

Great American Game of Base Ball and Its Hold on the Public Heart

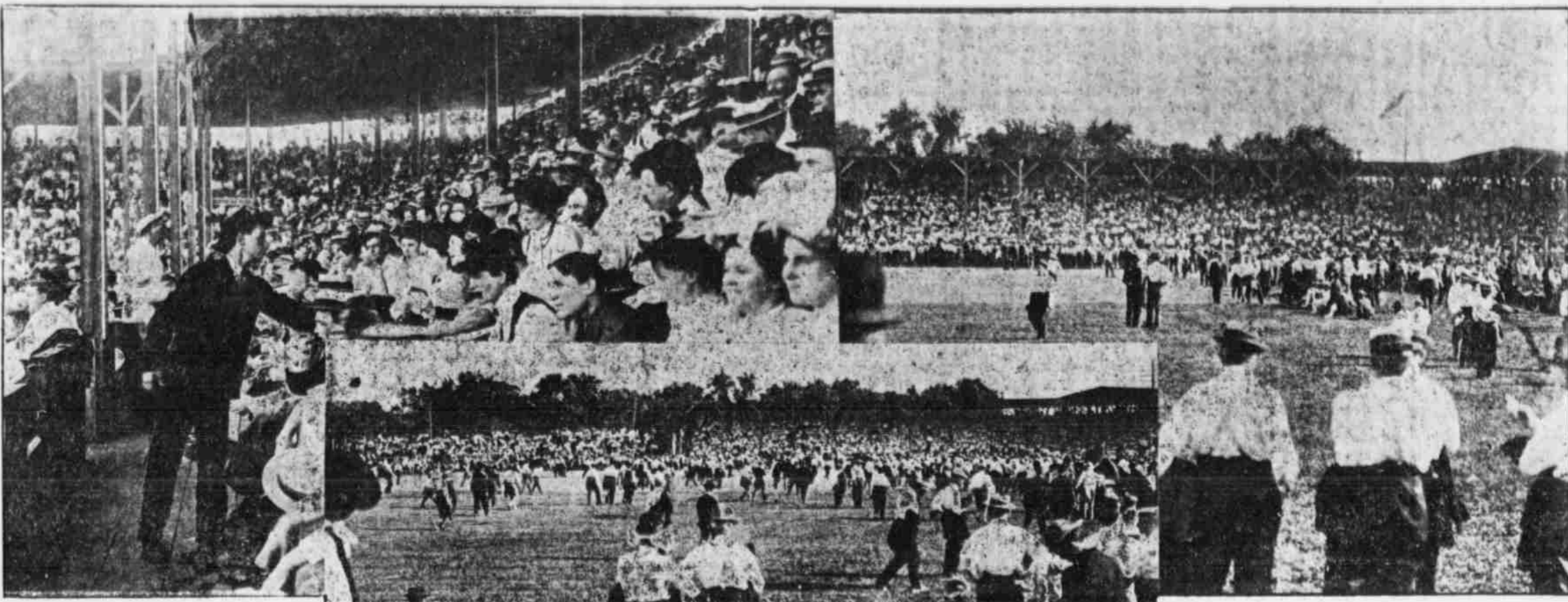
WHETHER invented base ball planted a seed that has germinated beyond his wildest dreams. Ezra Chadwick says the game is of English origin and is an evolution of "rounders," that giddy game that is sort of a cross between cricket and ping pong. Al Spaulding, with his patriotic blood at fever heat, denies the slyer Chadwick's avowal, and says that rounders is no more related to base ball than a cross is to foot ball. The only point of resemblance between the games is that both are played with ball and bat, and a runner must touch four bases in order before he can tally. Spaulding insists that base ball is indigenous to America, and points to the fact that his most earnest research has not yet discovered the origin of the game to prove his claim that it is like Topsy—"It grewed," and has been growing ever since. Whatever the beginning, the result is the same. All over this broad land of the free and home of the brave, from May until October, base ball is in the ascendency. And during the months from October to May it holds first place among a large portion of the country's visiting population. The interest of Young America in base ball goes on forever. In fact, it is almost an all-year 'round game. When the championships are all settled in the fall, and the post season games have been played off, and the country settles down to a long breath before turning to the serious things of life, the base ball politicians get busy, and for a few weeks the papers are full of stories, most of them like Ingall's notion of pure politics, "a—d iridescent dreams," but all mighty interesting, each in its turn. Then come the meetings of the leagues, and then the inevitable discussion of next season's chances. Many a pennant is won and lost around the hot stove, and then the assembling of the teams, the training trip, with its preliminary games, and then the beginning of the championship season and all its stressful train of events.

