

Delaware's First Baseball Match

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THE first match game of baseball played in crossing the plate, for there available record, took place on Saturday afternoon, Oct. 7, 1865, between the Diamond State and St. Mary's College clubs, both of Wilmington. The scene of the contest was at Delaware Ave. and Adams St. "on the lot adjoining the Wilmington and Brandywine Cemetery," with Diamond State the winner by the lopsided score of 69 to 28.

The three-hour diamond battle was witnessed "by a large number of ladies and gentlemen, who manifested great interest in the game, frequently cheering successful play." In the last half of the eighth inning, the Diamond Staters went on a scoring rampage, racking up 22 runs for a total of 69 before the game was called on account of darkness. The umpire, Mr. M. Reilly, must have been slap-happy after watching 97 runners in all crossing the plate, for there were only two out at the time and the score should have reverted to the seventh inning, or 47 to 26. The decision was not disputed, the leg-weary collegians being probably willing to settle for anything.

NO ONE bothered to tab the number of hits required to produce close to a hundred runs, the published box score revealing only runs and putouts, as follows:

Diamond State	69	St. Mary's	28
Dixon, cf	2	7 Ross, ss	0
Harlow, rf	4	3 Sweeney, 3b	0
McCarthy, 1b	4	7 Keros, 1b	0
Bully, p	3	3 Hill, lf	0
Wallace, 3b	3	2 Dougherty, cf	0
Bringham, 2b	2	2 McCabe, c	0
Lammot, c	2	2 McCabe, c	0
Tatnell, lf	1	2 Reilly, 2b	0
Taylor, 3b	1	2 Reilly, 2b	0
Innings	7	2 4 12 3 6 7 22-69	1
Diamond State	2	0 2 9 3 2 2 2-28	0
St. Mary's	2	0 2 9 3 2 2 2-28	0

The dizzy scorekeeper, it will be noted above, gave St. Mary's 25 putouts in eight innings, a liberality that would induce apoplexy in a Durocher or a Stanky.

COULD a Delaware baseball fan of today have been transported on some magic carpet to this initial game, he would have discovered other strange doings on the field. To begin with, the teams might well have resembled House of David players, since sideburns, roustes, and full beards were then all the vogue, especially with players fresh from Civil War battlefields.

No fielding gloves were used and the catchers were minus mitts, masks, and chest protectors. The first catcher to use any of them was called a sissy. Pitchers were required to throw un-

derhanded, as in cricket or bowling, and curve balls were unknown, "Candy" Cummings not having figured them out until 1867. Fouls could be caught on the first bounce, and nine bad balls entitled the batsman to first base. Home runs were called aces; according to some rules, two runs could be chalked up for a circuit blow.

EMBOLDENED by this first success, the Diamond Staters forthwith issued a challenge to the Philadelphia Athletics, then "the Champion Club of the United States," meeting them on the home grounds on Oct. 28. The kindly veil of secrecy was drawn over the score, the Wilmington paper merely stating: "The Athletics are practiced and expert players and, of course, far excelled the Diamond State, which is a club of very recent formation."

The new-fangled game caught on like wildfire, and in a mere matter of weeks, eight Delaware baseball clubs took the field, in spite of the unfavorable fall weather. Six of the nines hailed from Wilmington: the Diamond State, St. Mary's College, Wawaset, Pautaxat, Independence, and Delaware. New Castle was represented by the Lenapi Club, and Delaware City by the Atlas Club. The last game of this first Delaware baseball season was played on Dec. 14, the report noting that "the full number of innings were not played owing to the intense cold weather."

At least 12 full-dress games were played by these clubs during this brief period. Most of these contests were with one another, but both Lenapi and Atlas played the Mosassa Club of Salem, N. J., in the first South Jersey games, and Pautaxat met Chester on the latter's grounds.

PLAYERS on the Wawaset Club were: Bright, Perkins, Wilson, Connell, Gibson, Wright, Kates, Young and Bateman. Pautaxat players included: Chandler, Bush, Plunkett, Doyle, Cox, Shaw, Garrett, Kelly, McCorkle and Frist. On the Delaware Club were: Harvey, Englund, Brooks, Turner, Chandler, Lupton, Eastburn, Howland and Howard. Lenapi listed: G. Paddock, J. Rodney, W. Paddock, Wise, Evans, Lt. H. Rogers, Paynter, Capt. Reynolds Driver, Buell, Warner and Cavanaugh. Atlas players were: C. Reybold, F. Reybold, Pennington, Stew-

art, Price, Davidson, Clark, Ash and Barnes.

