

January 01, 2002

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Recommended Citation

Abrams, Roger, "Constructing baseball: Boston and the first World Series" (2002). *School of Law Faculty Publications*. Paper 215.
<http://hdl.handle.net/2047/d20002628>

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CONSTRUCTING BASEBALL: BOSTON AND THE FIRST WORLD SERIES

*Roger I. Abrams**

Societal cohesiveness is a condition precedent to the legitimacy of legal rules. Shared norms of behavior are learned characteristics. Perhaps in some small measure, the shared experience of baseball among millions of immigrants facilitated the emergence of a consensus within society that supported a common set of understandings. Even if it did not, it was still a “swell time” for those Americans—new and old—who witnessed the first World Series, a vital step in constructing the National Pastime.

INTRODUCTION

The 1903 World Series marked the first post-season tournament between the pennant winners of the National and American Leagues of baseball. After two years of bitter commercial warfare and a peace treaty signed before the 1903 season, the two major circuits of baseball clubs were ready for combat once again, this time on the field and not in the board offices. At the time, no one appreciated that this post-season event would be repeated annually—with but two interruptions—for a century. Outside of the cities of the two competitors, Boston and Pittsburgh, few took much notice. However, in those cities baseball fanatics were enthralled by the spectacle. The newspapers devoted banner headlines and multiple columns of print to the unfolding events on the diamond. They also focused on the crowds of spectators. Political, civic and business leaders

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joined the cheering throngs who would fill Boston's Huntington Avenue Grounds and Pittsburgh's Exposition Park beyond their capacities.

Of course, other events captured the public's attention during the first two weeks of October in 1903. Boston hosted a symbolically important visit from the British Honourables, the London artillery brigade that reminded Boston's Brahmins and Yankees of their Anglo heritage. Jews—both Germans and the recently arrived Russians, Litvaks and Galitzianers—observed Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the Jewish year. The Democratic Party of Massachusetts held its nominating convention, once again dominated by the sons of Irish immigrants. Yet the Hub was “baseball crazy,” said the local dailies.

Traditionally, baseball history focuses on the stories of the men who played the game. Every child knows of Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig, Ty Cobb and Joe DiMaggio. The 1903 World Series had some superb players—Hall-of-Famers Cy Young, Honus Wagner, Jimmy Collins and Fred Clarke to name just four. It had some unexpected heroes, like Bill Dineen and Deacon Phillippe, two pitchers who reached the apex of their careers in October 1903. But the game as a distinctive cultural icon held greater significance than a mere child's game played by talented young athletes on a grassy refuge in the urban landscape.

Baseball fascinated the public because fans felt they participated by rooting for their favorite team, suffering when they lost, and sharing glory in their victories. Baseball fanatics identified with their “hometown” teams, even though few, if any, of the players on that team hailed from that hometown. Few of the spectators were natives either.

Baseball was more than a business—although it certainly was a profitable commercial enterprise. It was a social phenomenon. Baseball had spectators and rooters, not a passive audience. Both those on the field and in the stands were immigrants or the progeny of immigrants sharing a common secular experience.

The immigrants to America, who intersected on these shores, forged a new polity, one divided by class, race, and religion, but united by an affiliation to a new urban space with evolving social and economic norms. Baseball was a cultural event involving all their lives, a public activity with a noteworthy diversity of spectators. They came out to root for the men who had found work representing the cities the immigrants had also adopted. More than that, the immigrant fanatics of baseball had adopted America's game as their own.

By the turn of the twentieth century, the mass influx of

immigrants over the prior half-century had altered the reality of the cities. As Boston Brahmin Henry Adams wrote: “The old universe was thrown into the ash heap and a new one created.” The order of things—what Adams called “restraint, law and unity”—had been changed forever. The old stock remained socially dominant but apart, as aristocracies had learned to do around the world. The dreams of easy assimilation under the enlightened leadership of a select group of families gave way to the reality that immigrants would continue to disturb the settled fabric of the commonweal. Even the new technology proved unnerving: “Prosperity never before imagined, power never yet wielded by man, speed never reached by anything but a meteor, had made the world irritable, nervous, querulous, unreasonable and afraid,” said Adams.

