knickerbocker Rules.

Questions

1. Who developed the rules of the game that evolved into modern day baseball?
2. Why were they called the Knickerbocker rules?
3. Why is it important for a game to have formal written rules?

Document 2: “I see great things in baseball. It’s our game – the American game. It will take our people out-of-doors, fill them with oxygen, give them a larger physical stoicism. Tend to relieve us from being a nervous, dyspeptic [] set. Repair these losses and be a blessing to us.” – Walt Whitman (poet and New Yorker) 1846

Question

4. According to Whitman, what are two positive physical effects of playing baseball?

Document 3: Rules And Regulations Of The Game Of Base Ball, Adopted By The National Association Of Base Ball Players, New York, March 14, 1860.

“The ball must weigh not less than five and three-fourths, nor more than six ounces. It must measure not less than nine and three-fourths, nor more than ten inches in circumference. It must be composed of india-rubber and yarn, and covered with leather, and, in all match games, shall be furnished by the challenging club, and become the property of the winning club, as a trophy of victory.”

Questions

5. What is the purpose of this rule?

6. What does a baseball club receive at the end of a match?

Document 4: “The Model Baseball Player” by Henry Chadwick from *Haney’s Base Ball Book of Reference* (1867)

“The principal rule of action of our model base ball player is, to comport himself like a gentleman on all occasions, but especially on match days, and in so doing he abstains from profanity and its twin and vile brother obscenity, leaving these vices to be alone cultivated by graduates of our penitentiaries. He never censures errors of play made by a brother member or an opponent, as he is well aware that faultfinding not only leads to no improvement in the play of the one who blunders, but on the contrary is calculated to have the very reverse effect. He was never known to dispute the decision of an Umpire, for knowing the peculiar position an Umpire is placed in, he is careful never to wound his feelings by implying that his judgment is weak. He never takes an ungenerous advantage of his opponents, but acts towards them as he would wish them to act towards himself.”

Questions

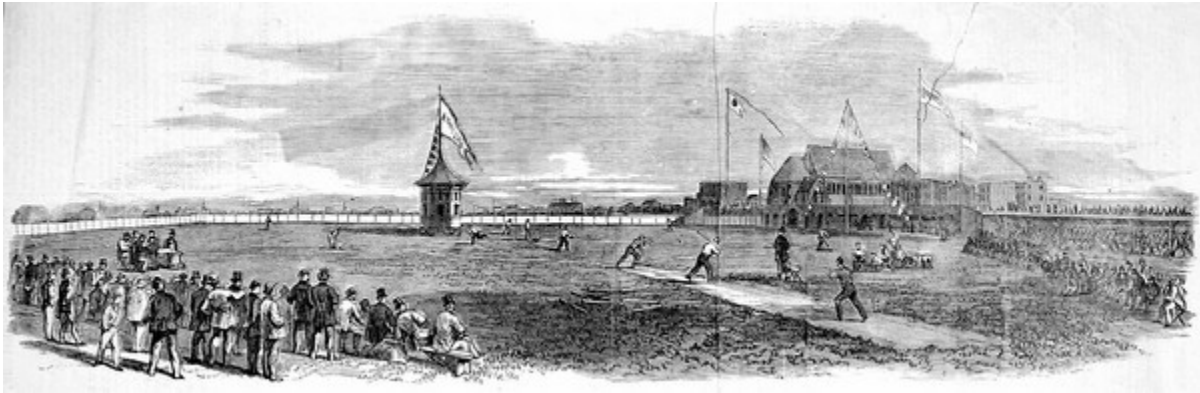
7. What is the “principle rule of action” for all baseball players?

8. What is proper conduct toward an umpire?

9. What is proper conduct toward an opponent?

10. Based on this passage, how are baseball players expected to act as role models?

Document 5: The Union Grounds, Brooklyn, NY 1862. Source: <http://theboweryboys.blogspot.com/2008/09/union-grounds-baseball-history-in.html>



A Base Ball game is played between the Atlantics and Eckfords, with a ten cent admission charge. The net proceeds are donated to the Sanitary Commission of Brooklyn for the benefit of sick and wounded soldiers. It is also the first time the National Anthem is played before a game.

Questions

11. What happened for the first time at this baseball game?

12. What was done with the money collected at the game?

13. In your opinion, why did these things happen at this game? (Clue: Look at the Date)

Document 6: Vassar College Resolutes, Poughkeepsie, NY. Source: <http://www.awesomestories.com/sports/baseball-cards/women-players-in-the-19th-century>

The first documented mention of women playing baseball anywhere in the United States was in a letter from Vassar student Annie Glidden to her brother on April 20, 1866. "They are getting up various clubs now for outdoor exercise. They have a floral society, boat clubs, and baseball. I belong to one of the latter, and enjoy it hugely, I can assure you."

Questions

14. Which New York State women's college had an early baseball team?

15. In your opinion, why would a woman's college field a baseball team?

Document 7: The birth of baseball was followed quickly by the birth of baseball songs. The first piece of such music was "The Baseball Polka" written in 1858. The "Live Oak Polka" was written in 1860 in Rochester, NY.

Question

16. How did music help spread the popularity of baseball?

Document 8: Base-Ball Match Between the "Athletics," of Philadelphia, PA., and the "Atlantics," of Brooklyn, N.Y., Played at Philadelphia, October 30, 1865. Source: *Harper's Weekly*, November 18, 1865.

The championship game at the Capitoline Grounds is played before 15,000. Henry Chadwick says, "is there another sport attractive enough to draw such attendance under such circumstances? In the summer it is not surprising as the weather is pleasant . . . but on a cold November day, in the busiest time of the year, it must be indeed an attractive sport to collect such an assemblage that is present on this occasion." The Atlantics of Brooklyn win by the score of 27-24, and claim the 1865 championship with a record of 17-0.

Questions

17. Who won the 1865 baseball championship?

18. What does the size of the crowd tell us about baseball at that time?