

## INTRODUCTION

### EARLY BASEBALL AND THE URBAN POLITICAL MACHINE<sup>†</sup>

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The nineteenth century in America was a time of explosive population growth, remarkable technological change, and a disastrous civil war. At the same time, in this period of upheaval the men and women of this country created a uniquely American culture. European immigration and domestic migration dramatically increased the population density of urban centers. The Industrial Revolution added a manufacturing sector to an essentially agrarian economy and American-made goods became available to the world. Completing the business left unfinished at the founding of the nation, the Civil War solidified a union of states at a significant cost. More than 2 percent of the population, 620,000 lives, were lost on the nation's battlefields.

Amidst all this change, uproar, carnage, and social transformation, the country created a culture that, for the first time, was distinctively American. That dominant culture—its music, arts, social habits, cuisine, and folklore—also included activities that filled newly found leisure time. For the first time, nineteenth century Americans enjoyed hours each week that could be devoted to play and entertainment, a pleasure not possible when work filled every day but Sunday from sunrise until sunset. One activity of this new indulgence was a uniquely American sport, one filled with “vim, vigor [and] vitality,” as Albert Spalding later wrote in *America's National Game*. It was baseball, born shortly before mid-century and soon played

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nationwide. It was baseball that would capture the attention of the nation and reflect the dynamism of America.

The nineteenth century also gave birth to new forms of political governance, and these were directly related to meeting the needs of the surging urban population. The American political system, as ordained in the constitutions of the United States and each of the states, contemplated periodic democratic elections in which citizens freely selected their leaders. The legitimacy of governmental power under this political compact rested upon “the consent of the governed,” as Jefferson wrote in the Declaration of the Independence the prior century. Public officials, elected for limited terms of office, would periodically seek a reaffirmation of their governance power by the electorate, which would then hold them accountable for their actions. This original and elementary version of American politics, of course, was never quite accurate, although it remained a compelling myth. It was just as reliable as the later constructed fable that in 1839 a nineteen-year-old Abner Doubleday invented the national game of baseball on Mr. Phinney’s dirt field in bucolic Cooperstown, New York.

Democracy was the privilege of only a few in America. In fact, about 10 percent of Americans, white male landowners, were entitled to vote in the early decades of the nation. More than 15 percent of the inhabitants were slaves, half were women, and the remaining males were landless. None could vote. In some states there were religious and literacy tests that barred many others from voting. In some states, “heretics,” Jews, Quakers, and Catholics did not enjoy the privilege of political participation. Thus, in fact the “consent of the governed” meant the consent of those few white Christian men who held a property stake in the country and thus could be counted on to exercise the franchise in the best interests of the nation.

America’s game—baseball—was equally enveloped in fable. Abner Doubleday, later to become a Civil War general who commanded Union troops at Fort Sumter, was attending West Point in 1839, the date when he was said to have conceived of the national game. In fact, Doubleday’s family had moved away from Cooperstown the prior year. Abner Graves, a mining engineer, was the sole source of the Doubleday myth. That was more than sufficient in 1908 for Organized Baseball to elevate Doubleday to the status of creationist. (Mr. Graves shortly thereafter murdered his wife and was committed to an asylum for the insane.)

We can come much closer to the truth about both American politics and American baseball in the nineteenth century, and, in the process, reveal how they were intertwined from the very beginning. We have always had a variety of political systems in America and have not yet achieved universal suffrage. Despite the outcome of the Civil War, we remain an amalgam of heterogeneous republics—a union of states—with local, regional, and national officials elected in various ways. At times, our core principle of consent has operated close to the idealized norm. Other times, government has been distorted by wealth, prejudices, avarice, misdealing, and partisanship. Within a decade of the election of George Washington, political parties gained control of the American electoral process. As a new and overwhelming set of problems beset our major cities mid-nineteenth century, a new variant of the party structure, the political machine, grew to dominate the administration of government. It would offer a perversion of democracy under which an urban gang would maintain control for decades and loot the public treasury in the process.

Baseball, that most American of games, rather than emerging full-blown from the head of one man, was also the product of evolution. Bat and ball amusements had ancient roots, and assorted variants were played throughout the colonies. The version that would form lasting roots attracted public attention because it was a game people could play at various skill levels. It was a communal experience. While Americans previously had watched horse racing, boxing, or boating, baseball was the country's first sport in which a broad cross section of adults could actually participate, seeking exercise, honor, glory, and fun. Although we are able to identify those who were involved in formulating the rules which led to the modern game, baseball very much remained a work in progress until late in the nineteenth century, much like the nation for which it would serve as the national pastime.

#### AMERICAN GOVERNANCE

The American political myth clashed with the political realities in a nation that was outgrowing its rural and agricultural roots. For the most part, in early America government had played a minor role in people's affairs. American governance was a crazy quilt of influence centers—some elected, others hereditary, still

others the product of commercial success.

From the earliest colonial days, inhabitants participated in voluntary associations, what the *Federalist Papers* decried as “factions.” Some of these groups were based on religious or commercial interests, while others were purely fraternal. As eastern and Midwestern cities burgeoned through immigration from foreign lands, in particular from Ireland and Germany in the mid-nineteenth century, voluntary associations multiplied, providing immigrants with an essential anchor against the disturbing winds of urban complexity and chaos. Persons thrown into new, unforeseeable and often friendless circumstances joined with others to create a communal sense of belonging to help weather the gales of American daily life.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, urban areas had swelled in size and economic importance. New York City’s population, for example, expanded eightfold from 123,706 in 1820 to 942,292 in 1870. The existing structures of government, built to meet the needs of much smaller municipalities, could not solve the social problems created by this dramatic expansion of population. Instead of restructuring government and creating the administrative structures needed to address these changed social conditions, informal, but effective, urban political organizations, such as Tammany Hall in New York, filled the political vacuum.

