

BASEBALL Mercury.

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THE PROFESSIONAL LEAGUES.

There have been a number of professional baseball leagues in England. I will give a fairly condensed history of them. 1890

The first was the National League of Professional Baseball Clubs of Great Britain. This was one aspect of the effort to popularise the game in the British Isles launched by A.G. Spalding. His staff in England contacted clubs in the infant Football League, and tried to persuade them to set up baseball clubs which would use the football grounds and the professional soccer players during the summer months. When one considers that Spalding seems to have been willing to finance these baseball sections, the response of the Football League clubs was not overwhelming. Only three clubs took up the offer. These were Aston Villa, Preston North End, and Stoke. Limited companies were established to operate the baseball sections of the three clubs. The entire capital of the three limited companies appears to have been subscribed by Spalding.

A fourth club emerged, this was Derby. I must make it quite clear that this club had no connection with Derby County F.C. The Baseball Ground was laid out by Mr. Francis Ley for his baseball club; and it was used for six seasons mainly for baseball, but also for occasional sports meetings, before Derby County F.C. moved in as tenants of Mr. Ley.

There have been three authentic baseball parks in England, and that at Derby was almost certainly the finest.

The National League was closely based on the model of the National League in the U.S.A. The players had to sign contracts. Most of the players, other than those at Derby, were professional soccer players, but each of the three football connected clubs had one or two players who had played in North America, and who were responsible for coaching and managing. It seems to me to have been a hare-brained idea, to take a group of professional soccer players, and give them about four weeks coaching before launching them as professional baseball players.

Derby were different, Mr. Francis Ley had introduced the game to his works' sports club in 1889, so presumably his employees had a little more background in the game. Mr. Francis Ley also obtained the services of a Mr. Kelly, an American resident in Leicester, to run the team. He also imported two players from North America, Jack Reidenbach and Sam Bullas. These were recruited by his business contacts at Cleveland, Ohio. One condition was that any players sent from America had to be experienced foundry workers, who would either play baseball or work in Ley's foundry, just as Mr. Ley wished. So there was a great difference between the player set-up with Derby, and that of the three other clubs.

In the early weeks of the season, Derby were much the best team. So much so that the other three clubs protested about the use of Reidenbach as a pitcher. He was very formidable against the novice

batters. It seems certain that Mr. Ley gave an undertaking that Reidenbach would not pitch versus Stoke or Preston North End; Aston Villa had improved to the point that they did not need such a guarantee. This undertaking was not honoured, and tremendous bitterness arose. When Derby had built up such a lead that they could not be overtaken in the league championship, Mr. Ley withdrew the club from the competition, claiming that Derby were champions. The National League obviously did not accept the right of a club to withdraw before it had honoured its playing commitments. Accordingly, the League Executive decided to expunge all of Derby's games from the records; eventually Aston Villa won the title.

Preston North End played at Deepdale which is still the home of P.N.E. F.C., Aston Villa played at Perry Bar, they moved to Villa Park around 1895, while Stoke played at a soccer ground which was adjacent to the County Cricket Ground.

There was so much ill-feeling following these events that Mr. Spalding seems to have withdrawn all financial support for baseball in the British Isles. Spalding did consider taking Mr. Ley to court in a breach of contract suit.

Coming forward to the 1930's, Mr. John (now Sir John) Moores launched the National Baseball Association in the autumn of 1933. Mr. Ayres, who seems to have been employed by the Littlewoods group, was delegated to act as organiser. In the winter of 1933 - 34, he succeeded in persuading about 30 teams to take up the sport. These were soccer teams almost certainly, and I feel fairly certain that in view of economic conditions at that time, to persuade such a number of teams to take up American baseball, the equipment must have been provided to them free of charge.

As part of the promotional campaign three games billed as England v. Scotland international matches were staged. The third of these took place at Belle Vue, Manchester. At this game there were many officials of sports organisations in the Greater Manchester area. The game was followed up with a meeting for such officials.

Arising from this activity, it was decided to form a league, and a "professional league" at that. What part Mr. Moores and the N.B.A. played in coming to this decision is not known. Indeed, N.B.A. spokesmen claimed that it was done without his knowledge.