Born in the Boys.
Any boy with the normal number of red corpuscles in his blood, and an opinion index that wants the phagocytes to lurk in his plasma—which is one way of saying he is in good health—takes to base ball as naturally and with the same avidity that a duckling takes to water. From the time he is big enough to run he engages in the sport, and long before he is expert in the simplest rudiments of the game he has mastered in base ball to a point where even the oldest veteran can tell him but little of the general practice of the game. And through life he goes, watching the game with an eager interest, constantly alert to its advancement and ever keen in his pursuit of its more subtle points.

Best of All Games.
Some reason must exist for all this, and it is not hard to find. Base ball affords something that no other game offers. Even the English, conservative and patriotic, admit the superiority of base ball over cricket, once they have become acquainted with the niceties of the game. Cricket has its good points and is interesting in many ways, but it is as far behind base ball as a real game of skill as a stagecoach is behind a modern express train. This point will require no argument for an American audience. Anyone who has watched two well matched teams engaged in a game of base ball knows a joy that can be found nowhere else. It is not merely brawn against brawn; brains are employed and the quickest wit has need of all his keenness to keep up with the shifting tide of fortune on the ball field. Thought that anticipates attack and action simultaneous with thought is the thing that brings success to the ball player. Then the strength and agility of the youthful athletes engaged in the game, the moments of tense excitement, followed by other moments of unrestrained enthusiasm, the joy of the three-base hit, the satisfaction in the sensational catch, or the long and accurate throw; all these in the open air and bright sunshine, under the most appropriate of conditions, surrounded by thousands of fellow mortals in the same state of mental exhilaration, make the base ball game an actual tonic to the spectator and gives him a genuine physical uplift such as he can obtain in any other way.

Fairest of Games.
Base ball must be played fairly; in fact, it can be played in no other way, for the rules are so plain and so generally well understood that unfairness is impossible. An incompetent umpire may mar a game by his poor decisions, but the players cannot, under ordinary conditions, play unfairly. One of the most flagrant instances of an unfair advantage being taken, and probably the only one of its kind on record, was that which resulted in the team of the University of Chicago being disbanded last spring. In this instance the Chicago players, counting on the fact that their opponents were unacquainted with the members of the team, played one man in center field and had another bat for him during the entire game. For the trick the team was disbanded and the members are barred from ever taking part in college athletics again. Sharp practice among professionals is quite out of the question, but sharp tricks are continually being pulled off. It is good practice to deceive the other fellow as to your intentions as far as possible, but this is not very far as a general thing, for the other fellow has a think-tank of his own and has pretty nearly figured out which one of an endless variety of maneuvers will be adopted under a given condition and is prepared to meet it by its proper check.

Good Work Done Reversed.
Up to the grandstand and some thousands of people who have paid their money to get in. They are called "fans," "bugs," and the like, but they are quite as well versed in the fine points of the game as any of the players, and know just about what to look for under any circumstances. Once in a blue moon a player will bring off some unexpected coup, and when he does he is usually saluted by a salvo of applause. Once in a while, though, the good play goes unnoticed. An example of this may be cited as having occurred in the game last Sunday. It started Pat Ragan on the downward path and really cost Omaha the game. Hogreiver of Des Moines had gotten as far as third, and a second Des Moines runner was on second. Hupp was at bat, with two strikes called on him and but little likelihood of his making the hit needed to bring in a run. Pat Ragan was pitching pretty good ball, at any rate he was getting away with it, and the chances for a Des Moines run looked mighty slim. But Hogreiver has a head as well as a face, and he took the desperate chance. As Ragan mounded the ball with the ball in his hand, Hogreiver tore for home. The audacity of his attempt disconcerted Ragan, and he hesitated a minute and then threw the ball to Goding, who was eagerly waiting. But Hupp was waiting, too, and the ball bounded off his bat and landed on fair ground just a little way back of first base, bounded foul and went rolling into the crowd for a two-base hit. The man from second walked home, and the deed was did. If it had been any one but Hogreiver, he would have been cheered to the echo by the crowd, but never for Hogreiver, who has made himself about as unpopular as a player can get. It is a sure sign when



GLIMPSES OF THE GRANDSTAND.

a player brings off as fine a piece of head-work as that and it is received in silence.

