The Origins of Baseball

"Dominated by Vital Ghosts"

Baseball's Origins
Cultures throughout history have created stick-and-ball games. The action of hitting a ball with a stick means many of these games have similarities with modern baseball. Yale professor Richard Gilman, quoted in The Cultural Encyclopedia of Baseball, described baseball as "dominated by vital ghosts." This is particularly true of baseball's origins where nearly every alleged "creator" was deceased when his importance to the creation of the game was promoted.

America's first fitness craze swept New York City in the 1820s. Groups of young tradesmen and professionals began gathering to play the stick-and-ball games of their youth. Groups of players began crossing the Hudson River to play at Elysian Fields theme park in Hoboken, New Jersey. Travel problems and financial obligations led one group to organize as the Knickerbocker Baseball Club and publish their rules. These 1845 Knickerbocker rules are the initial link in the chain of events leading to modern baseball. Revisions in 1858 created a base ball craze among residents of New York City—who fielded 24 new clubs that year.

Doubleday Myth Debunked
Ballplayer, manager and co-founder of the A.G. Spalding Sporting Goods Company, Albert Goodwill Spalding created a commission in 1905 to determine the origins of baseball. In 1907, Abner Graves wrote a letter to the Commission claiming Abner Doubleday invented baseball in Cooperstown, New York in 1839. Spalding and the deceased Doubleday were both members of the Raja Yoga Theosophical Society in Point Loma, California. Spalding eagerly used Graves' letter to declare Doubleday the "Father of Baseball."

Abner Doubleday was long credited with inventing baseball in Cooperstown, New York in 1839. Doubleday was born in Cooperstown and enrolled at West Point in 1838. Military protocol would have confined him to campus until 1841.

African Americans in Early Baseball
In 1867 the National Association of Base Ball Players passed a rule banning blacks. While the National Association of Professional Base Ball Players formed in 1871 with no such written rule, the tradition of segregation continued. This tradition or "Gentleman's Agreement" continued into the National League when it formed in 1876. However, the informal nature of this segregation allowed African-Americans occasional access to the major leagues during this period. Most famous is Moses Fleetwood Walker, although he was not alone.

Walker reached the majors in 1884. During an 1887 exhibition game, Adrian "Cap" Anson protested having to share the field with African Americans Walker and George Stovey. That winter the owners segregated all of the major and high minor leagues. This accelerated the creation of all-black barnstorming teams like the Chicago Grays (who visited Eau Claire in 1885) and the Cuban Giants. Meanwhile integrated teams existed around the country at the semi-pro and town team level. Some of the lower minor leagues included both all-white and all-black teams.
The Evolution of Base Ball

Equipment and Rule Changes Shape the Game

Equipment and Rules
The rules and equipment of baseball have seen important changes since the game's beginnings. Changes in three pieces of equipment — balls, bats, and gloves — have been significant in changing how the game is played.

The Knickerbocker Rules (right) were a set of baseball rules formalized in 1845 by Alexander Cartwright and a committee from the Knickerbocker Base Ball Club. The original rules were similar, but not identical to, the English sport of rounders and are considered to be the basis for the rules of the modern game. Several of the rules are still around in some form today, while others are in direct contrast to current rules.

The first clearly documented match between two baseball clubs under these rules took place on June 19, 1846, at Elysian Fields in Hoboken, New Jersey. The Knickerbockers lost to the "New York Nine" by a score of 23–1.

From "Dead Ball" to "Live Ball"
George Ellard, a founding member of the Cincinnati base ball club, described the game, a time when the rules and equipment were very different than they are today. In the early 20th century the baseball was transformed from a wound ball of yarn (dead ball) into a ball with a cushioned cork center (live ball). During the dead ball era pitchers threw the ball underhand to batters, who were able to call for a high or low pitch. After the switch to the live ball, play became more about home runs and strike outs. Home runs became more important in the 1920s and offensive statistics soared with the efforts of players such as Babe Ruth.