The North of England Baseball League was created ready for the 1935 season, and operated for three seasons, it varied greatly in its set-up for each season that it operated. In 1935 it had eight teams in membership, two of which could claim to be amateur, Bradford Northern, and Rochdale Greys. In 1936 it expanded to form a Division II, and had about 16 teams in membership, some of which were the second teams of clubs in Division I. In 1937 it contracted to one division of six teams. Why these alterations took place is anyone's guess, but it seems reasonable to believe that the expansion in 1936 proved to have been a financial failure, hence the cut-back. In 1937, to make up a six team league it was necessary to include Caledonians, a Liverpool team that had been playing in the amateur league at Liverpool.

In 1935, the north of England League had the following clubs as members. Oldham Greyhounds, a very well organized outfit, operated by the greyhound stadium company. Belle Vue Tigers, which seems to have been run by Belle Vue Gardens, Manchester. Hurst Hawks, Hyde Grasshoppers, Manchester North End Blue Sox, this club played at the Manchester North End F.C. ground, and in 1935 had the services of Jim Sullivan, one of the greatest of all Rugby League stars, he certainly drew many curious people to see this new game. Jim had for many years been a top-class exponent of "English" baseball. Salford R.L.F.C. operated a team, known as Salford Reds, they had the great

Gus Risman among their players. Bradford Northern, an amateur club, which played at Odsal Stadium; and the last club admitted to membership, Rochdale Greys, which played on the Rochdale Football League ground. Rochdale were Mormons, and played as amateurs.

The 1935 champions were Oldham Greyhounds. Two clubs stated that they had made a profit, Bradford Northern and Manchester Blue Sox. Judging from the attendances I would estimate that Oldham, Rochdale, and Salford may have made profits. Attendances at games varied from around 250 up to 4,000.

Hyde Grasshoppers, Bradford Northern, and Salford Reds withdrew after this first season. Hawks were moved from Hurst to Ashton. To fill the vacant places, Liverpool Giants, Blackpool Seagulls, and Bolton Scarlets were admitted. So many teams applied for admission that a second division had to be formed. The greyhound company at Warrington formed a club, Warrington Greys, most of whose players lived in Liverpool. Bury F.C. formed Bury Shakers; Liverpool Royals were the second string of Liverpool Giants. Other teams were Eccles Borough Lions, Rochdale Rangers. Oldham Greyhounds, Manchester Blue Sox, and Blackpool Seagulls seem to have run second teams in this division II.

Following the expansion of 1936, came the sharp contraction of 1937. To round-out the league to six clubs, Caledonians a successful amateur team was included. This club played at the South Liverpool F.C. ground, and included in its ranks one of the great sports names of the day, 'Dixie' Dean, the greatest goal-scorer the Football League has ever seen. Dixie won many baseball trophies and was as proud of them as of those he won for playing soccer.

The league did not operate after 1937.

In 1936, two new professional leagues were formed, the Yorkshire League, and the London Major Baseball League. The Yorkshire League had a little trouble organising its membership. Bradford Northern was given a place, but could not accept it, as the Rugby League club was anxious to improve the surface of its pitch. So another Bradford outfit, Greenfield Giants, was invited to take up this place. Greenfield was probably run by the greyhound race company which gave a home to the club. Another greyhound race company in Bradford at the City Stadium, also stepped into a breach which opened-up later; this was caused when Doncaster, which had accepted a place, decided that its field was not large enough.

The Yorkshire League in 1936 had as members, Scarborough Seagulls, formed by Scarborough F.C., Greenfield Giants, City Sox, Leeds Oaks, Wakefield Cubs, and Dewsbury Royals, the last two clubs played on the Rugby League grounds in those towns. I have seen a reference to Eddie Waring having done the public address job at baseball games at Dewsbury. The other two member clubs were Sheffield Dons, operated by the Sheffield Stadium Company, and Hull. Hull seems to have been promoted by Mr. L.D. Wood, who also promoted the West Ham club in the London Major League. Mr. Wood was also Vice-President of the N.B.A.

In 1936 Greenfield Giants won the league title and also the Yorkshire League Cup. In the final of the Cup Greenfield beat Sheffield Dons in a mid-week evening game played at Craven Park, Hull, in front of 5,000 spectators.