The new urbanites founded their own social clubs and associations, seeking a collective identity in their often forlorn and destitute enclaves. These clubs, based on class, ethnic, religious, or business groupings, became the rock upon which the new urban political machines built their political bases. In fact, some machines created clubs as a means of social control, reducing the prospects for social disorder and urban unrest. Devoted to social and political goals, these clubs also engaged in popular recreation such as baseball. Thus, from the beginning politics and sports intertwined.

#### IN THE BEGINNING

It might be said that Alexander Cartwright, William Wheaton, Daniel L. “Doc” Adams, and their Knickerbockers club committee invented baseball in the 1840s. Although different versions of bat-and-ball games had been played in eastern cities for decades, the New York game that the Knickerbockers formulated had genuine staying power. We would recognize the game they

played as akin to baseball as we know it today.

A group of young men from New York City formed the Knickerbockers in 1845 to provide an opportunity for athletic exercise to “those whose sedentary habits required recreation.” Voluntary private associations, such as the Knickerbockers, were the city’s focal point for physical recreation, and exercise was seen as the antidote to the miasmas of the unhealthy, immoral and dangerous urban environment. It was also fun, and it was not work. Even before the creation of their formal organization and the development of their famous baseball rules, this fraternal group of young clerks, storekeepers and artisans—at one point with as many as two hundred members—played various bat-and-ball games on the fields at Twenty-Seventh Street and Fourth Avenue in Manhattan. Members of this communal and sporting fraternity claimed for themselves a reputation as “gentlemen,” and they paid dues to the organization in exchange for the social and athletic opportunities it offered.

Cartwright was the twenty-five-year-old son of a shipping proprietor. He worked variously as a bookseller, bank clerk, and sometimes as a surveyor in New York City and had served as a volunteer fireman in Knickerbocker Engine Company No. 12, the name he and his colleagues appropriated for their new club. Over six feet tall, Cartwright was an imposing figure for his time. The members of the Knickerbockers club played the game Cartwright and his colleagues had devised—a clever variation of rounders and town ball, both well-established pastimes at that time in East Coast cities. They first played their new game in October and November of 1845. This more “manly” game of baseball fit perfectly the fast-growing urban environment where there was inadequate time and space for full games of cricket and the town ball practice of “soaking” runners by hitting them with the ball seemed too primitive.

Although the Knickerbockers considered themselves well-born gentlemen, they were actually white-collar workers and skilled craftsmen. They were certainly not aristocrats, but they did have leisure time after work that could be filled with athletic and social diversions. Club members subscribed to principles of sportsmanship, fraternity, and proper conduct. Under their baseball rules, they imposed fines on a player using profanity, arguing with an umpire’s decision, or refusing to obey the directives of the team captain. In these earliest days of the game, baseball seemed primarily a good excuse to throw a dinner party,

a gala post-game repast, after a pleasant and friendly athletic exercise.

Manhattan was running out of available playing space, and so the young men ferried across the river to the “Elysian Fields” on the heights above the Hudson in Hoboken, New Jersey. It was there on June 19, 1846, that they first played the new game against a rival team made up of former members of the Knickerbocker club (called the “New York Nine”). The Knickerbockers laid out a field with three “bases” and a circular home plate. They borrowed the field’s diamond shape from the bat-and-ball games commonly played in Philadelphia, but extended the distance between the bases to about ninety feet. The flat bases were canvas bags filled with sand or sawdust, replacing the rocks or posts that had earlier been employed. Their game would normally be played by nine men on a side, with a “short roving infielder,” the shortstop, stationed between the second and third base. This new “regulation” game was an adult pastime designed to exhibit skill, agility, and eye-hand coordination. Cartwright’s team lost that first match against the New York Nine, 23-1, but he did not play. The assembled teams had asked him to serve as the game’s single umpire. After all, they were playing under the rules he had helped devise.

In short order, daily and weekly newspapers extolled the virtues of the new Knickerbocker game. Henry Chadwick, the game’s premier chronicler, explained in his 1860 book, *Beadle’s Dime Base-Ball Player*, that the sport required “the possession of muscular strength, great agility, quickness of eye, readiness of hand, and many other faculties of mind and body that mark a man of nerve.” Moreover, playing baseball, especially for one’s community, would soon become a matter of enormous personal and local pride. Chadwick and others sought to purify the game even further, urging the elimination of the rule that allowed the defense to record an out by catching a hit ball on one bounce. He wrote in 1860 in the *New York Clipper* that by improving the rules his goal was to make the game “more perfect.”

The value of playing Cartwright’s game was equal shares of good recreation and good spirits. After their physical exercise, the Knickerbockers would dine at McCarty’s Hotel adjacent to the Elysian Fields. In short order, early baseball would become an important and approved social pastime, recognized by the influential Muscular Christianity movement as a means to supplant the blood sports normally hosted by the local saloon,

such as cockfighting, ratting and bear-baiting, although these “entertainments” would continue through the remainder of the century.

Reverend Henry Ward Beecher, Congregationalist minister of the Plymouth Church in Brooklyn, extolled the value of the new game. Baseball, he told his flock, could help develop a healthy spiritual life and exemplify the “virtues of physical exercise, discipline and teamwork.” As a moral and well-regulated recreation not bound by dour Calvinism or steeped in savage violence, baseball would fit nicely into “wholesome” America, uplifting the working class and offering groups solidarity and pride, especially important in an urban culture where so many immigrants needed to be Americanized.

In the years to come, although the Knickerbockers would not join the rush to competitive rivalry, commercialization, and professionalism, it would make other innovations, for example introducing brightly colored uniforms similar to those worn by their progenitors, the volunteer fire departments. Club members would remain constant in their devotion to their traditional social values and the purpose of their enterprise. Members came and went—Cartwright himself was soon to head west, ending up in Hawaii—but the “ancient and honorable” Knickerbockers had made their mark on the evolving American cultural scene. Even at its inception, proponents of baseball understood that there was value in extolling tradition, even if that tradition was only a few years old.