Crowd and the Umpire.

Democracy is the rule at the ball game. Bugs and baggages are the only distinctions made; these are necessary, for the women folks now understand the game quite as well as the men, despite the apparent belief of the Jockemiths to the contrary. Grandstand and bleachers are on common ground, and have two cardinal articles of faith. One is that the home team is the best in existence, at least in the league, and the other is that the umpire is a robber. Some slight difference of opinion may be allowed for in regard to the first proposition, but none as to the latter. If the umpire doesn't rob the home team, he does the visitors and this makes the rule hold good. The umpire knows all about it when he takes the job, for he used to be a ball player himself, and knows exactly where the umpire stands. Consequently, when he hears the hoarse-voiced mob in the stands informing him of the fact that he is a robber, together with more or less pertinent comment concerning his eyes, his mind, his personal habits, his state of bodily preservation, with some occasional remarks as to his ancestry and his destination after this life's fitful fever is over and ball games have



CROWD SURGING ACROSS DIAMOND BETWEEN TWO GAMES.

passed for him, he realizes that he is earning his money. Also that the fans and bugs are getting the worth of their money. Omaha crowds are less demonstrative than in many other cities. In fact, Omaha has a reputation for fairness that is proverbial among players, all of whom recognize the fact that what Omaha people want is to see a ball game; they like to see the home team win, but they want the ball game first, and a visiting player gets all that is coming to him in the way of applause. If Hogreiver didn't get it Sunday, Clarke, Gochnaur and Hupp did for the fine plays they made, and that is proverbial of Omaha. Even on last Sunday, when Umpire Brennan had given decision after decision against Omaha, until he had forever destroyed any chance of the home team's winning, the crowd was with him at the last, when Hogreiver started one of

his senseless outbreaks in the closing minutes of the game. In all Omaha's base ball history but one umpire has been mobbed, and that was Bauswine, who deliberately stole a game out on the old Miami street grounds, back in 1890. Several times umpires have been assaulted by players on the Omaha grounds, but never by a home player. And this doesn't mean that Omaha hasn't drawn the short end of some very bad umpiring.

As a Business Proposition.

Base ball as a business proposition has assumed proportions that are not generally understood by those who have not followed the game closely. Aside from the two big leagues, the National and the American, in 1906, twenty-eight minor leagues played through their championship schedules and finished the season with colors flying. For

the current year some thirty-four minor leagues are making the race, with good chances of all finishing. Enough independent clubs and local organizations are in the field to bring the general strength of organized ball up to numbers that would amount to fully fifty leagues of a strength of eight clubs each. Organized ball controls absolutely this season, for the independent teams are so situated that they must have games with league teams now and then in order to exist, and no league team is permitted to play against a team on which an ineligible player is employed, or against an independent team that has played against an ineligible player. This is but a single feature of the business. Last season the paid admissions to the National League games amounted to more than 4,750,000, and to the American league

CENTER SECTION OF THE GRANDSTAND.

games almost 3,000,000 people paid. Each of the Chicago teams had average paid attendance at their games of over 8,500. The Washington American and Boston National with an average of less than 2,000, the lowest. The game as at present constituted costs more money, for the expenses of a big team are enormous. In most of the minor league teams the expenses are limited by putting a limit on the salary list and reducing the mileage of each team to a minimum, but even this requires the most careful management to keep the teams on a safe basis.

Omaha Ranks High.

Omaha has always had a high rank as a base ball town. Only once in its history has a team failed here for lack of support, and that was in 1898, when the Western league team installed at the grounds on Ames avenue went down because the people would stop at the exposition grounds instead of going on out to the ball park. Several times Omaha has been included in a league which went to the wall, but the local team always had sufficient patronage to keep it alive. Since the present Western league was organized in 1900 Omaha has been one of its mainstays. The attendance here has been large, and the quality of ball has been uniformly high.



ON THE HILL IN LEFT FIELD.



LEFT END OF THE GRANDSTAND AND PART OF THE LEFT-FIELD BLEACHERS.

