

THE CREATION OF THE DOUBLEDAY MYTH

by

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ABSTRACT

In 1908, a Special Base Ball Commission determined that baseball was invented by Abner Doubleday in 1839. The Commission, established to resolve a long-standing debate regarding the origins of baseball, relied on evidence provided by James Sullivan, a secretary working at Spalding Sporting Goods, owned by former player Albert Spalding. Sullivan solicited information from former players and fans, edited the information, and presented it to the Commission. One person's allegation stood out above the rest; Abner Graves claimed that Abner Doubleday "invented" baseball sometime around 1839 in Cooperstown, New York. It was not true; baseball did not have an "inventor" and if it did, it was not Doubleday, who was at West Point during the time in question.

Ever since the Commission's decision, historians have attempted to remove any connection between baseball and Abner Doubleday. The Commission's process and decision, itself an episode in the history of baseball, has largely been treated by historians narrowly: mostly debunking the decision over and over. Even one hundred years later, many Americans believe the Doubleday Myth.

In 1999, the documents Sullivan collected, previously believed to be burned in a fire, were donated to the Baseball Hall of Fame. This made available the entire process of the decision for analysis. Historians have used this information to gain additional information on the early history of the game, and to further analyze the circumstances surrounding the creation myth.

This paper attempts to analyze the motives of the decision. The documents show how much patriotism was involved and how seriously the men involved in the debate took the issue. This persistent debate was settled at a time when America was flexing its muscles on the world stage and spreading its gospel. Baseball, which was part of that gospel, had already sent its own missionaries to the world twice. Spalding, baseball's greatest missionary, was involved both times. This paper will utilize the Commission documents and extensive scrapbooks in the Albert Spalding Collection to show that to the men involved in the debate, their patriotism and masculinity were at stake, and winning the debate became as important as any game.

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INTRODUCTION

“The eyes of the whole nation are upon this little village,” declared Walter Little, President of the Doubleday Field Association, in 1938 to a gathering of Cooperstown, New York citizens near the recently completed Doubleday baseball field.¹ It was obviously hyperbole, as Americans focused on other things, namely the depression and the gathering clouds of World War II in Europe. Yet, the next year 15,000 spectators traveled to the village that William Cooper founded on the banks of Otsego Lake to celebrate the opening of the Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum. Major League Baseball and Cooperstown residents established the Hall in 1939 because they believed that it was the one hundred year anniversary of baseball, invented by Abner Doubleday in Cooperstown, on the spot where Doubleday field now stood.

For those who assembled, there was no doubt that baseball was not only the National Pastime, but also that it was an American invention. This belief stemmed from the so-called Mills Commission of 1904, organized by Albert Spalding, a former baseball player and owner of Spalding Sporting Goods, to determine the origins of baseball. The commission resulted from an argument between Spalding and his friend Henry Chadwick, a sports journalist and editor of his *Spalding Guide*. Spalding believed baseball was solely an American conception. Chadwick, an Englishman, also believed it

¹ James A. Vlasich, *A Legend for the Legendary: The Origin of the Baseball Hall of Fame* (Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University Press, 1990), 114. Walter Little was a local reporter and secretary of the Doubleday Field Association.

was American, but that it evolved from the English game of rounders.

Scholars have written extensively on the controversy over the game's origin. The first two writers to question the myth were Will Irwin and William Rankin, who both spoke out against the decision in 1909. Robert Henderson provided the first researched analysis in his book *Ball, Bat, and Bishop: The Origin of Ball Games* (1947), by showing that the game evolved from other bat and ball games. Subsequently, nearly every book on early baseball history discusses the Mills Commission, usually followed by a debunking of its final decision, that Abner Doubleday, a Civil War general, invented baseball in Cooperstown in 1839.²

This essay will put the debate in its historical context and analyze the motives for creating the myth making extensive use of the Mills Commission correspondence. Such an effort will focus on the debate, not baseball's actual origins, and will therefore provide meaningful knowledge about Americans during the early twentieth century. This debate, which was ostensibly over baseball's genesis but was fundamentally an argument about which nation was superior, reveals much about Americans' perceptions about themselves and England, especially as it pertains to masculinity. Equally important were the ways the English saw the Americans. This essay will address such questions as: Who were the men involved in the debate? Why did this debate take place at this time? What does this debate reveal about Americans' self-perceptions? How did Americans see themselves as different from the English? How did the English view the Americans?