1937 saw Hull win the Yorkshire League, and also the N.B.A. Challenge Cup, but Hull were beaten by Leeds Oaks in the final of the Yorkshire League Cup. 1937 was the final season for the Yorkshire League; like the North of England League it was discontinued to allow for the formation of the Lancashire-Yorkshire Major League.

The London Major League operated for two seasons 1936 and 1937. It was probably the most ambitious launching in the 1930's, most of the players were ice-hockey players connected with the ice-

hockey league which operated in the London area. The baseball clubs seem to have been financed mainly by greyhound racing organisations, in its first season, 1936, each of the clubs in the London Major League seems to have played in a stadium which also staged greyhound racing. In 1936 the London League began with seven clubs in membership. These were White City, Harringay, Hackney Royals, Romford Wasps, Streatham & Mitcham Giants, Catford Saints (a Mormon team whose players were amateur), and West Ham. The last club had the best publicity set-up, and was often described as the most talented team ever to play in England.

The fact remains that in spite of its publicity machine, and its good record for home attendance, West Ham never won a major trophy. In 1936 the club gave many sparkling displays, but in crucial games was never able to overcome White City. White City probably turned in the greatest performance of any club ever to play in England when winning three major trophies in 1936, the championship of the London Major League, the London Major League Cup, and the N.B.A. Challenge Cup. The final of the latter cup was won versus Catford Saints, who had won it in 1935, playing as New London.

Unfortunately, White City only operated for the 1936 season. The greyhound racing people seem to have given thumbs-down to baseball, and in 1937 only two tracks still hosted ball clubs. These were West Ham and Romford, and each track took on board an extra club, West Ham hosted "Pirates", and Romford "Corinthians". Catford Saints functioned but were turned out of Catford Stadium, and had to seek a home with Nunhead F.C., this club also acted as host to Nunhead Baseball Club. So the London Major League functioned in a greatly contracted form. Half way through the season Nunhead folded. The title was won by Romford Wasps, which had finished last in 1936.

In 1938 only one professional league operated under the auspices of the N.B.A., this was the Lancashire-Yorkshire Major League. The N.B.A. seems to have taken over the management of several of the clubs, and the original intention was that the professional element would be drastically reduced. Accounts differ, but either two or three was to be the maximum number of professionals with each club. This meant a great cut-back in paid players, as in 1937 there had been 17 professional clubs each of which could use an unlimited number of players, while in 1938 there were ten clubs, and even with three professionals a club, this only allowed for a total of 30 professional players.

This cut-back provided an opportunity for an "outlaw" league to pick up many professional players. This was the International League which had member clubs at Newcastle, Middlesbrough, Halifax, Leeds, and Hull. It was an unfortunate venture, the N.B.A. had decided to place a club in Halifax; in Hull, Hull Giants were in direct competition with the well-established Hull club. While in Leeds, a city for which I have never been able to find out anything concerning attendances, the International League club played at Ellana Road, which the N.B.A. club had left in order to move to Headingley. The International League only operated for a few weeks. Some of its better players were absorbed by the N.B.A. clubs.

As for the Lancashire-Yorkshire Major League it had ten clubs in membership in 1938, Hull, Sheffield, Leeds, York City Maroons, Greenfield, Oldham, Rochdale, Liverpool, Bolton Scarlets, and Halifax. I do not know why some of these clubs were selected; Bolton for instance had played one season, 1936, and then dropped-out. Halifax had never had professional baseball. Halifax as it turned out was an excellent choice, it did well at the gate and on the field, winning the league title in 1938 and in 1939.

In 1939 further contraction followed, York City Maroons, Bolton, and Sheffield dropped-out. Sheffield had gone all out to promote

seasons.

So top-league baseball under the N.B.A. was in constant change. Two teams, Oldham Greyhounds and Rochdale Greys played every season from 1935 to 1939, although Oldham once faced a severe crisis, and had to be taken over by the N.B.A.

As for direct benefit to amateur baseball, this varied from town to town. Amateur baseball exploded in Hull; in Bradford, Leeds, York, Halifax, Oldham, Rochdale, and Manchester a much more modest development took place. The same could be said of Greater London. The amateur game was quite big in Liverpool before the arrival of professional ball in that city, and the number of amateur clubs did not seem to increase after the formation of Liverpool Giants.