The new manufacturing economy produced numerous consequences. Gradually, some immigrants and their progeny moved out of ranks of abject poverty into the working class. They sought out pastimes for enjoyment of their time of leisure. As James Garfield once said, the struggle of the human race was divided into two chapters—the struggle to acquire leisure and the struggle to know what to do with it.

There was at least one circumstance—and perhaps only one circumstance—where dominant and subordinate groups, new and old immigrants, could come together if not as equals, then at least as co-participants. The cheers of all were of equal weight at the baseball park. Although segregated within the stadium by class—the menu of ticket prices ensured that—all could claim equal “ownership” in this one enterprise. Unlike sporting clubs with restricted memberships, the park was open to all who could pay the price of admission. And the park was a welcomed refuge of green amidst a city of grays and browns, smoke and noise.

The players on the field at the Huntington Avenue Grounds wore “BOSTON” on their uniforms, a source of great community pride. These were young men from a variety of ethnic groups. The Boston ballplayers were known as Collins’s boys, after Irishman Jimmy Collins, their stalwart captain and manager who hailed from industrial Buffalo. Although the franchise in 1903 was owned by a Milwaukee attorney, Henry Killilea, the baseball club really belonged to the Irish, the Jews, and the Yankees—to the entire city of Boston.

From early spring to late fall, the game of baseball was everywhere—played by children within their segregated neighborhoods, young adults in social, work and church groups and by a few extremely talented professionals at the ballpark.

Most could identify with, cheer for, and claim ownership in the local professional nine. As a popular song of the era said:

The men who lead the world today in all athletic games
Are brawny sons of Uncle Sam, with good old Yankee names.
Brady and O'Toole, Dooin and McColl
McInemy and McBarney, Harrigan, McVey and Kearney. . .
Connie Mack and John McGraw—all together shout Hurrah! . . .
There's Rosenheimer, Jacobs, Weiner, Gimble, Sax and Straus
They're all good American names!

Professional baseball did not transform immigrants into Americans, but as Professor Ted White has written, a “remarkable synergy existed between the game of baseball and the aspiration of Americans.” Immigrants could never connect to the founders of their new country, but they could identify with the players on the hometown club, themselves the sons of immigrants. By the end of the nineteenth century, as Frank Deford has aptly observed, “baseball was developing as a kind of adhesive that held together the evolving modern city and all its diverse types.”

A “COMMONER EVENT”

The crowds began arriving at the wooden gates by 1:00 p.m., two hours before game time. They had come to witness the first game of the first World Series, and newspapers had cautioned patrons to arrive early if they were to attend “what is expected to be the greatest series in the history of baseball.” It was October 1, 1903, a cloudy early fall day in Boston.

The first World Series was the brainchild of the owner of the National League Pittsburgh club, Barney Dreyfuss, a German Jewish immigrant, referred to by the Pittsburgh newspapers as the “little magnate.” The 1903 regular season had produced two runaway victors, Dreyfuss’s mighty Pirates of Pittsburgh, who had captured their third straight National League title, and the Boston club of the upstart American League. (The eight local newspapers referred to the club as the Boston “Americans” or sometimes as the “Pilgrims.” They would not receive their hosiery nickname, “Red Sox,” until 1907.) The Boston papers had heralded a “great struggle,” as the leagues’ champions were to “meet for blood” at 3:00 p.m. A reporter for the *Pittsburgh Press* cabled: “The enthusiasm is greater than has ever before been seen in this city.” Boston was “baseball mad.”