² David Block, *Baseball Before We Knew It: A Search for the Roots of the Game* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), 16-17.

THE DEBATE

Baseball was the preeminent participant and spectator sport in America in the second half of the nineteenth century. The game's evolution stems from an English bat and ball game called base ball, which led to many games, such as rounders, cricket, one-old-cat, stoolball, and others. These games came to America under a variety of names and forms. In Philadelphia in the 1830s it was known as townball, while further north it was called the "New York" game and the "Massachusetts" game. The New York game emerged as the dominant version in part because of Alexander Cartwright. Cartwright and his fellow amateurs often ferried from New York City to play ball at the Elysian Fields in Hoboken, NJ. In 1845, he organized the Knickerbocker Base Ball Club, and drew up a constitution and the first known rules to the game. At first the Knickerbockers had few teams to compete with—though they were not exactly the most skilled team, losing a 23 to 1 trouncing to the New York Club in 1846—but baseball clubs proliferated in the 1850s. These amateur clubs were as much about male fraternity as they were about playing baseball. As competition grew more intense, and as astute businessmen noticed the potential profit of paying spectators, the game gradually professionalized.³

Albert Goodwill Spalding represented this transition to professionalism. Spalding started his baseball career in 1866 by pitching for the Forest City Club in Illinois. He

³ Two seminal books on early baseball history are John Thorn, *Baseball in the Garden of Eden: The Secret History of the Early Game* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2011), and Warren Goldstein, *Playing for Keeps: A History of Early Baseball* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989).

collected his first baseball paycheck when Harry Wright signed him for the all-professional Boston Red Stockings. In 1871, Wright created the National Association of Professional Base Ball Players (NAPBBP), completing baseball's shift towards professionalism. Spalding worked closely with Wright in professional matters, and from him probably learned many of his organizational and entrepreneurial abilities, though he certainly already had the drive for making money. In 1874, in an effort to spread the game, Spalding and Wright went on a baseball tour to England, playing cricket and baseball in London, Manchester, Sheffield, and Dublin. Upon their return, Chadwick wrote that the tour should put to rest "the much-debated question as to whether we ha[ve] a national game or not."⁴ The next year, William Hulbert, owner of the Chicago White Stockings, hired Spalding to pitch for his club. In 1876, Spalding and Hulbert established the National League, which replaced the NAPBBP and is still in existence today. Realizing there was more money in managing than in pitching, the passionate Spalding began his decline as a player and his ascent as a businessman. He created the first sporting goods firm in 1876, Spalding Sporting Goods, and quickly turned it into a monopoly. His company published an annual sporting publication called *The Spalding Guide*, complete with standings, statistics, and articles covering baseball and other sports.⁵

Spalding eventually obtained ownership over Hulbert's White Stockings, and took the club and the National League all-stars on another tour in 1888, this time to Hawaii,

⁴ Henry Chadwick, *Beadles Dime Baseball Player* (NY: Beadle and Adams, 1875), 57-58.

⁵ See Peter Levine, *A.G. Spalding and the Rise of Baseball: The Promise of American Sport* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1985).