Within the first decade of the sport numerous other social and athletic clubs formed in New York, including the Gotham, Empire, Star, and Eagle fraternities. They adopted the Knickerbockers “regulation” baseball rules. Uniform standards of play created a common metric that allowed for competition and permitted the growing number of athletic clubs to play challenge matches. With the spread of the game and the commonality of the rules, within a decade the game evolved from a purely athletic exercise to a competition. It was no longer sufficient for those who played to enjoy the fresh air of northern New Jersey and the social repast of a fine dinner. Now the game would be played for pride, accomplishment, and victory.

Baseball clubs were formed by men who shared common work experiences, such as policemen (Manhattans), saloonkeepers (Phantoms), dairymen (Pocahontas), schoolteachers (Metropolitans), and men in the food trades (Baltics, Jeffersons,

and Atlantics). The important Eckford club of Brooklyn was made up of shipwrights and mechanics from the Williamsburg and Greenpoint areas of the New York dry docks, and they named their club for Henry Eckford, an early Brooklyn shipbuilder. Masonic orders, workers' benevolent associations, and party ward organizations played the game. Volunteer firemen, always the symbol of great civic pride, took up baseball, drawn by the same principles of teamwork that had always characterized their activities in fighting urban fires. As we shall see, one of the clubs that traced its origin to volunteer firemen, the Mutuels, would play a particularly important role in the development of the game and in its connection to political power.

The amateur clubs of the 1850s had been manned almost exclusively by local athletes. Players developed pride in, and allegiance to, their clubs and to their neighborhoods, cities and towns. They paid dues in order to enjoy club status—the Niagaras of Buffalo, for example, had 350 members, each paying annual dues of five dollars—and the dues covered club expenses. Each of these fraternal clubs was governed by a constitution under which they annually elected officers. Members met regularly in their “club rooms,” often at a hotel or a saloon. Membership in the clubs offered a sense of belonging, with baseball just one of their social activities. They would meet to practice on days between formally scheduled challenge matches against rival clubs. The baseball fraternity judged these early clubs not only by the quality of their play on the field, but also by the sumptuousness and hospitality of their post-game meal and festivities. Toasts and speeches rounded out match days.

The Knickerbocker rules were not formally printed until they appeared in *Porter's Spirit of the Times* on December 6, 1856, and then in the *New York Clipper* a week later. Word of the new game, however, had already spread across the country. Chadwick wrote that the game had become “epidemic just now.” The *New York Ledger* implored young men to “run out, merchants, lawyers, clergymen, bookkeepers, editors, authors, clerks and everybody else who can, and have half a day of it in the fields every week during the ball season.”

The Knickerbockers certainly did not appreciate that they had done anything special, and they did not actively promote the adoption of their rules. For many years after their first historic (but losing) match in 1846, they were content to play their game as an intramural exercise within the club as a means to enhance

the athletic well-being of the participants. The other clubs that had adopted their rules, however, were ready to take on all comers, but always paid their verbal respects to the “ancient and honorable” progenitor club’s role in the development of the game.

By the mid-1850s, the game had become a ubiquitous feature of New York male social life. In 1856, *Porter’s Spirit of the Times* wrote that “every available plot of ground for ten miles around the metropolitan area” was devoted to playing the new game of “base.” The “first nines” of the sporting clubs played match games that attracted much public attention in the antebellum period. Thousands attended, and the results were reported in the press. In this new phase, the game had clearly evolved. It was played not simply as physical exercise, but as competitive sport. The clubs abolished the practice of post-game dinners as an old-fashioned custom that distracted from the main purpose of the exercise—to win at the game. Soon capitalism would capture the sport much as competition had, and it would convert baseball into a money-making enterprise.

Accomplishment on the baseball field soon attracted the interest of politicians who saw in the pastime an opportunity to command the public’s attention while demonstrating in a convincing fashion the prominence of local achievement. Brooklyn produced dozens of baseball clubs. Forever in the shadow on Manhattan, even 150 years ago, the *Brooklyn Eagle* could crow with pride in 1862: “If we are ahead of the big city in nothing else, we can beat her in baseball.” While the game had spread to the Midwest and beyond, there was no question that it was the child of the New York metropolitan region which, by then, had established its lasting preeminence in American commerce.

Having evolved from athletic exercise into a competitive enterprise, baseball needed some formal organization. On March 10, 1858, representatives of twenty-two amateur clubs from the New York area met at Smith’s Hotel on Broome Street in Manhattan to form the National Association of Base Ball Players. The clubs represented neighborhoods and ethnic groups, as well as occupations. Under the aegis of the National Association, the clubs wrote a set of rules of play with only a few codicils added to the Knickerbockers text. Now champions could be recognized and boasting rights established based on challenge match victories, an important source of American psychological capital both then and now. The game had certainly lost its innocence. Baseball would

be played with the object of winning. When these social and athletic clubs played against each other—normally as part of a series of three scheduled games—they would present their very best players for the contests, their “first nines.” The winners would normally receive a gilded ball worth more than one hundred dollars as a trophy. If winning mattered to the clubs—and it did—soon players would have to be attracted to play for a club with offers of pay for their efforts.

Thus, within little more than a decade the meaning and role of baseball had changed. Baseball games evolved from an urban recreation to competition between localities, ethnic communities, and class groups. Baseball was soon commodified as part of the new American consumerism. Those who created and defined this new essential characteristic would seek to promote it as an enterprise with commercial potential no longer tied to local resources or affection.

Although not yet as popular or widely played as cricket, baseball’s growth spurt demonstrated its resonance with the nation’s character. By the 1860s, the number of clubs in the National Association had surpassed three hundred, and hundreds more nationwide did not even bother to join. As the popularity of the game spread across many working class neighborhoods, the Knickerbockers emphasis on elitism waned, and the game’s commercial prospects and political implications rose to prominence.