To the best of my present knowledge professional baseball in Bury, Bolton, Blackpool, Warrington, Dewsbury, and Scarborough did not lead to the emergence of any amateur clubs. In Sheffield no senior amateur clubs seemed to emerge, but a small schoolboys' league was formed.

The next issue of Baseball Mercury should appear in August. Items for inclusion are always welcome.

The B.A.B.S.F. Executive have decided that the cost of publishing Baseball Mercury will be met by the B.A.B.S.F.: and that area representatives will become responsible for distribution and sale in their respective areas.

Future issues will contain a certain amount of official information supplied by the B.A.B.S.F. President, Don Smallwood.

For persons who are not in contact with clubs, it is still possible to subscribe directly; please send a remittance of 50p. to William Morgan, this will ensure receipt of three issues.

BELGIUM 1980.

Premier Division.	<u>G</u>	<u>W</u>	<u>L</u>	<u>%</u>
BERCHEM B.C., Berchem	28	22	6	.786
General Motors, Antwerpen	28	19	9	.679
Luchtbal, Antwerpen	28	18	10	.643
Borgerhout B.C., Borgerhout	28	16	12	.571
Antwerp B.C., Antwerpen	28	15	13	.536
Bell Pioneers, Hoboken	28	15	13	.536
Spartans, Leurne	28	7	21	.250
Zeeuwse Honk, Terneuzen	28	0	28	.000

Most Valuable Player, Albert de Lannoy, Borgerhout Squirrels. In Belgium this award is based on a points system which considers the various aspects of play. Albert de Lannoy led in RBI's (33), Home runs(8), and Assists (71). Batting champion was Robby Timmermans (.456). Pitching trophy was won for the sixth time since 1975 by Arthur Weyenberg, Berchem Stars, whose E.R.A. was 1.51. He was followed by Arthur Leemans(Luchtbal), and Frank Mathijs(Antwerp Eagles).

In Womens softball, Vera van de Ven, of champion team General Motors, won two trophies. She was Most Valuable Player, and Best Pitcher, her E.R.A. was 1.66. Batting champion was a 16 year old, Lizzy Dams a player with the relegated Bell Pioneers, her figure was .591.

JAPAN 1980.CENTRAL LEAGUE

	<u>W</u>	<u>L</u>	<u>T</u>	<u>%</u>
HIROSHIMA	73	44	13	.624
Yakult	68	52	10	.567
Yomiuri	61	60	9	.504
Taiyo	59	62	9	.488
Hanshin	54	66	10	.450
Chunichi	45	76	9	.372

PACIFIC LEAGUE

	<u>W</u>	<u>L</u>	<u>T</u>	<u>%</u>
KINTETSU	68	54	8	.557
Lotte	61	51	15	.556
Nippon Ham	66	53	11	.555
Seibu	62	64	4	.492
Hankyu	58	67	5	.464
Nankai	48	77	5	.384

The Central League batting champion was Kenichi(Chunichi) with .369. The home run leader was Koji Yamamoto with 44, he also led in RBI's with 112.

The Pacific League batting champion was Leron Lee with .358. Charles Manuel(Kintetsu) led in home runs with 48, and RBI's with 129. Isamu Kida(Nippon Ham) led pitchers in ERA 2.28, he was most winning pitcher with 22 wins and 8 losses.

Earlier this year Japanese baseball officials had discussions with the Cuban government regarding the possibility of recruiting Cuban players. It is probable that if Cuba permits this, any players recruited will initially play in the Japan Industrial League as subsidised 'Amateurs'.

Central League Pennant Wins. Yomiuri Giants - 30: Hanshin Tigers - 10: Hiroshima Toyo Carp - 3: Chunichi Dragons - 2: Yakult Swallows - 1: Yokohama Taiyo Whales - 1.

Pacific League Pennant Wins. Nankai Hawks - 12: Hankyu Braves - 9: Seibu Lions - 5: Lotte Orions - 4: Kintetsu Buffaloes - 2: Nippon Ham Fighters - 1.