Australia, Egypt, and Europe. As his purpose was to gain converts to baseball and gain a foothold to sell his sporting goods equipment, he selected not only the best players, but also those whose character and behavior were upright enough to represent the sport and the country (he released four players from the tour for drinking). He and his men showed their lack of refinement, however, in Egypt when, “to the horror of the native worshippers of Cheops and the dead Pharaohs,” they climbed on the Sphinx for a picture and tried throwing baseballs over the pyramids. Also, while in England, Spalding breached etiquette when he slapped the Prince of Wales on the leg after a triple by Cap Anson.⁶

In 1881, Spalding hired Henry Chadwick to edit his *Spalding Guide*, which he published annually starting in 1878. Chadwick was born to James Chadwick in Exeter, England in 1824. His brother, Sir Edwin Chadwick, was noted as the “sanitary philosopher” of England for his 1842 *Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population of Great Britain*, written while he was on the royal commission to reform the poor laws.⁷ His *Report*, which featured the use of quantitative analysis, helped him to become the Commissioner of the Board of Health from 1848 to 1854.⁸ Meanwhile, Henry began his legacy of statistical analysis and reform in the United States after his family moved to New York in 1837. He started his journalism career with the *Long Island Star*

⁶ Levine, *A.G. Spalding*, 42-43, 104-106. For more on the tour, see Mark Lamster, *Spalding's World Tour: The Epic Adventure that Took Baseball Around the Globe - And Made it America's Game* (NY: Public-Affairs, 2007), and Thomas Zeiler, *Ambassadors in Pinstripes: the Spalding World Baseball Tour and the Birth of the American Empire* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006).

⁷ Jacob Morse, “In Memory of Henry Chadwick,” *The Baseball Magazine* 1 (June 1908), 9; Jules Tygiel, *Past Time: Baseball as History* (NY: Oxford, 2000), 16-18.

⁸ Tygiel, *Past Time*, 18.

at age nineteen, joined the *New York Times* in 1856 and the *New York Clipper* in 1858, where he started reporting on baseball games and created the box score, a condensed statistical report of the game.⁹ Chadwick played rounders in England as a child before learning cricket in America, but after witnessing a baseball game in Hoboken, NJ in 1856, “the thought struck me that here was the game that should be the National Game of America.” He believed the game, as opposed to cricket, was “peculiarly suited to the American temperament,” and decided then to “do all in my power to make it the national game,” which he did by spending the rest of his life covering baseball, improving its rules, and doggedly attempting to rid it of corruption, particularly gambling and drinking. His steadfastness in cleaning up the game once caused his brother Edwin to quip to an American, “While I have been trying to clean up London, my brother has been keeping up the family reputation by trying to clean up your sports.”¹⁰

While Henry Chadwick was commonly known as the “Father of Baseball,” another Spalding employee, James Sullivan, has been called “America’s first sports czar.” Sullivan, born in 1860 to Irish descendants in New York, started his career in journalism, working for Frank Leslie’s publishing house in 1878. He later founded the *Athletic News* and edited the *Sporting News*. In 1888, he became secretary of the fledgling Amateur Athletic Union, which he presided over from 1906-1914. Amateur sports were extremely popular at this time because people believed they were pure, as opposed to the professional sports world, with its gambling, drinking, and salary problems. Sullivan was the driving force behind amateurism, especially with his involvement in the newly

⁹ Morse, “In Memory of Henry Chadwick,” 9.

¹⁰ Ivor Campbell, Frederick, “Via: Henry Chadwick,” *Harvard Magazine* 90 (Sept-Oct 1987), 6061.

revived Olympic games.¹¹

The Olympics provided Sullivan and other Americans a chance to boast in their physical strength. In 1896, the French aristocrat Pierre de Coubertin established the modern Olympic games, in which athletes represented their countries on the international stage. Americans performed well enough to garner some attention, and then, according to the *New York Times*, “won” the 1900 Games, even though no one was officially keeping score. The 1904 Games were held in St. Louis, during the Louisiana Purchase Exposition, thus giving the world a taste of “American style Olympism.” Sullivan organized an “Anthropology Days” contest, where native cultures competed in Olympic events and cultural specific contests, such as mud fights, pole climbs, and dashes. The Americans dominated the Games, winning all but a hand full of medals, prompting Sullivan to proclaim 1904 as the “greatest athletic games ever held in the world.” What he overlooked, to the distaste of Europeans, was that out of 617 athletes in the 1904 Games, 525 were American.¹² Most foreign athletes could not make the trip due to the cost and distance. Pierre de Coubertin, who clashed with the boastful and competitive Sullivan, regarded the entire event as a mockery, especially the Anthropology Days, and did not even attend. Even so, the Olympics were just the beginning of an American sense of physical superiority over England. They also showed Sullivan’s competitiveness and patriotism.¹³