The Rise of the Glove
Early base ball players did not wear gloves. When players first began to wear protection, they were nothing more than a leather work glove. Players slowly began to add padding to their gloves for added protection. It is reported that some catchers used beef steaks to soften the blow. As gloves continued to evolve, so did fielding techniques as gloves made it easier to handle the baseball.

The Importance of Bats
Players are very particular about their bats. In the 19th century bats with one flat side were allowed, and there was a brief experimentation with a square bat. The relationship between the pitcher and batter changed over time, and by the end of the 19th century batters could no longer call for a pitch, and pitchers threw overhand by 1890. By the beginning of the 20th century the dimensions of the bat had been determined.

Transforming the Game
The style of play in the Negro leagues was different than in the white leagues in the early 20th century. Players employed a fast-running, power-hitting style of play. Bunting, stealing home plate, double steals, hit-and-run, and strike outs were popular in the Negro leagues. The game they played was exciting and more like the games played in the early years before home runs and long balls became central.
Early Baseball in the County

The Menomonee Blue Caps were one of the first teams to draw large crowds in Dunn County. Formed in 1882, the Blue Caps proved to be very good at winning, and by the early 1900s, they were known by opposing teams as the "Invincible Blue Caps." In 1910, the Blue Caps won the Northern Wisconsin League. The 1920s again brought an abundance of victories. The 1921 team (below) opened the decade with a 19–7 record. While other Dunn County teams would eventually surpass the Blue Caps, they were still thrilling local crowds throughout the 1930s and pre-war 1940s.

"Handy" Andy Pafko
Born February 25, 1912, in Bayonne, Wisconsin, Andy Pafko would become a baseball star and ambassador of the sport. Pafko played for several teams professionally. In 1938, Pafko faced off against Tami "Tombay" Stone in a baseball game between Connorsville and the visiting Colored Giants. Both were 17 years old. In the 1939 team photo below, Pafko can be seen kneeling in the middle row, second from the left.

African Americans in Dunn County Baseball
Dunn County, Wisconsin in the early 20th century was populated primarily by immigrants from northern Europe. For many local residents, their initial contact with African Americans came from the barnstorming baseball players and teams. Starting in the early 1900s, African American athletes played against — and sometimes for — local Dunn County teams. Between stints on all-black teams, Alex Irwin (below, right) played on and coached Dunn County teams in 1909.

A 1903 photograph of the Menomonee Blue Caps shows an unidentified African American clad in suit and tie standing alongside the uniformed Blue Caps. More than a century after the photo was taken, the man is still unidentified — his name and association with the team is sadly lost to history.

Heirs to the Throne
The 1930s brought Dunn County two more competitive teams. The Wakanda Park Braves were one of many teams that played in the Dunn County League, winning the championship in 1937. The Lakeview Eagles emerged in 1937 for ballplayers under the age 17. By 1942, with the Blue Caps roster short due to the war effort, the Eagles took control of the Blue Caps franchise by merging the two teams. The Blue Caps’ last season was short, and 1942 was the last year a Blue Caps jersey was worn. After the 1943 season, no games were played again until 1946, when the Eagles defeated the Braves for the Dunn County League title. In 1950, the Eagles won the W.A.B.A. Championship — making them the best team in Western Wisconsin.

Pafko played with many greats in the game, including former Negro league stars. Following a stint with the Chicago Cubs, Pafko joined the Brooklyn Dodgers and played with Jackie Robinson and Don Newcombe. Eventually he returned to Wisconsin as a member of the Milwaukee Braves. It was as a Brave he finished his career, teammate of another African American great, Hank Aaron.
From Print to Broadcast

Media Covers America’s Pastime

Early Print Coverage
A fan of the games of rounders and cricket, Henry Chadwick was captivated by baseball the moment he laid eyes on the game in 1856. An amateur statistician and professional writer, Chadwick helped form public perception of the game. He developed the modern box score, introduced statistics such as batting average and ERA, wrote instructional manuals, and edited baseball guides. He was an influential member of baseball’s early rules committees. His work and love for the game popularized baseball during its infancy.