The electric trolley cars disgorged their human contents along crowded Huntington Avenue about a half mile west of Copley Square. On the north side of the thoroughfare stood Boston's magnificent three-year-old Symphony Hall. On the south side of Huntington was the left field wall of the huge wooden edifice, the Huntington Avenue Grounds, that beckoned the throng that day. Erected only three years earlier as the first home of the Boston Americans—Cy Young had christened the quickly constructed Grounds with his first American League win on April 30, 1901—the playing field was expansive. Left field measured 350 feet down the line, right field a mere 280. No one had ever accurately measured center field—sometimes referred to as “middle field”—but it was estimated at an impressive 530 feet from home plate. Located on the trolley car line on the border of Boston and Roxbury's Mission Hill, the new park was easily reached by fanatics of the team. The Boston Nationals, called the Beaneaters, played in an adjoining facility, the South End Grounds. To attract fans to cross over the New York, New Haven and Hartford Railroad tracks from the South End and desert the National League Beaneaters, Charles Somers, the first owner of the American League franchise in Boston, had set admission at half the price of a National League game. He had also signed a team of strong, experienced major leaguers, many well-known “artistes” from the roster of the Beaneaters. By 1903, the public's affection had switched to the Americans.

Pittsburgh Pirate rooters, who had accompanied their heroes to the Hub from Western Pennsylvania, “expressed the utmost confidence” in the outcome. The Pirates and their followers, including many gamblers, boarded at the Vendome Hotel on Commonwealth Avenue in the Back Bay during their stay in the Hub. Most of the Boston players stayed at the Putnam Hotel on Huntington Avenue.

The *Boston Post* reported that Bostonians were ready for the match: “Interest all over the city and by all classes is at fever heat. In the downtown hotels and sporting resorts [betting parlors] last evening nothing else was talked of.” Boston's general manager Joe Smart had doubled admission prices for the occasion. Spectators paid fifty cents for bleacher seats and standing room and one dollar for grandstand seats.

By 2:00 p.m., the 9,000 bench seats down both foul lines were taken, but the crowds continued to roll in waves from the trolley cars. Men sat on “every available inch of the big 12-foot fence” that surrounded the outfield. “Thousands and thousands filed down the little avenue to the entrances and went their separate

ways as determined by their desires and their purses.” More than 16,000 “wildly enthusiastic” fans attended that day’s festivities, thousands sitting on the walls and ringing the outfield behind ropes, the largest crowd ever to see a baseball game in Boston. A contingent of policemen kept order in the good-natured crowd. The *Post* reported: “Everybody seemed to be at the game. Business men rubbed shoulders with their clerks, and City Hall ‘pols’ and their heelers were on an equal footing. Like a Harvard-Yale football game, almost everyone of any importance was to be seen.”

The *Herald* echoed this chorus: “Side by side sat clerks, ministers and sports, college professors and graduates of the sand lots, all bound together by one great all-absorbing love for the national game.” It was a rare “commoner event” where all of Boston participated and cheered together to achieve the same goal.

1. The People of Boston

Representatives of all segments of the Boston populous had enthusiastically embraced their new sports heroes. The Royal Rooters, a contingent of Irish men dressed in their Sunday finest—one could purchase the new “Continental Special” bowler hat for \$2.00—were the greatest baseball fanatics. They occupied reserved bleacher seats behind first base. Charley Lavis was the “master of ceremonies,” teamed with saloonkeeper Mike “Nuf Ced” McGreevey. McGreevey’s bar, the “Third Base,” was the Rooters’ regular post-game roost. (It was a “rule of baseball,” of course, to touch “third base” on your way “home.”)

Prizefighter James J. Corbett took his front seat among the Boston Rooters, and local hero John L. Sullivan, the “Boston Strong Boy,” sat on the players bench chatting with manager Collins before the game began. More than a decade earlier, Corbett had won the heavyweight world championship by knocking out Sullivan in the 21st round of their historic match in New Orleans. That was the “Great John L’s” last fight. Corbett held the heavyweight title from 1892 until 1897, and had just fought his last fight on August 14, 1903, against champion James Jeffries.

Former Massachusetts Governor Winthrop Murray Crane was also in attendance. A member of the wealthy Dalton family, he managed the family’s stock portfolio and philanthropic activities before entering politics. The following year, Crane

would accept the legislature's appointment to the United States Senate. John I. Taylor, son of the patrician owner of the *Boston Globe*, General Charles Taylor, took his regular seat behind home plate. Taylor would play a critical role in Boston baseball history. In 1904, he would become the Brahmin owner of the Boston club, which he renamed the Red Sox in 1907. Using his father's money, he built his club a new concrete stadium, Fenway Park, that would open in 1912.