¹¹ *Dictionary of American Biography*, vol. 18; S.W. Pope, *Patriotic Games: Sporting Traditions in the American Imagination 1876-1926* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1997), 31.

¹² Pope, *Patriotic Games*, 37-44.

¹³ See George R. Matthews, *America’s First Olympics: The St. Louis Games of 1904* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2005). See also Susan Brownell, *The 1904 Anthropology Days and Olympic Games: Sport, Race, and American Imperialism* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008).

Sullivan became Spalding's secretary at the American Sports Company in the 1890s, and it was during this time that the debate over baseball's origins began heating up. While Spalding initially agreed with Chadwick's claim that baseball originated from a popular English kids' game, rounders, his ideas changed after his world tour of 1888-89.¹⁴ During his last tour stop in England, he repeatedly heard Englishmen dismissing Spalding's baseball as a form of their game of rounders. Tired of hearing them criticize his beloved game, he issued a public challenge to a game of rounders, answered by the Champion Rounder Club of England in March, 1889. They must not have reviewed the ground rules beforehand, because the Americans were confused when the game began with the first two batters of the England club hitting balls backwards and running around the bases for an 8-0 lead. This strange scoring pattern dumbfounded Spalding, but once he figured it out, he situated his players to combat England's "dainty but effective" backward hits. He took great pride in holding them to three runs the rest of the game, but the Americans lost 11-8. He then challenged them to baseball, in which the Americans won 35-0. Spalding boasted in this victory, noting that they did not even finish the first inning before the England team quit.¹⁵

Spalding saw such a great disparity between rounders and baseball that he changed his mind about the origins of the game. Apparently he changed other minds, also. When Spalding and his ambassadors landed on American soil, they held a celebration at Delmonico's restaurant in New York. At the banquet, A.G. Mills, the first

¹⁴ Henry Chadwick, ed., *Beadle's Dime Base-Ball Player* (NY: Beadle & Co., 1871); A.G. Spalding & Bros., *Spalding's Official Base Ball Guide* (Chicago: American Sports Publishing, 1878), 5.

¹⁵ *Spalding's Official Base Ball Guide*, 1903, 5-7.

president of the National League, proclaimed that “patriotism and research” had shown that baseball was of American origin. The crowd responded with chants of “No rounders!”¹⁶

Spalding soon became obsessed with the rounders-baseball issue because he refused to believe baseball had ties to England. He and Chadwick carried on the argument for a number of years, both trying to win converts by publishing theories on the game’s evolution, using *Spalding’s Guide* as a soapbox. Yet while Chadwick pointed out the connection between rounders and baseball—both used a bat, ball, and a square or diamond playing field—he was quick to make clear that any rounders connection “did not deprive our present game of its legitimate title to the name American.” Spalding, meanwhile, took offense to the rounders suggestion:

Just imagine the argument you would get into and the touchiness an Englishman would show if you told him that his favorite game of cricket derived its origin from Rounders; *or*, the Scotchman’s indescribable flow of words if you stated that his ancient game of Golf originated from Rounders; *or*, the American Indian’s grunt if it was explained to him that his game of lacrosse originated from Rounders.