Baseball’s amateurism paradigm lasted well into the 1860s, although there had been some “ringers” who were paid under the table even as early as the 1850s, such as pitcher Jim Creighton in 1859 and Al Reach shortly thereafter. The best players would change clubs for increased pay. (Creighton, for example, played for the Niagaras, the Stars, and finally the Excelsiors of Brooklyn in a two-season period until his untimely death at age twenty-one from an internal injury caused by a massive swing during a game.) The earlier paradigm of localism changed when the commitment to victory and achievement overcame the pride of community.

Competition had superseded fraternity as the controlling American ethos, and baseball changed along with it. In order to win, players were recruited and compensated by local businesses, donations from the general community, and ultimately from admission fees. The purposes and practices of the game changed fundamentally. Some recognized that this was not a totally

positive development. As the *Brooklyn Eagle* wrote, this resulted in “the breaking up of all local feeling in regards to baseball.”

However, the recruitment of better ballplayers and, ultimately, their open professionalism improved the quality of play. Baseball clubs became small businesses. As a result, baseball captured the public’s attention as an attractive urban entertainment. In 1858, tens of thousands of baseball enthusiasts descended upon the new Fashion Race Course in Queens for a three-game all-star series pitting the best baseball players from Manhattan against their counterparts from Brooklyn. The horse racetrack had erected a wooden fence around the field and charged admission, the first time that had ever occurred in the still ostensibly amateur game. The proceeds from the series went to a firemen’s fund for widows and orphans, a decision that reflected the history of many baseball clubs as outgrowths of volunteer fire brigades.

By 1862, entrepreneurs began to construct more permanent stadiums, as baseball continued to evolve as part of the growing commercialized consumer culture. William H. Cammeyer converted his ice-skating pond in Brooklyn into an enclosed baseball field, the Union Grounds, and collected a ten-cent admission fee from each spectator who came to watch the best clubs play baseball. Cammeyer’s Grounds, located on the corner of Lee Avenue and Rutledge Street, served as the home field for the Brooklyn Eckfords and later for the New York Mutuals, who would share in the proceeds. Other entrepreneurs followed Cammeyer’s lead in New York and around the country.

Once again, the object of the popular game had changed. While competition would remain within the game’s bloodlines, now baseball had become an openly commercial entertainment. Charging admission provided a source of income for the clubs that until recently had only thought of their sporting activity as a healthy recreation. This commercial aspect made certain the eventual transformation of the amateur pastime into a business of professional clubs. The growing popularity of the sport also insured that it would attract the interest of urban politicians.

#### THE MUTUALS OF NEW YORK

The Mutuals became one of New York City’s best amateur clubs. In 1857, the preeminent New York Democratic politician, William Magear Tweed, participated in organizing the social and athletic club, formed by volunteer firemen who were members of

the city's Mutual Hook and Ladder Company Number One. Although Tweed never served as president of the Mutual club, as has sometimes been reported, he was involved in the organization from its creation. Tweed was a member of the club's board of trustees along with a parade of Democratic politicians. Throughout the twenty-year history of the organization, the Mutuels always had city alderman, state legislators, and judges on its board of directors. The long-time president of the Mutuels was City Coroner John Wildey, Jr., a ballplayer himself who played first base for the Mutuels in their early days. Other influential Tammany officials played important management roles with the ball club. For example, Alexander Davidson, chief clerk in the New York City Office of the Streets Commissioner, was the secretary of the Mutuels. The Mutuels were widely known as "Tammany's club."

Every season the Mutuels would challenge, and normally triumph over, other premier clubs in the region. As members of the National Association, the Mutuels had pledged to maintain their amateur status, but, like many of their competitors, they would not. As competition between baseball clubs grew, it became apparent that the Mutuels' "first nine" needed more time to practice and play their game. Club management wanted to attract better players for the squad. Coroner Wildey and Boss Tweed did exactly what they had done with thousands of their loyal followers. They placed the "amateur" baseball players on the city payroll without requiring them to perform any work for the city in exchange. By accepting those positions, the Mutuels "first nine" players became secret professionals in clear violation of Association rules. Their only obligation was to play championship baseball. The Mutuels would be the first, but not the only, club to demonstrate the symbiotic relationship between baseball and politics.

Sportswriters—a new profession that grew as baseball became a more popular attraction—generally referred to the Mutuels as an adjunct of Tammany's operations. The *New York Clipper* reported in 1865 that "politicians are commencing to curry favor with the fraternity of ballplayers, as a class of our 'fellow citizens' worthy of attention of our 'influential men.'" The *Clipper* was talking about the Mutuels, and the report was accurate. Tweed and the Tammany men saw the Mutuels as part of its outreach to the public. The politicians would attend games, mixing with the crowds who would play a critical role in the urban machine's

political dominance.

On the field the Mutuels played the game with distinctive intensity. Voluntary firemen were not known for their meekness; neither were members of urban political machines or the baseball clubs they sponsored. Arriving at a structure on fire—a significant problem in a city built mostly of wood—fire companies would brawl with rivals who had also arrived on the scene. Similarly, the baseball Mutuels would maintain their ruffianism on the ball field and were considered “notorious” by many. As the *New York Times* noted, when the Mutuels played away from New York City, they brought with them “their fame and universal success,” which often involved rough play: “New York alderman and other ‘sports’” were in attendance to “back them.” During a Mutuels match against a club from Irvington, New Jersey, a city just west of Newark, a riot broke out. Hugh Campbell, the Irvington’s outfielder, claimed he was “sucker-punched.” No one doubted his report. The same thing happened in a Mutuels game against Troy in 1871 when Mutuels manager John Wildey ended up bloodied. The Mutuels would play the game with a zest characteristic of an urban mob, the antithesis of the gentlemanly manners of the Knickerbocker club. Certainly, the Knickerbockers would disdain such thuggery.