Politicians attending the Democratic State Convention skipped the afternoon session to attend the sporting festivities. Boston Mayor Patrick A. Collins could not attend, however. Just before the team took the field, Street Commissioner James A. Galvin presented Boston's Collins with a note from the Mayor:

Baseball Team

Huntington Avenue Grounds

Dear Sir—In a contest between Boston and any other city for supremacy, either in the domain of brain or brawn, the sympathies and best wishes of our citizens are always with Boston champions.

In this spirit and interpreting the popular desire, I sincerely hope that your brave corps of ball players will triumph over the invading forces of Pittsburgh, as they have triumphed over all their opponents during the season.

Some of Boston's loyal fans were not in attendance for that first game, but would attend later contests. Many German and Russian Jews, Boston's newest immigrant group, were otherwise occupied on October 1, 1903. It was Yom Kippur. They would be present for the second game, led by Rabbi Charles Fleischer, the distinguished patriarch of Boston's oldest congregation. He viewed the game as the guest of Barney Dreyfuss and his Pittsburgh rabbi who had made the trip east with the Pirates owner. (Five years later in an article in *Baseball Magazine*, Rabbi Fleischer would extol the virtues of the sport, expressing his personal love for the game of baseball.)

2. The Rival Clubs

On paper, the rivals in the 1903 World Series seemed fairly matched. As one close follower of the game said to the *Boston Post*: "You may as well toss up a penny and pick the winner as to try to figure out which team should win." Each club had its enthusiasts, and all spectators looked forward to the spirited contests. The *Pittsburgh Press* opined: "If confidence would win

games, the opening contest would certainly result in a tie.”

The powerful Pittsburgh club had won its third pennant of the new century, powered by strong hitting and steady pitching. In 1903, it won 91 games and lost only 49, six games ahead of its nearest rival, John McGraw's New York Giants. The club's nickname, the Pirates, had been affixed in 1891, when the Philadelphia Athletics of the American Association failed to sign their star infielder Louis Bierbauer. The second baseman signed a contract with the Pittsburgh club, and the Athletics protested Pittsburgh's action, labeling them “pirates” for stealing Bierbauer. The Pittsburgh faithful adopted the moniker as their own.

First among the Pirate stars was the great shortstop Honus Wagner, generally referred to as “Hans” or “the Dutchman,” who led the National League in batting that year with a .355 average and in triples with 19. The *Pittsburgh Press* called him the team's “bright particular star.” Other Pirates complemented Wagner's productive bat and prodigious fielding. Center fielder Ginger Beaumont, the speedy lead-off man, had been the 1902 National League batting champion at .357 and led the 1903 Pirates in runs, hits, games played, and at bats. Well-liked manager Fred Clark played left field and Jimmy Sebring was in right. Surrounding Wagner in the infield was the diminutive Tommy Leach at third, Claude Richey at second. The 200-pound William Bransfield, called “Kitty” because of his feminine hairstyle, anchored first. Eddie Phelps caught most games that season for the Pittsburgh nine.

The Pirates had started the season with a powerful pitching staff. Charles Phillippe (24-7), referred to as “Deacon” because of his sterling character, and Sam Leever (25-7), had both logged stellar seasons. Leever had led the National League with a 2.06 earned-run average, but by season's end his arm was tiring. Phillippe would bear most of the work from the mound during the 1903 Series. Pittsburgh's third starter, Ed Doheny (16-8), had been overcome by paranoid delusions. On September 22, Doheny's clergyman brother brought him home to Andover, Massachusetts, just north of Boston. He would never play baseball again. Old “Brickyard” Kennedy (9-6) was in the last year of a thirteen-year major league career, all but two campaigns with the Brooklyn Bridegrooms (also known as the Trolley Dodgers, later shortened to the familiar Dodgers). Two little-used rookies, Bucky Veil (5-3) and Gus Thompson (2-2), completed the staff. The Pirates were a tough and seasoned club.