Now, boil down together the Englishman’s indignation, the Scotchman’s huff and the Indian’s grunt into one composite mass and you have my feelings and that of every lover of Base Ball when a claim is made that our great American national game of Base Ball originated from Rounders.¹⁷

Spalding had a deep hostility towards the suggestion that the game was English, and while Chadwick again retorted that baseball’s “English origin does not detract one iota” from its American merit, Spalding did not concur.¹⁸ But this quote also reveals that there

¹⁶ Harold Seymour, *Baseball: The Early Years* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1960), 9.

¹⁷ *Spalding’s Official Base Ball Guide*, 1905, 5-9.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 29.

was something else that caused Spalding angst at the rounders suggestion. Rounders was a children's game; baseball – and yes, even cricket – were for men. Spalding, who had helped raise the game from its infancy in amateurism to its adulthood in professionalism, did not want the game's respectability to slip by being connected to a children's game.

Spalding wanted to settle the argument, so in the 1905 *Guide* he called for the creation of an "impartial" commission to resolve the debate. He suggested that James Sullivan be the secretary, gather information from early ball players, and present it to the commission for a resolution.¹⁹ Over a span of three years, Sullivan synthesized the information and gave it to the commission.²⁰ Throughout the process, they referred to the commission as the "Special Base Ball Commission."

For Spalding and Sullivan, the decision was too important to be left to an "impartial" commission. Spalding already knew who he wanted to decide baseball's provenance. As early as November, 1904, he sent letters to men of the baseball world asking their opinions on the issue, also making known his patriotic viewpoint. In a letter to John Lowell in November, Spalding explained that he was "weary" of listening to Chadwick, and he was trying to "convince myself and others" that baseball was solely American. "My patriotism," Spalding continued, "naturally makes me desirous of establishing it as of American origin, if possible, and as the same spirit will probably prompt you, I would like your ideas about it." His arm-twisting was to no avail. Lowell

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 13.

²⁰ For years it was thought that the original correspondence was burned in a fire, but in 1999 it was donated to the Hall of Fame by Jack M. Doyle, whose father, John T. Doyle, was head of Spalding's publishing company. Much of what follows comes from this relatively untapped collection. See Richard J. Tofel, "The 'Innocuous Conspiracy' of Baseball's Birth," *Wall Street Journal*, July 19, 2001. Found in Origins of Baseball File, Baseball Hall of Fame (hereafter BHOFF).

wrote back with his opinion, “Chadwick may be right that all games of Base Ball may have been handed down to us from the English game of Rounders.” Spalding did not choose him to be on the committee.²¹

D.J. McAuslan, a New York writer and former member of the Eckford Base Ball Club, was another of Spalding’s contacts who did not pass the test. In November, 1904, he wrote Spalding that “the game might possibly have evolved from ‘Rounders’ but not in the sense that Mr. Chadwick would like to convey.” He did make clear, however, that he supported baseball as purely American: “Whatever was the origin of base ball, you may rest assured that [it] is essentially an American developed sport, and no one can take that proud title from it, let him be the ‘Father of Base Ball’ [Chadwick] or anyone else.”²² Spalding did not choose him for his commission, presumably because of his slight tilt towards rounders, but Sullivan found his latter statement good enough to use in the final report to the commission.

Spalding had his men selected by March, 1905. They were Abraham G. Mills, Alfred J. Reach, Arthur P. Gorman, Morgan G. Bulkeley, N.E. Young, and George Wright. James Sullivan served as secretary and collector of information. Mills, who served in the Civil War, received a law degree from Columbian Law School in 1896. He was involved in the creation of the National League, and later became its third president. He was ousted from office in 1884 because of a disagreement regarding the competing Union Association League. Spalding brought him back into the baseball world with his

²¹ Albert G. Spalding to John Lowell, November 5, 1904, and John Lowell to Albert G. Spalding, November 12, 1904, Spalding Scrapbooks, BHOE.

²² D.J. McAuslan to Albert G. Spalding, November 23, 1904, Spalding Scrapbooks, BHOE.

invitation. After the decision, the Special Base Ball Commission became known as the Mills Commission because he wrote the “final decision,” which will be discussed later.