“Radio, television, more fans, more money.”
—Red Barber, Broadcaster

Broadcast Media
Advancing technology provided more opportunities for fans. On August 5, 1923, Harold Arlin called the Pittsburgh Pirates’ 8-5 victory over the Philadelphia Phillies on Pittsburgh’s KDKA radio. It was the first live radio broadcast of a major league baseball game.

Less than 20 years later, on August 26, 1939, some 3,000 viewers tuned in to W2XBS to watch the first televised major league baseball game. With Walter “Red” Barber on the call, the Cincinnati Reds and Brooklyn Dodgers split a double header at Ebbets Field in Brooklyn. The Reds won that historic first game 5-2. The Dodgers took the second game 6-1.

Most owners feared that broadcasting would hurt ticket sales. Instead, they discovered that it extended the reach of teams, recruited families of fans and created new revenue streams. As Barber observed, “Radio, television, more fans, more money.”

Racism and the Media
In 1905, the Chippewa Falls Gostrians became the second racially mixed team to play in Dunn County. With a lineup that included the famed George Wilson, the Chippewa Falls team defeated the local Blue Caps. The game was reported in the sports column. Accounts of other games followed after it.

However, near the bottom of the column, an editorial comment credited the Blue Caps’ loss might be due to “an African in the woodpile.” For generations this phrase, typically using a more offensive term, was understood to mean that some fact of importance had not been disclosed. Indeed, Wilson, an African American, was mentioned only in the box score, not the story itself.

Is the editorial comment evidence of bigotry and ignorance? Is it a poor attempt at humor? Is it a sign of frustration over a loss suffered by the hometown favorites?

History does not provide us with satisfying answers to these questions. But this much is clear: In 1905, Dunn County residents were coming face-to-face with a culture that many had not known previously. It would change the way residents viewed themselves and others. It would change the way Dunn County residents embraced the Great American Pastime. It would change, on baseball diamonds across Dunn County, hometown athletes were sharing the field with African Americans who were playing through.

The Dunn County News
The Dunn County News covered local baseball with gusto. Coverage extended beyond individual games and box scores, including news and photographs of local and visiting teams. Upcoming games against barnstorming foes were often promoted in preview stories or advertisements.

With its local focus, the News rarely mentioned national baseball news. It did not cover Jackie Robinson’s entry into major league baseball and rarely mentioned the World Series.

WHEELER WILL PLAY ST. PAUL MONARCHS
Colored Team Will Furnish Exhibition in Sunday Game

WHEELER.—Baseball fans from the surrounding community are invited to attend the midnight game of fun and baseball that will be exhibited here Sunday afternoon on the local field. The game begins at 2:30 when the local team engages the St. Paul Monarchs, colored team. This colored team is a remarkable collection of diamond stars losing only one game this year. George Haas, manager of the local club, assures fans an afternoon of fun.

MONARCHS GIVE 7-1 LOSS TO WHEELER
Fast Colored Team Amuses Crowd of 1,000 Here Sunday

WHEELER.—The St. Paul Monarchs, a fast semi-pro colored baseball club, easily defeated the Wheeler team Sunday evening on the local grounds by a score of 7 to 1, before the largest crowd to see a game in several years. About 1000 attended.

Schults on the mound for Wheeler, allowed only 8 hits and struck out 5, while the Monarch’s pitcher struck out 10 and only allowing 4 hits. The local team played fine baseball until the sixth inning, when St. Paul scored 5 times on 3 hits and 4 errors.

Wheeler had several chances to score but some were caught at home plate, and hits were lacking with men on base.