The Boston Americans carried 14 players on their roster during the 1903 season, including five pitchers and one little-used

utility fielder. Thus, the starting eight field players played every game. Led by the immensely popular Collins, who served as the field manager and captain, as well as the star third baseman, the club attracted widespread interest among the Boston fanatics, especially from the City's strong Irish contingent. In its "history of the members of a champion team" published two days before the first game of the World Series, the *Boston Herald* wrote of Collins with hometown hyperbole: "His record with the Boston Nationals and Americans is so well known that any discussion on this point is superfluous." The *Post* wrote: "Much of the American League's popularity in this city belongs to Collins. . . . His players swear by him." Known for his modesty and lack of conceit, he was the leading personality on the pennant-winning club. Jacob C. Morse, the *Boston Herald's* expert, said the inhabitants of the bleachers of this country would elect Collins "the supreme 'it' of the baseball fraternity. . . . The secret of it is that Jim Collins is just chock full of baseball."

The American's first baseman was Candy Lachance. A dour veteran of ten years in the majors, Lachance had joined the club from the Cleveland Americans in 1902. "Though anything but a showy player," according to the *Herald*, Lachance was "a wonder in fielding bad throws . . . and is sure on fly balls." Hobe Ferris, "the fastest thrower in the league," played second base, and little Freddy Parent, a native of Maine of French-Canadian descent, had enjoyed a career year at shortstop, batting .304 with 80 RBI.

In Boston's outfield, the powerful Patsy Dougherty played left. Dougherty led the League in runs and hits and batted .331 for the 1903 campaign to lead all Boston batters, ranking third in the circuit after Cleveland's Larry Lajoie (.344) and Detroit's Sam Crawford (.335). Chick Stahl patrolled the broad reaches of the Huntington Avenue Grounds center field, and Buck Freeman, who led the League in home runs with 13 and RBI with 104, played right field.

The Boston pitching staff was led by the still formidable 34-year-old hurler, Cy Young (28-9), who had led the American League that season with 34 complete games, seven shutouts, and 341 $\frac{2}{3}$ innings pitched while, at the same time, batting .321. During the 1903 campaign, Young had surpassed Pud Galvin's record (361) for the most victories in baseball history. He finished the year with 379 wins and would complete his career eight years later with the insurmountable record of 511 victories. Bill Dineen (21-13), who would prove to be a Series' hero for the Boston nine, and Long Tom Hughes (20-7), afflicted with a sore arm at season's end, completed the starting rotation. Cy Young's pal, the light-

hitting Lou Criger, "the greatest catcher living," caught most of the games for the Bostons. He was lauded in the Pittsburgh newspaper for his "marvelous throwing to the pillows," a significant threat to the Pirates' base-stealing ability.

The *Boston Post* reported that this Pittsburgh club was "one of the speediest teams in the game. With a man on first a base hit will in almost every case put him on third." If Boston were to prevail, it would have to counteract Pittsburgh's hit-and-run game.

This then would be the match-up: A three-time National League pennant winning club with Honus Wagner's hitting and fielding against the upstart American League's champions from Boston with veteran pitching from Cy Young and Bill Dineen. Most observers thought one club or the other would not easily win the Series, and they were prescient. It would be, as the *Post* had predicted, "a battle royal." "These things can never be properly told, but they will go down in history with the spectators who heard and saw them," wrote the *Herald*.

3. The Contest Commences

Each club supplied one umpire for the game—Hank O'Day for the Nationals and Tommy Connolly for the Americans—and both were subject to the approval of the opposition. The two men would umpire the entire Series, taking turns behind the plate. A gong sounded, and Umpire Connolly barked "Play." Cy Young took the mound for the Boston squad.