The Mutuels were also involved in the first reported fixing scandal of the new game, not a surprise for a club run by the urban political mob. Three members of the club took a bribe to throw a game against their arch rival, the Eckfords, on September 28, 1865. After the participants admitted their perfidy, they were banned from baseball, if only for a little while. However, compared with the astounding crimes committed by their sponsors, the Tweed Ring, the Mutuels’ transgressions were trivial.

Despite their hooliganism—or perhaps because of them—the Mutuels were a widely popular club and thousands came to watch them play. The press referred to them variously as a “celebrated,” “well-known,” “noted,” “renowned,” and “crack” ball club, and their matches were always reported as the “most exciting” of the season, attended by the most spectators. Reporting on the Opening Day intramural game in 1867, for example, the *New York Times* wrote on April 17:

It is to such clubs as the Mutuels that our national game is indebted for its wide-spread popularity, for besides having one of the best practice grounds in the country, they generally turn out such a jolly crowd on their opening day as to make the game very

attractive to witness. It is no wonder then, that the crowd at the Fields on Monday could be counted by the thousands, and that they applauded and laughed and enjoyed themselves as people do who attend a lively theatrical performance.

Immediately below the story about the Mutuels practice session appeared the newspaper's listing for "City Politics." The "newly elected officers of the Tammany Society," the *Times* reported, included: "Sachem . . . William M. Tweed."

By 1867, even though amateurism remained the required norm, some of the best Mutuels players were sharing in the gate receipts for their games. By 1868, many were placed on a straight salary for their work on the field, and by 1869 the entire team was openly paid as professionals. That year, the New York City Council voted to end the charade and appropriated \$1,500 to fund the Mutuels.

#### BOSS TWEED AND TAMMANY HALL

From the founding of the nation until well into the nineteenth century, government offices were filled by men from the middle and upper classes. As officeholders, they saw their roles as temporary service, rather than as careers. They were modern-day recreations of Cincinnatus, the model of Roman virtue, who served as consul to protect his city from its enemies in the fifth century B.C., before returning to the countryside when the threat was repulsed. American politicians were similarly motivated by selfless civic virtue.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, however, the new circumstances facing American cities caused urban politics to change. Millions were without adequate food, shelter, health, and sanitation services. The teeming cities were a jumble of immigrant groupings, formal political parties, civic organizations, social clubs, and street gangs. Those who would now aspire to political power could do so only by stitching together enough of these groups into a coalition that could control the elective process and, in the process, address some of their overwhelming problems. The most successful politicians took one step further, forming organized urban political "machines" that could systematically (if illegally) manage the electoral process. Politics in American cities had become a business run by full-time professionals.

Although there were many cities that were run by political machines, the most effective organization by far was in New

York. New York City was a Democratic stronghold, but the party was as disorderly as the electorate. The Society of St. Tammany, named for Indian leader Tamanend, would bring order out of this political chaos. It operated out of a hall built in 1830 on East Fourteenth Street in Manhattan. Although originated as a social and political club with an anti-aristocratic orientation, by the 1840s Tammany had adapted to the new urban circumstances to become the avowed champion of the poor and immigrant masses. At the same time, it became a champion at greed and corruption. Tammany's most notorious leader was William "Boss" Tweed. Over a five-year period, from 1866 until 1871, Tweed and his cohorts—the "Elegant" Oakey Hall, Peter "Brains" Sweeny and Richard "Slippery Dick" Connolly, known collectively as the Tweed Ring—stole upwards of \$200 million from the City and its residents. They set a standard for civic corruption that has never been surpassed.

Like many other urban politicians of the time, Tweed had formed the initial base of his support from the membership of volunteer fire departments. In 1848, Tweed and State Representative John J. Reilly ran the Americus Engine Company, No. 6 ("The Big Six"). Tweed gave The Big Six its symbol, a snarling red tiger, the emblem later attached to his political vehicle, Tammany Hall. The seventy-five firemen of the Big Six could be called upon by Tweed to do anything, at anytime. Tweed and his colleagues soon recognized that chartering and funding fire brigades and social and athletic clubs provided a reliable political base. He founded the Mutual Hook and Ladders Company No. 1. Later, as we have noted, Tweed organized the members of this brigade into the amateur baseball and social club, the Mutuals.

Tweed began his political career around the time the young men of the Knickerbockers were perfecting their new version of baseball. He learned the fundamentals of his political trade through petty corruption, selling governmental favors, and licenses in his ward and handing out jobs from his law offices at 95 Duane Street. Developing a chain of friends, Tweed climbed the ladder of elected jobs—Alderman from the 7th Ward, congressman for a term, deputy streets commissioner, commissioner of public works, state senator and chairman of the state finance committee. In 1857, the year he helped form the Mutual Baseball Club, he became a member of the New York County's Board of Supervisors, on which he served from 1857–

1870 with four terms as the president of the board. At the same time, Tweed rose within the ranks of Tammany Hall, becoming chairman of the general committee on January 1, 1863, and later that year, the “Grand Sachem,” the first time one man had held both positions.

Tweed, a mountain of a man, crude and blustering, could be a suave “jolly rogue” when needed. He could also be charitable, especially when spending someone else’s money. He made friendships for political purposes and offered personal favors as the source of his power. Although not a great public speaker, he was a remarkable organizer. He enjoyed mixing with his people, including attending Mutual baseball games when he was not at Harry Hill’s dance hall on Houston Street.

Early in his career Tweed recognized that the flood of immigrants was a political godsend. His city was filled with confused strangers—fresh from the farms of the old country—who lacked the skills, direction and capital that would be needed to prosper in their new country. By 1870, a half million of those new residents lived in tenement slums and cellars. Beggars and children roamed the streets, and Tweed made sure that Tammany was there to offer order, jobs, health services, sanitation, coal, and food to ease the ever present chaos. Immigrants lined up to be naturalized wholesale by Tammany judges. In exchange, Tweed had found the source of his continuing political power.