The colored team put on a fine exhibition of baseball all the way, and also put on some fun making stunts. St. Paul — 7, Wheeler — 1. The final game is scheduled for Monday.
The Negro Leagues
The Rise and Decline of a Black Institution

Early Leagues
Early professional Negro leagues cannot be called major or minor. Until the 20th century, not one completed even half a planned season.
- Southern League of Colored Base Ball Clubs, 1885
- National Colored Baseball League, 1887
- R.I.P. 1946

Eventually, some teams were able to survive and even profit by barnstorming small towns and playing local semipro teams as well as league games.

Early Negro leagues were unable to attract and retain top talent due to financial, logistical and contractual difficulties. Some early dominant teams did not join a league since they could earn larger profits independently.

Negro Major Leagues
While organized leagues were common in black baseball, only seven leagues are considered to have been of top quality of play at the time of their existence. Some formed prior to 1920 and most were in decline by 1950 due to integration. Some league member teams continued to barnstorm and play non-league games against local or semipro teams. Those games, sometimes approaching 100 per season, did not count in the official standings or statistics. However, some teams were considered "associate" teams and games played against them did count, but an associate team held no place in the league standings.
- Negro National League (B), 1900–1931
- Eastern Colored League, 1923–1950
- American Negro League, 1920
- East-West League, 1930
- Negro Southern League, 1932
- Negro National League (S), 1933–1948
- Negro American League, 1937–1960 or so

Negro Minor Leagues
At least 10 leagues from the major-league era (post-1900) are recognized as Negro minor leagues, as is the one of two 1940s majors that continued after 1950:
- Southern Negro League, 1927
- Denver City League, 1930
- Texas-Louisiana League, 1931
- Texas Negro League, 1924-1932
- Texas-Oklahoma Negro League, 1933–1935
- Negro Major Baseball League of America, 1932
- Negro Southern League, 1930–1945 (major a. 1930)*
- West Coast Baseball League, 1946
- United States Baseball League, 1945–1946
- Baseball Association of America, 1948
- Negro American League, 1932–1940 (previously major)**

* The Negro National League continued as a minor league in 1932 between seasons from the major leagues, in a season in which the World Series was played.
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The Negro and AAA championships met in a World Series from 1930 to 1945 and the MBL, but they joined hands in a Negro World Series from 1942 through 1948.

The World Series was a best of nine match-up between the Negro National League champion Kansas City Monarchs and the Eastern Colored league champion Pittsburgh Crawfords. In a 1939 game, the Monarchs scored 16 runs, with 12 stolen bases against the Crawfords. In addition, the Monarchs used the "Wild" for the first time. The Monarchs would go on to win the World Series.
The Leagues

With team owners unofficially agreeing to abandon their black ball players, major league baseball entered the 20th century as a segregated league. African American teams, their members excluded from the majors, survived by barnstorming and playing exhibition games. In the early 1900s, there were failed attempts to organize these teams into leagues. While major league baseball enforced segregation, there would be as many as seven significant “Negro leagues.” The first successful league was organized by star turner manager Andrew “Rube” Foster in 1920. This Negro National League (NNL) enjoyed stability until Foster’s departure in 1926. Foster died in 1930 and his NNL folded in 1931. A new Negro National League was established in 1913 followed by the Negro American League in 1917. Many popular teams were made up of top caliber players. But the absence of a central authority left teams and leagues struggling as players jumped at better offers from rival owners. Although there were a number of long-lasting successful franchises, most teams struggled. Many would fold after a single season. One of these teams was the Milwaukee Bears, which played in Rube Foster’s NNL in 1913. The Bears drew from regional barnstorming teams to fill their roster. They finished last in the league and the franchise disbanded.

Clowning Around

Negro leagues struggled to overcome white audience expectations that African Americans were entertainers first and athletes second. While most players sought to avoid these stereotypes, some teams embraced them to attract audiences.