Young quickly dispatched Beaumont on a fly to center and Clarke, who fouled out to the catcher. Then with two outs the Pirates erupted for four runs that would ensure the National League club's victory in the opening contest. With two strikes on Leach, who had earlier been reported as ill, he flied deep to right and his hit fell among the roped-off, right field crowd and was ruled a ground-rule triple. Wagner lined a single over the shortstop's head, driving Leach home. The "Flying Dutchman" then stole second, moved to third on Ferris' error on Bransfield's grounder and came home on a double steal. "Old dependable Cy" was not able to "stem the tide." Ritchey walked and Sebring, the hitting star of the day, tallied Bransfield and Ritchey on a single to left, the first of three safeties for the right fielder, including an inside-the-park home run in the seventh inning to the far reaches of center field. The home town team seemed to observers to be nervous at the start. The previously boisterous Boston crowd sat in silence.

Deacon Philippe was masterful on the mound for the Pirates, “from first to last like the artist that he is,” said the *Pittsburgh Press*. The *Post* reported: “To Philippe mainly belongs the credit of Pittsburgh’s victory.” The Bostons went 1-2-3 the first three innings—five of the first seven batters struck out—and the Americans did not score until the bottom of the seventh, by which time Pittsburgh had taken an insurmountable 7-0 lead. Philippe pitched “a game that the locals simply could not fathom.” His “high drop ball and a wide out curve that swept continually beyond the reach of the longest bat kept Captain Collins’s men stretching their necks and shoulders . . . in a vain effort to connect.”

Both pitchers hurled complete games, the norm in 1903, but Phillippe won the day. The *Globe* opined, “it’s not often that Uncle Cyrus fails to land the money, even if he is a bit fat.” (He was quite hefty by his mid-30s.) Young would make up for his game one performance before the Series was completed, however. The final score that day was 7-3, a propitious beginning for the National League entry, in a game that took less than two hours to complete. The Americans appeared unsettled and uncertain in their play. In particular, their usually reliable catcher, Lou Criger, seemed unsteady with two throwing errors. (The *Pittsburgh Press* reported that Criger was so upset by his performance “he used language unfit for publication.”) The orderly crowd, which had stayed until the end of the contest, “took defeat quietly,” and “the loyalty of the Boston rooters never wavered.”

Some newspaper accounts questioned whether Boston “lost the game on purpose.” Because the players were to be paid out of total receipts for the entire Series, they would benefit financially from more games. The “sports,” as the gamblers were called, lost money, having given odds on a Boston victory. Some \$50,000 was wagered on the game’s outcome. “The big crowd, particularly in the third base pavilion, was gambling crazy.” (No one seemed to remember that on August 17 President Ban Johnson had ordered betting prohibited at all American League parks.)

That night, after dinner at Back Bay’s Vendome Hotel, the Pittsburgh players went to Keith’s Theatre, where they were said to have “enjoyed the performance immensely.” Barney Dreyfuss and the other Pittsburgh club officials took in the “Yankee Consul” show at the Tremont Theatre. The Boston nine saw the performance at the Grand Opera House. Plans were made by the visitors to see “The Silver Slipper” at the Colonial Theatre after the second game of the World Series.

4. The Tradition

The first game of the first World Series began a tradition that would last with little change for more than a century. Each October, the attention of America's sports fans would turn to two ballparks where the winners of the league pennants would battle for the hyperbolic title of Champions of the World. (For most of the century, the "world" stretched only from Boston to St. Louis across the northern tier of American states.)

The best-of-nine tournament went eight games before Boston came back from a 3-1 deficit to defeat their National League rivals. Each game had its full share of sparkling plays and disappointing miscues. Deacon Phillippe would pitch a record five complete games for the Pirates, winning his first three and losing the pivotal seventh game in Pittsburgh and the denouement in Boston. Bill Dineen and Cy Young shared the hurling duties for the Bostons and ultimately prevailed. Young struck out Honus Wagner to end the Series and bring the first baseball championship to Boston.

Those fans who attended the World Series at the Huntington Avenue Grounds came from all of Boston's communities. They were day laborers, Yankee craftsmen, Irish factory workers and Brahmins, immigrants and sons of immigrants all. Their lives were so different from one another that baseball was the only event they would share in common. In constructing baseball as the national pastime, the owners, players and spectators of the game created a commoner experience in which all could participate. For the century to come, Americans from every social class and ethnic identity would join together in celebration of the National Game.