Some of the best players in the country have worn the Omaha uniform during these years, and a remarkably fine lot of pitchers have been sent out. Among these are Mordcael Brown of the Chicago Nationals, generally looked upon as the best in the country; Jack Pfeister of the same team, one of the best left-handers in the business; Frank Owen of the Chicago Americans; Glenn Liebhart of the Cleveland Americans; Tommy Hughes of the Washington Americans, and "Yank" Brown of the Philadelphia Nationals. George Stone, who led the American league batters last season, is an Omaha graduate, and many of the players whose names adorn the score sheets daily are from the Vinton street lot.

Prosperity and the Players.

Prosperity has naturally had its effect on the amusements of the people, and the base ball business has shared with all other lines in the general uplift. During the last five years the professional game has been advanced to a stage beyond the fondest hopes of its supporters; salaries for players have reached a figure that sound fabulous, some of the highest being almost out of apparent reason. Yet the figures are based on the value of the player to the team. The owner figures that a star player will draw enough people to the grounds to make up for the excess on his monthly check. Even an ordinary player gets enough in his five or six months' activity on the diamond to balance the earnings of a high-priced mechanic for a year. From \$1,750 up to about the range of pay in the big leagues, until the \$12,000 paid to Frank Chance, John J. McGraw, Napoleon Lajoie and one or two others of the leaders is reached. The bulk of the pay for big league players ranges around \$3,000, which is equivalent to \$500 a month for the time they are engaged on the diamond. The rest of the year they have to themselves. In the minor leagues the pay is not so high, but still it amounts to something. Back a few years a player who drew down \$1,800 for his summer on the ball field was a crackerjack; nowadays he is common in the Class A leagues, to which the Western belongs. Fifteen men on the team and a salary limit of \$3,000 per month means that these men draw an average of over \$50 weekly for their services. This is why so many of the American youth strive to become good ball players, and it is also one reason why the quality of ball has improved so much in the West. In fact the game is no faster now than it was fifteen years ago, but the majority of the fans and the players think it is. It is beyond testing, for obvious reasons; but the Omaha team of today could very likely make the Omaha team that won the pennant in 1889 look as if it were standing still in a contest.

Local Attendance Big.

Some outside writers, unacquainted with the city, seem to misunderstand the enthusiasm that prevails here over the game, and make light of the reported attendance at the games. In no instance has the number present been purposely padded; the truth is enough. It is, of course, impossible to give exact figures, as the management prefers to keep that much of its business secret, but the round numbers stated by The Bee daily are close enough to facts for all practical purposes. The photographs from which the illustrations with this article are made were taken last Sunday at the park, during the game between Omaha and Des Moines. Neither of them shows the entire field, but the crowded condition of the stands and the field are plainly enough shown. During the last winter Secretary Rourke of the local team made an examination of the records of the games played since the league was organized, and found that Omaha had averaged a few over 1,000 paid attendance for each game played during the six seasons. The figures for the present year will go above that. This makes Omaha the best ball town of its population in the United States. Other team owners in the league realize the benefit Omaha has been to the league, and admit that, no matter how much Omaha may be criticized for other things, they get the money here. The players know they will get fair treatment from the Omaha fans, and the owners know that they will get gate receipts enough to make their visit profitable, and this is why Omaha is the most popular town on the circuit.

Uncle Sam's Letter Carriers a Carefully Chosen Force

IN no branch of the public service is a higher degree of moral character required than with the letter carrier. Appointment to the service is based wholly upon the civil service examinations, which, while not necessarily severe, require a good common school education, knowledge of geography, mathematics, ability to decipher addresses and a fair knowledge of the city or town in which the applicant expects to be employed. His rating is based upon anything over 70 per cent and he is then placed upon the eligible list for appointment as a substitute. With the application there must also be an endorsement of five reputable citizens, not related to the applicant, and a statement from his employer. Once appointed as a substitute or regular carrier he must execute a surety bond of \$1,000. The government will not accept a personal bond. The age limit for carriers is from eighteen to forty years, with special exceptions in the case of civil war and Spanish-American war veterans. Once placed on the eligible list the examination stands good for one year. If he is not made a substitute within that period he must be re-examined. From the list of eligibles the substitute

