



BASEBALL-for What's in It

By EDWARD LYELL FOX

ILLUSTRATIONS by B. CORY KILVERT



THERE SAT IN THE press box at Cincinnati, one summer day, twelve years ago, a young man, heavy-jowled, heavily foreeful, and built on the lines of a Jeffries. He was Byron Baneroft Johnson, baseball reporter, salaried at \$25 a week. Ten years later, a slightly heavier-jowled Johnson sat in a Chicago hotel and heard the club-owners of the American League vote him a salary as President of \$25,000 a year for twenty years.

In reporting the incident a newspaper man coined the phrase, "The Czar of Baseball." The rise of Johnson is the rise of baseball, and this is how he came to be its "Czar."

At the time the large young man was reporting, there came to him Charles Comiskey, who was interested, in a small way, in baseball. Comiskey had heard of Johnson, of his forcefulness, his way of getting what he wanted.

"There's a fortune to be squeezed out of baseball," remarked Comiskey.

Johnson agreed.

"But not as players," said Comiskey.

Johnson nodded his head.

"As magnates," proposed Comiskey.

"Exactly," came in Johnson's deep voice. "I like your proposition, and I'll be the magnate."

Whereupon they formed the Western League, with the best club for Comiskey and for Johnson the presidency. From the start, prosperity attended the little league. Then, Johnson's reputation for executive ability began to drift East, to the ears of big baseball men. Eventually, certain moneyed sportsmen boarded a train and went out to see Johnson. They proposed that he launch a second big league to rival the National. They asked for a definite answer. Johnson laughed at them. He knew the hold that the long established National enjoyed in the big cities. He knew the powerful opposition that would have to be broken down. He wanted time to study the project from every angle. He told them so. But other secret meetings followed, and there came a day when the baseball world was astounded by the announcement of a new league. It was called the American League, and at its head was the former reporter of Cincinnati.

Then, trouble came along. In 1900 a "baseball war" broke out between the American and the National leagues. Johnson ordered his club owners to spare no expense, to throw all the money they could gather into the fight. At his bidding, agents raided the National's ranks. The star players of the old league were lured away by big salaries. Johnson needed them as box-office attractions, to draw the crowds for his new league. Those were golden days for the players. They were at liberty to sell their skill to the league offering the most money. Salaries doubled and trebled. But after three years of this, Johnson realized that the end must come. It was too heavy a drain on the treasuries of the clubs. Also, he knew that the National League, tottering and broken, was eager for "peace." The large young man from Cincinnati was able to sit astride its chest. So, he declared a

truce, and on January 10, 1903, directed the drawing up of the so-called "Cincinnati Peace Compact." This put an end to the high salaries. On September 11 of the same year a wonderful document, styled "The National Agreement for the Government of Professional Baseball," was signed by the Cincinnati reporter. That was the document that transformed baseball from a number of scattered leagues into a great business, a corporation.

Today, there are sixteen parent companies—the clubs of the National and the American leagues. The subsidiary companies are the clubs of the minor leagues. The latter are answerable to a body called the National Commission. The last-named is composed of three men, appointed by the National and the American, thus giving these leagues complete control of the business of professional baseball. And what, eighty-one years ago, was a haphazard sport of New England's village greens is today a great money-maker. All because Byron Baneroft-Johnson saw what he wanted, went after it, and got it!

In an interview with me, the Secretary of one of the Major League clubs called his product "Honest Baseball." Regarding this, Johnson has been ever watchful. Permit an incident:

It was an afternoon in October four years ago. New York and Chicago were playing the game on which hung the championship of the National League. Never had New York been roused to such a pitch over baseball. The city had forgotten everything but that game. Partisan feeling ran high. Stories of enmity between the two teams filled the newspapers. Only a few days before, McGraw, manager of the Giants, had refused admittance to the Polo Grounds to a National League umpire. There were rumors of a "conspiracy to do the Giants out of the pennant."

From the first inning, the crowd behaved as no New York crowd has done since. Fierce applause greeted the Giants if they gained a trivial advantage. Sullen mutterings and a few open threats met the Chicago team and the umpires on every hand. Innings passed; the tension tightened; the nerves of the crowd became frayed. Violence was in the air. The last inning came, and with it New York's last chance to win. With the Giants needing a lone run to carry off the championship, and with men on second and first, Bridwell, their shortstop, drove the ball safely over second. The man on second scored. Pandemonium swept the stands.

Two men were out; and Merkle, the man on first, should have run to second and touched that base, before fleeing with his team-mates from the jubilant crowd. Instead, he raced with Bridwell toward the clubhouse. Seeing Merkle leaving the field, Evers, Chicago's quick-witted second baseman, cried for his center-fielder to throw the ball to second. If it reached there before Merkle, the play would be a force-out—the run would not count. And as Merkle was at the clubhouse by this time, Evers caught the ball, and jumping up and down at second, held it high overhead, calling in the meanwhile for the um-

pire. Grasping the situation, Umpire O'Day tore off his mask and protector and dashed across the diamond to second base. From the bleachers and grandstand tumbled angry men, only a few of them understanding the cause of the uproar. Came the Giants; came McGraw, red-faced and spluttering; came the Chicago team. Now the crowd closed about them, muttering and dangerous. Men struck at Evers, at Chance, at the umpires; but O'Day called Merkle out and the pennant was lost! Before the crowd, dumb and unbelieving, could break into violence, O'Day had brushed aside man after man and walked to his dressing room.

That night the New York Club filed formal protest against O'Day's decision with President Pulliam of the National League; they demanded an award of the championship. The city was up in arms. O'Day received anonymous letters, threatening him. So did members of the Chicago team. Practically everybody who had ever seen a game at the Polo Grounds took the decision personally, as an attempt to defraud his city out of the pennant. For ten days the case hung fire. The officials of the National League remained in secret session. Strong influences were brought to bear

upon them. With the New York club were marshalled some of the most powerful interests in the league. It was clique against clique. Intrigue and threats faced President Pulliam at every turn; but over it all fell the shadow of the Cincinnati reporter.

"Give that game to New York," Johnson thundered, "and you'll ruin baseball!"

Then, Pulliam made his decision. It was against New York, against the powerful interests of the National League; "Honest Baseball" was saved. But the tragedy of it was, that not long after, a nervous wreck, Pulliam committed suicide.

And now, let us consider the players—the employees—and their unique status, their relation to the Business and what it has done for them. If they are "stars" demanded by the box office, like Mathewson and Cobb, they receive high salaries. If they are "average," they must play for the salary given them by one club or not at all. Were Devore, of New York, for instance, to go to President Brush and say:

"You must raise my salary or next season I'll play with some other club that has offered me more

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He did not enthuse



Caught the ball, and . . . held it high overhead



The ball, thrown from third, hit Isbell in the back