The Ethiopian Clowns (later Indianapolis Clowns) were arguably the most successful of these teams. In addition to wearing African face paint, they embraced clowning both before and during games. The Clowns hired the 4’6” performer known as Spee Bbosop and talented female players like Toni Stone. The Clowns were also known for playing shadowball, a pantomime game whose imaginary ball and stylized moves kept audiences spellbound.

Reintegration

After baseball Commissioner Kenesaw Mountain Landis died in 1944, he was replaced by Albert “Happy” Chandler. The new commissioner made it known he was in favor of reintegrating professional baseball. At the urging of African American reporters Sam Lacy and Wendall Smith, three teams — the Pittsburgh Pirates, Brooklyn Dodgers and the Boston Red Sox — held tryouts for African American players. The Red Sox invited Sam lathree, Jackie Robinson and Marvin Williams to camp, though it is believed the teams never considered signing anyone. This is evident in the fact that the Red Sox were the last team to reintegrate professional baseball.

On October 31, 1945, Branch Rickey signed Jackie Robinson to a professional contract with the Brooklyn Dodgers. After the sport was reintegrated, top stars of the Negro leagues had the opportunity to move up to the majors. Deprived of the drawing power of these players and facing decreasing gate receipts, the Negro leagues soon failed. Surviving teams returned to barnstorming before fading into history.
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Wisconsin and the Ku Klux Klan

Cloak of Patriotism Can’t Conceal Agenda of Hate

Wisconsin Klan Forms in Milwaukee

The Klan’s motto of “Not for Self, but for Others” resonated well with the post World War I communities of Wisconsin. The first Ku Klux Klan in Wisconsin was established in the fall of 1920 by a small group of men in Milwaukee. They were successful in expanding their membership by spreading their message of patriotism. Underlying their patriotic message, was their anti-Catholic attitude and fear of foreigners. Some members genuinely held these beliefs, while for others the Klan functioned more as a social group. The Klan’s popularity grew steadily throughout the mid 1920s, reaching Dunn County in 1924.

Activity in Dunn County

The high point of the Ku Klux Klan’s popularity came during a reported gathering of 14,000 people at the Dunn County Fairgrounds on July 5, 1928. People in attendance paid five dollars to enjoy the program put on by the Klan followed by a demonstration of fireworks. Pat Malone gave a speech about the meaning of American citizenship.

Notably, Malone did not reveal the Klan’s opposition against foreigners and the Roman Catholic Church. These were the core principles binding several current members of the Klan together. However, it seems for most of those in attendance, the event was a celebration of American patriotism that provided much excitement to their weekend when there was little else to provide entertainment.

Demise of the Klan

The 1920s were the Klan’s most prominent years locally. In 1926 the Dunn County News reported multiple meetings with thousands in attendance. That popularity was short-lived. The Klan’s true message of hatred could not be concealed behind the beneficial social function of the group. When Klan leaders urged violence, Wisconsin withdrew her support and membership shrank.
Alex “Happy” Irwin
Shortstop Earned a Position on the Team and in the Community

South Carolina Roots
Alexander “Happy” Irwin was born on April 4, 1882 in Abbeville, South Carolina. Likely the child of former slaves, Irwin accompanied his parents to Evanston, Illinois by 1890. It was there that he took a job as a porter on the Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul and Pacific Railroad (Milwaukee Road) and began a baseball career that would last more than a decade. Irwin spent three seasons with the Chicago Unions, starting in 1904. In 1908, baseball brought Irwin to Menomonie as a member of the Minneapolis Keystones. Irwin would not only play against Menomonie, in 1909 he would return to the community as a member of the Menomonie White Sox and Menomonie Skidoos. Alex Irwin is the only African American confirmed to have played for a Dunn County team during the barnstorming era.