The question as to which was the first baseball team to be organized in Delaware is at this late date subject to some doubt, with the weight of evidence favoring Diamond State, which was definitely formed on Sept. 7, 1865. Its early minutes are in the custody of the Historical Society of Delaware. Members of this West Side organization included such later well-known figures as Levi C. Bird, Benjamin Nields, Anthony Higgins and Samuel M. Harrington.

The St. Mary's club, however, must have been contemporary with Diamond State in order to be challenged and to be played in this first game. This institution, which stood at Delaware Ave. and Madison St., devoted much time to field sports, such as "cricket, shinny, and football," and may well have had a budding baseball team prior to Diamond State. No data is available on the founding of the Lenapi Club, which was challenged by Diamond State on Oct. 13, and which gave Diamond State a shellacking on Nov. 11, the score standing at 29 to 19. All the other clubs were positively organized after Diamond State.

PRIOR to the fall of 1865, the sports engaged in by Delawareans were of the individual type, rather than the team. The main diversions were boxing, bowling, rowing, sprinting, horse racing, and the like, along with seasonal sports like swimming and skating. The chief exception was cricket which, however, was viewed as a

"gentleman's game," in which workingmen and mechanics were not welcomed. Several cricket teams existed at this time, one of them the Mechanics Club of Wilmington, which was refused matches by the older city team.

The coincidence in time of the first baseball match in Delaware and the closing of the great Civil War was not a chance one, by any means. The several regiments of the state returned from the front during the summer of 1865, and these veterans when discharged missed the friendly contests they had engaged in during idle hours of camp life, especially the popular game of baseball.

While team baseball was first played in 1846 and had shown growth in the larger cities, all authorities agree that its greatest strides toward becoming the national game, were made when the soldiers returned home and spread intimate knowledge of the new fascinating pastime throughout the country.

The final act of the brief 1865 season was the presentation, on Dec. 22, to the Wawaset Club of the "Base Ball Regalia" voted on at the Fair held in Grace Church. Wawaset received 346 votes to 289 for Diamond State and 214 for Pautaxat.

FOLLOWING this auspicious beginning during the chilly days of November and December, 1865, an early start the following spring could be anticipated. The first game was reported on April 6, with Atlas of Delaware City defeating the Defiance Club, of Odessa, "by a large score." New

teams blossomed out all over the state, among them Live Oak, of Dover; Excelsior, of Milford; Olympics, of Middletown; Diamond State, of Newark; Lenapi and Tammany, of New Castle; Atlas, of Delaware City, and the St. Georges Club. Wilmington was represented by the Diamond State, Wawaset, Pautaxat, Independence, Pacific, Minquas, Lafayette and Minute Clubs.

Over 1,000 fans turned out on April 28 to see Diamond State defeat Lenapi in a three-hours-and-a-half game by a score of 35 to 32. The contest, played on the Wilmington grounds, was featured by five double plays. The temporary stands collapsed, injuring several ladies.

On June 29, the "two clubs universally acknowledged the best in the state, Diamond State and Atlas," played on the latter's grounds in Delaware City. Diamond State won by the score of 32 to 15. Two home runs were scored, one on each side.

WHEN 5,000 spectators assembled in Milford to see the local Excelsior Club play Diamond State, of Wilmington, baseball as the king of sports in Delaware had arrived to stay. The game was played on the Fourth of July, with the final score 44 to 15 in favor of Diamond State in seven innings. In seven more innings on the following morning, the visitors eased up a bit, scoring only 26 runs to Excelsior's 24.

The last game of the season was played on Thanksgiving Day between Diamond State and Germantown at the Delaware Avenue grounds. Admission of ten cents was charged. Score: Diamond State, 70; Germantown, 17.

Through the remainder of the 1860's, Diamond State and Wawaset battled it out for the state championship, with fortune favoring first one, and then the other. But as the 1870's opened, the tramp of Real Champions on the march irresistibly could be heard as that incredible amateur club known as the Quicksteps moved in to stake out its claim. Wilmington went crazy over its new diamond heroes, who deserved all the praise and adulation they got. The Quicksteps held top rating for a number of years and during that time defeated some of the best teams in the country, including league professionals.



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