list is made up. The substitute ordinarily has to wait from one to two years for a regular appointment. Prior to July 1, 1907, the substitute receives a salary of \$1 per hour, should he happen to not be called to fill the place of a regular carrier. Since July 1, he is to receive thirty cents per hour for time actually employed. The substitute must report at the postoffice each morning. In the Omaha postoffice are fourteen substitutes, who must be ready at any time to do the work of any one of the 107 regular carriers. Generally the substitutes take the place of the carriers who are each allowed fifteen days' vacation each year. Once upon the regular list the carrier begins work at \$900 per year, and this is increased after the second year annually at \$100 per year, the maximum salary being \$1,100. The average weight of the mail carried in the business districts of a city the size of Omaha on each delivery is forty pounds, but in the winter season this may run up, especially during holiday times, to seventy-five pounds per man. In the residential districts the mail is lighter. Under no circumstances is the letter carrier permitted to work more than eight hours per day. He must so time his del-

iveries as to complete his work during eight hours from the time he leaves the office until he returns. His time is checked as he goes out and as he comes in. He may work less than eight hours, but he must not work over that number of hours. If he does so, it is a violation of the post-office regulations and he is liable to summary discharge without further notice for disobedience of orders. This eight-hour rule became necessary through some of the carriers in an eastern city turning in claims for overtime, which became so expensive that the department resolved to put a stop to it and limit the work of the carriers to eight hours. Most of the carriers walk in their delivery districts, particularly in the business and inner residential districts. In the congested business districts mounted or wagon deliveries are made. In Omaha fourteen are mounted carriers or deliver by wagon; two or three deliver by horseback in the sparsely settled suburban districts. Omaha has four sub-stations. Thirteen carriers deliver from Station A, eleven from Station B, and six each from Stations C and D. The remaining seventy-one carriers deliver from the main office downtown. The oldest letter carrier in Omaha in

point of service is John H. Tebbins, who was appointed September 23, 1878. The next oldest in point of service is Andrew Peterson, appointed August 18, 1877. A. J. Lacey, superintendent of carriers, has held that office eleven years, having been appointed superintendent in 1896. He first entered the postoffice service in the mailing division in 1883. Four colored men are included in the Omaha regular force of carriers. These men are old-timers and are regarded as among the most reliable of the entire force, ranking well with the white carriers in intelligence, honesty and efficiency. These men make deliveries in the business district. In the twenty years past there has been but one dismissal from the letter carrier force for dishonesty, and but four for neglect of duty, such as loitering and for drunkenness. All carriers are expected to wear the regulation uniform, which they must procure themselves. The pouches are furnished by the government. Carriers are permitted to receive letters for registry and may also sell stamps to patrons. They cannot sell money orders. In the matter of deliveries the carrier is not required to ascend stairways beyond the second floor in build-

ings where there are no elevators. They are not required to deliver mail when the people of the house are absent except upon the written order of the patron. House letter boxes must be absolutely safe and secure to receive mail delivered by carrier. The carrier is not required to deliver mail at the back door of a residence, but is required to deliver it only at the most convenient door. They do not have to deliver mail at houses where contagious diseases prevail, or at houses where vicious dogs are permitted to run at large about the premises. In the matter of complaints or faultfinding, the matter is usually adjusted by the carrier, when his attention is called to it. Every convenience and comfort is provided at the Omaha postoffice for the letter carriers. They have a spacious rest room where they can lounge about when not on duty. Lockers are provided for each of the carriers, and bath rooms, with shower baths, toilet rooms and lavatories are provided for their special use. The carriers are continued in the service as long as they are physically able to perform the work, without regard to age. No

provision is made by the government for the retirement of letter carriers on a pension. An effort has been made at almost every congress during the last fifteen years to secure the passage of an old age pension bill for carriers. The carriers have an organization known as the National Association of Letter Carriers, which is distinctively an insurance organization based very much on the order of the ordinary fraternal association. The lowest life benefit is \$500 and the highest \$3,000, the assessments being paid monthly. Sick benefits are also provided which permits the payment of \$1 per day during the illness of the member for a period not to exceed thirteen weeks. The national association meets biennially. There are also state associations and local branches, all of which affiliate with the national association. Omaha has a thrifty branch, which is known as Omaha branch No. 8. The delivery of "special" letters is entrusted to the special delivery carriers, who are not members of the regular letter carrier force. These are generally boys and are appointed without examination at the discretion of the postmaster.



GROUP OF OMAHA MAIL CARRIERS AT THEIR PICNIC.



WIVES AND CHILDREN OF THE OMAHA MAIL CARRIERS.