The other men were also former players, though most had moved on to more prestigious positions by 1905. Morgan G. Bulkeley served as the National League’s first president in 1876, and later as governor of Connecticut. He was a U.S. Senator while on the commission, but died in 1907, before the investigation concluded. Arthur P. Gorman was a former player and president of the National Baseball Club of Washington. A U.S. Senator from Maryland, he told Spalding he had little time to research anything, but would review any material Sullivan submitted to him. Nicholas E. Young was a former ball player, and the first secretary and fifth president of the National League. Alfred J. Reach and George Wright were successful sporting goods entrepreneurs after their ball playing days. Reach played professionally for a few years in the early 1870s before creating the A.J. Reach Company to manufacture sporting goods, becoming a millionaire. He sold his company to Spalding in 1889. He was instrumental in professionalizing baseball, helping to create the National Association of Base Ball Players in 1871. Wright was a star player for the Cincinnati Red Stockings, the first all-professional team, and the Boston Red Stockings, where he played alongside Spalding. He created the Wright and Ditson Sporting Goods Company.

Spalding knew these men were respected, and having them on his commission would give credence to the decision.²³ Spalding chose them because they agreed with him, which he found out either through his correspondence in 1904, or through previous

²³ See the correspondence between these men in the Spalding Scrapbooks, BHO (March 26-April 6, 1905).

acquaintance. As noted, Mills showed he was anti-rounders at Spalding's world tour celebration banquet in 1889. Bulkeley, Gorman, Mills, and Spalding sat next to each other at the head of the party, comprising 253 people. Sullivan and Wright were also in the crowd chanting "No Rounders!" Surely there was one voice missing from the chant. Henry Chadwick sat in seat 156, table D.²⁴

Henry Chadwick was relatively passive throughout the affair. There are few signs that Chadwick even paid attention to the investigation. Indeed, between 1905-1908, Chadwick seemed more concerned with improving the rules of the game than he did finding its origin, probably because he figured it was a forgone conclusion.²⁵ Still, Chadwick stepped into the ring a few times. In one letter he referred to Spalding, probably facetiously, as "mine enemy."²⁶ In an editorial Chadwick related a comical experience he and Spalding, whom he called his "Hibernian friend," had. While engaged in a debate over the game's origins in Spalding's office, Andrew Peck dropped in. Upon questioning, Peck said he first played baseball in the late 1840s, and it was called rounders. Chadwick continued, "We could not help laughing as Mr. Spalding said to Mr. Peck, 'Why did you come in just now for? I was getting the best of the old man on his rounders theory.'" In another article, Chadwick accused Spalding of using the columns of the *New York Sun* to promulgate his theories to the public. Sullivan did not appreciate this accusation. He cut out the article and wrote "old fool" in the margin.²⁷

²⁴ Spalding File, BHOFF. This file contains a map of the seating arrangement.

²⁵ Henry Chadwick File, BHOFF.

²⁶ Henry Chadwick to "Joe," April 11, 1907, Mills Commission Papers (Box 2, Folder 1), BHOFF.

²⁷ Henry Chadwick, "Baseball's Origin," *The New York Sun*, May 14, 1905, Spalding Scrapbooks, BHOFF.

Shortly after the committee was selected, on April 3, 1905, Abner Graves, a mining engineer from Colorado, picked up *The Akron Beacon Journal* while visiting Ohio. He read an article entitled “The Origin of the Game of Base Ball,” by Spalding. Spalding told of his debate with “Mr. Chadwick, who, by the way is of English birth and was probably rocked in a ‘Rounders’ cradle.” Much of the article came verbatim from his 1905 *Spalding Guide* argument—his bout with the Rounders Club in England, and his theory on the origins of baseball. It is not known to how many newspapers Spalding sent his article, but his purpose was to solicit information anyone might have regarding baseball’s early days. Specifically, he mentioned the names of the eleven original New York Knickerbockers: “Are not some of these gentlemen still living? Or possibly some of their heirs might throw some light on the early history and especially the origin of base ball.” He told anyone who had information to send it to Sullivan in New York.²⁸