Immigrant groups formed their own churches, newspapers, mutual aid societies, theaters, militia, and fire companies and, with Tammany’s direct assistance, they obtained public jobs. Ever threatened by nativist groups, the multitudes of Irish Catholics and German Protestants fit comfortably under Tammany’s umbrella. Tweed orchestrated the logistics of practical urban politics with genuine enthusiasm. Tammany’s boss presided over an empire of patronage—with twelve thousand job holders, all of whom owed their paycheck to Tweed and the machine. Because of their fashion for tall, sleek hats, these rank-and-file were called the Shiny Hat Brigade, and they held jobs in every branch of city government. Many of these Tammany loyalists had no real work obligations. They were only required to pick up their pay, while performing no service of any value to the public.

On election day, of course, Tammany would call upon this army of supplicants to insure that “democracy” would work as the

machine required. Loyalists would vote early and often, stuff ballot boxes, intimidate those who might vote another slate and manipulate the counting of ballots. His troops would spring into action with gangs like the Bowery Boys, renegades, and intimidators making sure only those chosen by Tammany prevailed at the ballot box. Thugs from New York City's Five Points could be called upon to provide the muscle—the Gophers, Dead Rabbits, Gorillas, the East Side Dramatic and Pleasure Club, and the Limburger Roarers. With everyone acting in his own self interest, the system thrived, at least until an overabundance of greed attracted too much public attention.

In Democratic New York, the critical election was normally the primaries, since the Republicans rarely could offer genuine competition in the general election. Statewide elections, in particular for the governorship, required the manipulation of nominating conventions where tight organization proved vital. Tweed would claim for Tammany the position of the “regular” Democratic Party, even though it was only one faction. He would attack the splinter groups that would challenge Tammany's status.

The Democratic Party included many dissidents, mostly those who had forsaken Tammany or had been expelled for various reasons, including challenging the incumbent leadership. Fernando Wood was elected New York City mayor in 1854 as a Tammany Democrat, but then lost the 1857 election and was expelled from Tammany. He proceeded to form his own political organization of dissidents, the Mozart Hall Democrats. Under its banner—and using the full array of election tactics he had perfected at Tammany—Wood was returned to City Hall in 1859. Tammany never did hold a monopoly on the use of dishonest election practices.

The Republicans maintained control of the state legislature in Albany and sought through various measures to manipulate city government. In the Charter of 1857, the legislature divided responsibilities for much local city business among various departments with leadership elected independently by the voters, thus removing them from the mayor's purview. Some of the officials designated to run new “commissions” were appointed directly by Albany, a way for upstate Republicans to share in the booty—both in patronage and plunder.

City Democrats raised the hue and cry that this Republican maneuver deprived the city of home rule regarding vital services,

such as police protection. This gave Tweed an emotional issue on which to run his candidates for state office. It also increased the gap between the needs of the immigrant population and the services provided by Albany's various commissions. Tammany stepped in with direct payments to the needy and jobs in those areas of government it still controlled, and lobbied the legislature to modify its plan for governance. Tweed himself ran for state senator and quickly assumed a position of prominence and influence in Albany. Ultimately, in 1870 Tammany bought the legislative votes it needed to reverse the Charter, creating a strong mayoral government in the city balanced against a powerful board of alderman. Tweed controlled both, and, in the process of "reform," he was able to vanquish local Democratic rivals—the so-called "Young Democracy," whose adherents had held city offices at the behest of the legislature. As a result, members of the Young Democracy, according to the *New York Times*, retreated to their clubhouse, Irving Hall, "to wail their monstrous melody to the moon."

The election of 1868 demonstrated how the Tammany machine operated at its most proficient level. While Tweed was not very concerned about the national election—General Grant was almost certain to prevail in the first election after the close of the Civil War—state and local contests were critical. Tweed needed to maintain control of significant municipal offices, the governorship, and the judiciary, which was elected in New York. His candidates won all those elections, using the horde of newly minted citizens naturalized by Tammany judges. These naturalization mills would grind out a thousand new voters a day. In 1868, over forty-one thousand immigrants were naturalized, sometimes at a rate of three a minute.

Tammany organized the effort to insure there were sufficient votes to prevail. So-called repeaters would vote, shave off their beards and vote again, shave off their mustaches and vote a third time. With forged papers, they would vote still again. City vote totals were withheld until upstate Republican districts reported. Then winning totals were posted in New York City sufficient to overcome the Republican rival's lead for statewide offices. The election was won with stuffed ballot boxes, fraudulent voters, and corrupt counting. (Occasionally, even Tammany made mistakes by reporting more Democratic votes in a district than there were registered voters.) The Republican Congress appointed a committee to investigate the obvious electoral corruption, but,

after hearing from dozens of witnesses, left town with the status quo unchanged.

As deputy street commissioner from 1863–1870, perhaps his most important political position, Tweed controlled thousands who were on call to insure the continued dominance of Tammany. The City was growing rapidly and, as the streets paved by Tweed's men moved northward, new buildings and new transportation offered abundant opportunities for personal profit for the Ring at a standard rate of 15 percent tribute. The town was filled with speculators, especially in real estate, and they too needed government approval that they could purchase and count upon. Tweed offered the machine's services and also purchased land himself, becoming the third largest landowner in the City in the process.

#### TAMMANY AND THE MUTUALS

Tweed and his Ring appreciated the value of success, both in political plunder and on the baseball field. It came as second nature to these political gangsters to offer no-show jobs to those who would bolster the prestige of their organization. The ploy would assure recruiting and retaining the best ballplayers by providing municipal patronage jobs at an annual cost of perhaps thirty thousand dollars to the city. A dozen or so phantom jobs out of twelve thousand was, frankly, insignificant. For the 1868 season, the club used the prospect of no-show jobs to recruit three players from New Jersey and three more from Brooklyn to complement the three natives of Manhattan.