1980 Results NATIONAL COMPETITIONS.ITALY

	<u>W</u>	<u>L</u>	<u>%</u>
DERBIGUM RIMINI	30	6	.833
Glen Grant Nettuno	29	7	.806
Biemme Bologna	24	12	.667
ParmaLat Parma	22	14	.611
Edilfonte Milano	16	20	.444
Juventus Torino	16	20	.444
Rio Grande Grosseto	16	20	.444
Comello- Ronchi del Legionari	10	26	.278
Novalit Anzio	9	27	.250
Caleppio Novara	8	28	.222

DENMARK

	<u>W</u>	<u>L</u>	<u>%</u>
COMETS, Horsholm	7	1	.875
Munkene, Gentofte	6	2	.750
The Bats, Lyngbe	4	3	.571
Blagelse B.C.	2	5	.286
Tigers, Gilleleje	1	5	.167
A.B.C., Gentofte	0	4	.000

HOLLAND

	<u>W</u>	<u>L</u>	<u>T</u>	<u>%</u>
AMSTEL TIJGERS	28	7	1	.792
Kok Juwelier Neptunus	21	12	3	.625
Haarlem Nicols	20	13	3	.597
Fresh Up Quick	19	15	2	.556
Unique Giants	19	16	-	.543
Nikon H.C.A.W.	18	16	2	.528
A.D.O. Den Haag	14	20	1	.414
Ola-U.V.V.	14	21	1	.403
Vax Kinheim	12	22	2	.361
S.C. Feyenoord	6	29	1	.181

CZECHOSLOVAKIA

	<u>W</u>	<u>L</u>	<u>%</u>
TEMPO, Praha	13	2	.867
Technika, Brno	11	4	.733
Kovo, Praha	10	5	.667
Motorlet, Praha	7	8	.467
Podoli, Praha	5	10	.333
Prirodny vedy Praha	4	11	.267
Zahradnictvi, Praha	1	11	.083

SPAIN

Play-off national championship
Copa S.M. El Rey

	W	L	%
CONDEPOLS C.B.M. (Madrid)	15	3	.833
Iturrigorri (Bilbao)	10	8	.556
Cinco Reinas	7	11	.389
Hippocampo (Barcelona)			
C.D. Irabia (Pamplona)	4	14	.222

POLAND

	W	L	%
K.S. SILESIA, Rybnik	6	0	1.000
K.S. Gornik, Bugoszwice	3	3	.500
Ludowy K.S., Roj	0	6	.000

SWEDEN

	W	L	%
Sunayberg	19	2	.905
Leksand	17	3	.850
Bagarmossen	15	6	.714
Skarpnack	12	7	.650
Ljudal	7	14	.333
Sundsvall	7	14	.333
Ormkar	4	17	.190
Rattvik	1	20	.048

WEST GERMANY

The Deutscher Baseball verband, the new name of the west German Federation, concentrated in 1980 on its Cadet programme for youngsters of 15 and 16 years of age.

CADETS	W	L	%
TORNADOES I	5	0	1.000
Koblenz	2	1	.667
Zulpich	3	2	.600
Wiesbaden	3	2	.600
Munchen	1	2	.333
Tornadoes II	1	2	.333
Stuttgart	1	2	.333
Iadenburg	1	2	.333
Rheinau	0	2	.000
Amigos Mannheim	0	2	.000

The Swedish Championship is decided by play-off series among the top four clubs in the league. Semi-finals: Sunayberg beat Skarpnack; Bagarmossen beat Leksand. Finals: BAGARMOSSEN beat Sundryberg.

The Swedish Baseball & Softball Federation celebrates its Silver Jubilee in 1981; it was formed as a baseball federation in 1956 with a handful of clubs. Now it has 35 clubs with about 100 teams. Quite a number of clubs operate more than one senior baseball team, plus several youth teams, plus womens' softball teams. I met Lasse Aberg, Press Officer of the Swedish Federation in Amsterdam last September, and he told me that his own club had a budget of £16,000 last year.

The three oldest existing clubs are Bagarmossens B.S. (1956), Skarpnacks B.K. (1961), and Leksands B.K. (1962).

Fifteen of the clubs are concentrated in the Stockholm area, the others are scattered over a vast area.