Graves, who was staying at the Thuma Hotel on South Main Street in Akron, sent a typewritten reply on his personal stationary to the *Beacon Journal*. His letter ran the next day, April 4, 1905, in its entirety, with the headline “ABNER DOUBLEDAY INVENTED BASE BALL.” Graves claimed he grew up in Cooperstown, N.Y., and that Abner Doubleday, the future Civil War general, invented the game there as a school boy around 1839.²⁹ The *Beacon Journal* forwarded the letter to Sullivan in New York, who thanked Graves for the information.³⁰

When Spalding found out about Graves’s claims, he wrote Sullivan from his

²⁸ Albert G. Spalding, “The Origin of the Game of Base Ball,” *Akron-Beacon Journal*, April 3, 1905.

²⁹ Abner Graves, “Abner Doubleday Invented Base Ball,” *Akron-Beacon Journal*, April 4, 1905, p. 5. See also Paula Schleis, “Baseball Myth Born in Akron,” *The Beacon Journal*, July 1, 2002.

³⁰ James A. Sullivan to Abner Graves, April 5, 1905, Spalding Scrapbooks, BHOF.

home in Point Loma, California, that the “Doubleday Cooperstown tip is worthy of careful investigation and corroboration.” He took the time to draft an evolutionary baseball tree, showing how serious he took the issue. When Spalding returned to New York in November, he wrote Graves asking for more information. He wanted information on Doubleday, including his age at the time of the event, the exact year in which the event took place, and names and addresses of those people in Cooperstown who were present.³¹

Abner Graves wrote back to Spalding on November 17 with answers to his questions. Graves claimed that as a young boy, he and other children gathered often to play town ball, a bat and ball game that allowed as many as twenty boys to be in the field at once. One afternoon, Abner Doubleday, then a resident of Cooperstown, “figured out and made a plan of improvement” on the game by limiting players and changing some rules. Although “crude,” he called it “Base Ball,” and it quickly superseded town ball as the popular game. Graves concluded his second letter with the following patriotic comment: “Just in my present mood I would rather have Uncle Sam declare war on England and clean her up rather than have one of her citizens beat us out of Base Ball.”³²

Historians have shown that Abner Doubleday was at West Point during the time in question, but that he had two cousins, Abner Demas Doubleday and John Doubleday, who could have been in Cooperstown at that time. Graves might have confused them with the General. David Block has shown that aside from this point, Graves’s allegations

³¹ Albert G. Spalding to James A. Sullivan, August 13, 1905, Spalding Scrapbooks, BHOE.

³² Abner Graves to Albert G. Spalding, April 3, 1905; Albert G. Spalding to Abner Graves, Nov 10, 1905; Abner Graves to Albert G. Spalding, Nov 17, 1905, Spalding Scrapbooks, BHOE.

are either mostly verifiable, or at least plausible based on what we know about baseball and Cooperstown during that time. All of which makes the Doubleday allegation more confusing.³³

Unbeknownst to Graves, of all the names he could have mentioned to bolster his claim, none could have been more perfect than Doubleday. Doubleday fired the first retaliatory shots of the Civil War at Fort Sumter and fought at Gettysburg. His name was well-known enough to be recognized by the average American, yet not so famous as to cause people to question. He was deceased, so no one could question him about the allegation. And, as fate would have it, both Spalding and Mills had connections to Doubleday. Spalding's second wife was a member of the Theosophical Society, an occult organization that Doubleday had led fifteen years earlier. Although it is unknown if Spalding ever joined the organization, he was certainly a large part of it, and one of its defenders. He was well aware of Doubleday's part in the society, though he made sure not to tell the commission of his or Doubleday's connection to the society. Although Spalding was not immediately convinced that Doubleday was baseball's inventor, he would eventually get used to the idea that there would be no better way to wrap the birth of the game in the Stars and Stripes than to say it was invented by a Civil War general. Mills, on the other hand, was close to Doubleday, and led his funeral procession. In his final report, Mills wrote: "it happened that he and I were members of the same veteran military organization--the crack Grand Army Post (Lafayette), and the duty devolved upon me, as