Irwin’s Team Chronology
1904 Chicago Unions
1905 Chicago Union Giants
1906 Illinois Giants
1906 Fruqua Giants (Illinois)
1908 Minneapolis Keystones
1909 Menomonie White Sox, Menomonie Skidoos, Elk Mound, Cadott
1909 Minneapolis Keystones
1910 Buxton Wonders (Iowa)
1911 Twin City Gophers
1911 Walker (Minnesota)
1912-13 Hennepin Clothing Co. (Minneapolis)
1914 Minneapolis Colored Giants (Manager)

A Life of Success
Alex Irwin’s accomplishments as an African American in the early 20th century were noteworthy. A baseball pioneer, he can also be seen as a pioneer in advance of the Great Migration. Between 1910 and 1970, more than 6.5 million African Americans left the rural south seeking work and opportunity in the north. Alex Irwin demonstrated that African Americans arriving in northern cities could achieve success.
Toni "Tomboy" Stone
The Gal Guardian of Second Base

No League of Her Own
Toni "Tomboy" Stone was born July 17, 1921, in Bluefield, West Virginia. In 1931 her family moved to St. Paul, Minnesota. She was just 17 when she joined her first team, the Colored Giants. The Giants were a Twin Cities-based barnstorming team that traveled on the weekends.

On September 5, 1938 the Colored Giants traveled to Connersville, Wisconsin. There they played against the Connersville team, which featured a young Andy Pafko. The Connersville team beat the Giants 13-4.

By 1940 Stone had dropped out of high school and started playing baseball full time. After playing with semi-pro teams in St. Paul, she went to stay with a sister in San Francisco, married Aurelious Pascia Alberga, a man 40 years her senior, and continued to play baseball. In 1949, she started playing for the San Francisco Sea Lions, and changed teams mid-season for better pay.

Her experiences as a young girl led her to become the first female baseball player in the Negro leagues. In 1953 she got her big break, an offer from the Indianapolis. There she played second base, a position Hank Aaron had vacated two years previously, when he signed with the Eau Claire Bears.

By 1954 she had inspired two more women, Mamie Johnson and Connie Morgan, to try out for the Clowns. After playing with the Clowns for one season, her contract was sold to the Kansas City Monarchs. She played there for one season before retiring in 1954, because lack of playing time and in order to care for her sick husband. She never returned to professional baseball. She died in 1996 at the age of 75 in California.

"In the eighth the Giants put in Tom Boy Stone, a girl who played left field. She made two difficult catches in the outfield."

Stone's Team Chronology
1937-38 St. Paul (Twin Cities) Colored Giants
1939-40 Other Teams
1949 San Francisco Sea Lions, New Orleans Black Pelicans
1949-52 New Orleans Creoles
1953 Indianapolis Clowns
1954 Kansas City Monarchs

Double Descrimination
Some reports indicate that Stone was respected and well-treated by teammates during her barnstorming days with the Colored Giants. However, as the first female player in the Negro leagues, she met resistance from her male teammates. Most of them shunned her and gave her a hard time because she was a woman, which became a point of pride for her. She would show off the scars on her left wrist and remember the time she was kicked by a runner trying to take out the woman standing on second base. "He was out," she recalled.

Stone was not allowed in the locker room with the rest of her team. If she was lucky, she would be allowed to change in the umpire's locker room. Once, Stone was asked to wear a skirt while playing for sex appeal, but she refused. Though she considered herself "one of the guys," her teammates did not. Playing for the Kansas City Monarchs in the final season of her career, she spent most of the games on the bench, next to the men who hated her. "It was hell," she said.

Facing a Legend
Toni Stone's most memorable moment in baseball came when she faced the legendary Satchel Paige in 1953. "He was so good," she remembered, "that he'd ask batters where they wanted it, just so they'd have a chance. He'd ask "You want it high? You want it low? You want it right in the middle? Just say.' People still couldn't get a hit against him. So I get up there and he says, 'Hey, how do you like it?' And I said, 'It doesn't matter, just don't hurt me.' When he wound up — he had these big old feet — all you could see was his shoe. I stood there shaking, but I got a hit. Right out over second base. Happiest moment in my life."