On July 4, 1867, Tammany laid the cornerstone of its new clubhouse in New York on Fourteenth Street to the east of Irving Avenue. The day before, according to the *New York Times*, the Mutuals of New York, Tammany's baseball club, had played "the most interesting and exciting" game of the season against the Eckfords club of Brooklyn. The game was tied at the end of the ninth inning, 20-20, and was declared a draw. The following week in a rain-shortened rematch of these two "first-class" clubs, the Mutuals triumphed 28-9.

Inside the Fourteenth Street edifice, Tammany officials, arrayed into committees and councils, would dispense thousands of government jobs and receive tribute in exchange for their favors. Ward clubs spread out across the city providing needed services in local areas. Tammany provided good fellowship as

well as patronage. Even the *New York Times*, later an implacable foe that would spearhead Tweed's downfall, could write that Tammany was "a wonderfully and admirably-constructed and conducted machine . . . the wheels work smoothly, the pulley run without a jar, the cogs slip into one another perfectly, while everything is kept well oiled and greased from the public funds of our wealthy citizens."

Tweed himself sought social respectability through sport, joining the American Jockey Club along with August Belmont, William R. Travers, James R. Hunter, and Leonard Jerome. He attended Mutual games, while leaving operational responsibility for the club to Coroner Wildey. Although Wildey, as player-manager, had played first base for the Mutuals in its early years, after the Civil War he devoted himself to the management of the enterprise. In addition to the city jobs Tweed and his cohorts had arranged, Tweed also paid five thousand dollars out of his own pocket for travel expenses when the Mutual club ventured out of the New York area, in particular on what the press referred to as its "famous" trip to New Orleans in 1869.

Tweed met his political demise when his hubris came into conflict with the ideology and business needs of the *New York Times* and *Harper's Weekly*, spearheaded by the sharp pen of cartoonist Thomas Nast. When the *Times* could add actual facts to its exhortations, Tweed was doomed politically. The trigger was a riot that broke out between Irish Protestants (the Orange) and Irish Catholics in July 1871. Sixty people were killed and more than one hundred and fifty were injured. Shortly thereafter, disaffected members of the city administration leaked damaging information to the *Times*. The headline stories of official corruption ran daily. Eventually, Tweed was indicted and convicted for stealing between \$25 million and \$45 million. He would die in prison.

#### POLITICS AND SPORTS

Tweed was not the only politician or political boss to see a value in sports. Nearly all baseball clubs had some connections to city politicians. In fact, one recent study of baseball club officials and stockholders found that half of them were politicians—including 50 mayors and 102 state legislators. The *Sporting News*, in an 1895 retrospective of the early amateur days of baseball, claimed that "the Atlantics of Brooklyn, Athletics of

Philadelphia, Unions of Morrisania, Nationals of Washington, all derived their support from politics.” The *Brooklyn Eagle* called the Pastimes of Brooklyn “the City Hall Club” for its connection to municipal affairs in Brooklyn.

The political connections were not limited to the New York area. Another politician, John Morrisey, a congressman and state senator from Troy, New York, controlled that town’s Haymakers, who purported to be simple “farm boys.” They were not. Morrisey was also not a simple politician. He was a gambler of the first order who would put significant amounts of cash on the line betting on his “first nine.”

Federal government clerks formed the Potomac Club in the District of Columbia in the summer of 1859. Later that year a second club of government clerks, the prominent Nationals, received the financial support of the Treasury Department. Arthur Pue Gorman was the Nationals club president and would later become a United States senator. He held a powerful position in Treasury during the mid-1860s and used the prospects of a government job to attract and retain the best players for his club. The two government teams played each other on the back lawn of the White House on what is now the Ellipse. In 1867, the Nationals club was the first Eastern team to travel west of the Alleghenies to spread the gospel of the new game. (Of course, the players continued to draw their federal paychecks while they were “abroad.”) Thousands came (at fifty cents admission) to see their local heroes take on the famed Nationals.

On August 30, 1865, President Andrew Johnson greeted the Atlantics of Brooklyn at the White House. According to the *Brooklyn Eagle*, “he took each one of the party by hand.” He apologized for not seeing them play, but “[p]ublic duties denied me that privilege.” The President had obviously been briefed on the outcome of the Atlantic’s match against the Nationals:

The President: You defeated our boys handsomely.

Rev. Mr. Crane: Not so badly, sir; it was the best fielding of the year.

The President: Perhaps they may have better luck next time.

Gentlemen, I thank you for the honor of your visit.

The *Eagle* was obviously correct when it concluded: “Baseball is now the rage in Washington.” The following year, on September 13, 1866, in Washington, D.C., President Johnson did attend a game where the local champion Nationals faced the visiting Brooklyn Excelsiors. Over seven thousand were in attendance. It would not be the last match attended by the chief executive, even

as he fought against impeachment in the Senate.

In late August 1867, Johnson entertained a visit to the White House by the New York Mutuals, Boss Tweed's club. The president used the occasion to declare baseball to be "the National Game." He then attended the August 26, 1867, game between the Mutuals and the Nationals, with his entire cabinet joining in the festivities.

Politicians enjoyed distinct advantages that could benefit baseball clubs when the game became a commercial enterprise. They had inside information from city hall that might be relevant to baseball entrepreneurs. Even if they did not make policies—which they often did—they knew where land was available to erect rudimentary stadiums and, later in the century, they knew where transportation lines were going to be authorized. Well-positioned "pols" could protect their clubs against rivals. They could control licensing fees, permits, and police protection at and around the ballparks. They could control assessments for tax purposes. The advantages, of course, were not all one way. When politics evolved from an upper-class civic obligation to a career, politicians sought job security through control of a variety of factions, clubs, and associations, many of which were sports related or sports based. Baseball and urban politics enjoyed a close and mutually beneficial relationship.