THE E.B.A. GAME:

Several people have asked me questions concerning 'Welsh' baseball. As far as I am concerned this is an incorrect description which has even crept into reputable books of reference. I describe it as English baseball. I give a brief account of its origin below.

In the mid-1880's, a body, the National Physical Recreation Society, which encouraged sport in general, approved a codification of the rules of rounders which was being fairly widely played by men. The leading centre was Liverpool, and a group there drew up a new code and formed The National Rounders Association, this was in 1885.

In March 1889, the Spalding Baseball Tourists played in Liverpool, they also played baseball versus the Liverpool rounders people, and played rounders versus Liverpool. The famous A.G. Spalding, actually bowled in the rounders match. Later that year a group of American College Players also played in Liverpool. Arising from these contacts, The National Rounders Association decided after the 1889 season to adopt several ideas from the American game.

The rules changes were to adopt double-handed batting, to adopt the junior baseball (the rounders ball had been smaller and softer), to abolish the rule whereby a base-runner could be put out by being

hit by a thrown ball. The bowler was moved back to 50 feet from the batting crease(the pitching distance in the American game was 50 feet at that time). Base-runners were to be put out by being touched with the ball held in the fielder's hand. Under certain conditions the base could also be touched. These rules were adopted for the 1890 season, and were adopted by the Gloucester Rounders Association, the South Wales Rounders Association, and the Scottish Rounders Association also.

The N.R.A. held its A.G.M. for 1892, in April in Liverpool. It was decided that as these new rules had transformed the former game, the name rounders was misleading, so the organisation decided to change its name to the English Baseball Association, and the game was to be called 'English Baseball', the other associations followed this decision to change their titles. Over the years the game has become stronger in South Wales than in Liverpool, so we now have the position when people actually believe that it began in South Wales and spread to Liverpool.

The game is played on a diamond, the distance from the batting crease to 2nd. base is 100ft., from 1st. base across to 3rd. base 88ft. Distance between bases, which are wooden or metal posts, is 66 feet, except 3rd. to 4th, base which is 51ft. The bat is 36 inches long, and is made like a cricket bat, except that it tapers from 2½" at the handle end to 3½" at the other end. This flat blade gives a batter much more control over the ball than is allowed by the American bat. The batter is also allowed to hit the ball in any direction. Although there are eleven fielders, as they have to cover an area about four times as large as the fielders in the American game, the batters are very definitely in "the driver's seat". A run is scored for each base reached by a batter before he comes to a halt; and a four run hit is quite common.

The bowler has to deliver the ball with a smooth underarm action. If the delivery crosses the batting crease between the chin and the front knee of the batter, the referee calls 'good'; two 'goods' not struck at puts the batter out. If the batter strikes and misses, he has to run to 1st. base, if he manages to reach it safely, his team scores a 'bye', which is one run. However, if the bowler's delivery is outside the area described, then the referee calls 'bad', a second 'bad' makes an extra; this is one run to the batting side. The batter may stand and get several 'extras'.

From my observation, in most games most put-outs occur as a result of catches. Sometimes a bowler gets an inspired spell, and batters may just not be able to hit his deliveries; in this case the backstop just catches the ball, moves after the batter-baserunner, and touches him with the ball to make the put-out. Every batter on the team has to be put-out to terminate an innings.

The clothing worn is as for soccer, no gloves are used except by the backstop who uses a pair of padded gloves of a distinctive type, they just come to the wrist, not like cricket wicket-keepers gloves. The backstop may also wear a mask.

The fielding positions are bowler, backstop, longstop(he fields 30 to 45 feet behind the backstop), 1st., 2nd., and 3rd. basemen. 1st. 2nd., centre, 3rd., and 4th. covers. In relation to the American game, the covers could be described as outfielders. Each team usually has two innings, although there is a follow-on rule. The team which bats second can be compelled to take its second innings if it has a score more than 30 runs behind its rival's first innings. Scores can vary enormously, from a few per innings up to over 200 in an innings; but in the average game scores would be around 40 to 70 in an innings.

The international series, England versus Wales began in 1908; of about 55 games played to date, Wales have won about two thirds. The game's greatest handicap is the huge area needed to play it.