#### BASEBALL PROFESSIONALISM AND THE PROMOTION OF THE CITY

We have followed baseball's evolution from athletic exercise to a competition between clubs representing various neighborhoods, work associations, and ethnic groups. Seeking victory, baseball clubs soon sacrificed localism in exchange for better players who often had to be recruited with payments in violation of prevailing rules. The game became a commercial venture with spectators paying admission to watch the best players play America's game. There was one more development that would firmly set the foundation for the game as we know it today. The game would become national in focus, and that development came not from New York City, the game's birthplace, but from the Midwest.

The New York version of baseball spread westward beyond the Appalachians. Americans enjoyed a new mobility as a result of the spreading railroad, and students and others who watched or played the game on the East Coast brought it home to the

Midwest. That was how the “regulation game” came to Cincinnati in 1860, and within the decade the Queen City would take the lead in establishing baseball as an openly professional commercial enterprise.

Clubs across in the Midwest followed the lead of the New York clubs. They sought out competition against same-city clubs and teams representing nearby municipalities. Large urban centers, such as Chicago and Cincinnati, moved to the next stage by recruiting the best players to represent them on the field of play. It was Cincinnati that first recruited the finest talent nationwide. Ultimately, in 1876 it would be a Chicago businessman and member of the city’s Board of Trade, William Hulbert, who would devise the structure for an eight-team National League of professional baseball clubs.

Throughout the Midwest, cities challenged other cities to baseball matches. That was why Cincinnati formed its first club, in response to a challenge from nearby Dayton, Kentucky. City pride was at stake, and businesses and government would provide the needed financial and other civic support. Hundreds joined as members of the Cincinnati club, but only the “first nine” would play in inter-city competition. Prevailing at this manly sport offered bragging rights, an important American currency. City officials also were quick to identify that political capital was to be made in the ceremonial roles they were given at the games, and the local baseball clubs became surrogates for community aspirations and self-worth. When local notables appeared in the crowd, the game became an endorsed activity.

The eastern clubs, experienced in playing the game, traveled widely as self-proclaimed ambassadors of baseball. They came to teach those in the hinterland who had not yet developed the skills and techniques needed to play the game at the highest level. In the 1860s, the Excelsiors of Brooklyn toured over a thousand miles throughout upstate New York. These travels were financed by the non-playing honorary members of the clubs, as well as by government and business entities. The players on the Nationals of Washington traveled on their government paychecks as clerks at the Treasury Department. The press reported that as a direct result of the tours there was an intense outbreak of “baseball fever.”

All fans of baseball history know about the legendary Cincinnati Red Stockings. Their 1869 undefeated national tour was a significant milestone in the development of the National

Game. The club traveled 12,000 miles and played before a total audience of more than 200,000 spectators. The civic and political leaders of the Queen City, including the city's political boss and publisher of the *Cincinnati Enquirer*, John R. McLean, appreciated the commercial value of sponsoring a baseball team of the best professionals available in order to raise the visibility of the "western" city. They hired Harry Wright to lead their initiative, and Wright would perform splendidly.

Harry Wright was the English-born son of a professional cricket player who came to America to play his father's game for the St. George's Cricket Club of Staten Island, just south of Manhattan. Wright also enjoyed the new American game of baseball, playing for the Knickerbockers for a while before taking a paid position in 1865 in Cincinnati at the Union Cricket Club. The next year, he was recruited to lead the Cincinnati Base Ball Club. He hired his brother George, a brilliant shortstop, and a "first nine" of the finest ballplayers in the nation to join the club at substantial salaries.

The Red Stockings are often referred to as the first all-professional team, but they were not alone. A number of other established clubs entered the 1869 season with a full payroll of open professionals. Until 1869, pay for playing baseball was never openly acknowledged. With the 1869 season as a watershed, the game divided between those clubs who would maintain the old commitment to amateurism and those who saw the business potential of professional entertainment. By 1869, professionals had taken over the National Association and elected James N. Kern, a United States Marshal, as president.

Money meant a commitment to top-level competition, and Cincinnati demonstrated how much success could be achieved. Harry Wright wrote that the club served as "ambassadors for the city." As one Queen City citizen said: "I don't know anything about baseball or town ball, nowadays, but it does me good to see those fellows. They've done something to add to the glory of our city. They advertised the city, advertised us, sir, and helped our business." They visited President Grant at the White House, who called them a "Cinderella" team whose standard of play was high. Although the 1870 tour proved almost as successful on the field, the City fathers had tired of funding the professional team. Club members declined to authorize the five thousand dollars needed to maintain the professional nine and disbanded the team after the season ended. The Red Stockings tour, however, and its

recruitment of the best players nationwide had converted the game from the local to a national stage.

Urban politicians like Boss Tweed and baseball players like Harry Wright worked in tandem to grow the sport of baseball for their own particular purposes. For Tweed, the game further solidified his hold on the public spotlight. For Wright and his cohorts, the game became a source of recognition and remuneration. Their purposes meshed, and in the process they converted a pastoral pastime into a commercial enterprise that would capture American imagination and aspirations.

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Over the past decade, researchers have found online contemporary newspapers, the "first rough draft of history," a phrase coined by Katherine Graham of the *Washington Post* in a speech in 1963. For the most part, early reports of baseball matches were short and hyperbolic. The press would not create separate sports pages until later in the century. By comparison, broad attacks on the Tweed Ring, in particular in the *New York Times*, would fill pages of newsprint. Tweed famously dismissed

the early *Times* reports, but recognized the political damage inflicted by the Nast cartoons in *Harper's Weekly*: "I don't care so much what the papers write about—my constituents can't read—but damn it, they can see pictures."