³³ David Block, *Baseball Before We Knew It: A Search for the Roots of the Game* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006), 57-60.

Commander of that organization, to have charge of his obsequies.”³⁴

Around this time, four months after the commission was organized, there was some impatience with the pace of the investigation. Newspaper articles discussing the issue had appeared well before 1905. Now, they proliferated. Tired of the speculation, a *Sporting News* article called for Sullivan to expedite the process: “For pity’s sake, Jim, get your commission on the move, so that it can throw some light on the early history of the game. There are some people today who know more about the shorter catechism than they do about the early history of the game.”³⁵ Perhaps spurred by this impatience, A.J. Reach, in one of the few instances of involvement by a committee member, wrote a desperate letter to his friend, telling him to “make up something as strong as you can proving the game is of American origin.”³⁶ The impatience by the public shows how seriously some took this investigation.

There were other signs that those involved took it seriously. They believed that the commissioners were “deeply interested in the problems,” and that they would not treat the matter “lightly or in haste.” One news writer, showing his ignorance of the situation, but nevertheless highlighting its importance in sporting circles, noted that since the commission was “expected to approach the subject with an open mind,” neither Spalding nor Chadwick could serve on it. The two were so polarized that they could not be in the room with the commission at the same time, because Sullivan “would have to

³⁴ See Block, *Baseball Before We Knew It*, Chapter 3, and John Thorn, *Baseball in the Garden of Eden: the Secret History of the Early Game*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2011), Chapter 1.

³⁵ “Easy for Giants,” *Sporting News*, June 3, 1905, p. 2. Spalding Scrapbooks, BHOFF. No author, but it could have been Rankin.

³⁶ A.J. Reach to “Dave,” Sept 25, 1905, Spalding Scrapbooks, BHOFF.

drop his pen and pry them apart. . . . The word rounders almost makes [Spalding] forget” his friendship with Chadwick. As for the fact that there were two U.S. senators on the commission—well, Congress could wait: “If the sessions are begun early in the fall it is believed that the work will be over in time to let Senators Bulkeley and Gorman take their seats in the Senate at the opening of Congress. Otherwise, Congress must suffer.”³⁷

Yet the debate continued for another two years before Sullivan, feeling pressure from the newspapers, curtailed the inquiry, condensed the evidence into a 66-page document, and submitted it to the commission. Sullivan crossed out references to rounders but kept those passages that supported Spalding. Some of these were taken out of context. In a letter from a Mr. Sargent to Sullivan, he discussed the possibility that rounders may have been the same game as old cat. Therefore, if “the difference between Mr. Chadwick and Mr. Spalding is whether base-ball sprung from rounders or from four old cat, there is no difference between them. They are talking about the same thing, only they do not know it.”³⁸ To admit this sort of misunderstanding would be to admit connections with England, so Sullivan (presumably) crossed it out. Instead, the final document contained Sargent’s confusion, arising from the strange foul ball rule, as to how they could be connected.³⁹ In another letter, Sargent conjectured, “It may be that 150 years ago when they began to play round ball it was a kind of rounders brought from England, for the settlers in this part of the state were purely English.” Sullivan crossed that out, but left in: “no one knew that a game called ‘rounders’ existed anywhere in the

³⁷ May 2, 1905, New York Sun, “Archeology of Baseball,” Bound Spalding Scrapbook, BHOFF.

³⁸ Mr. Sargent to James A. Sullivan, June 15, 1905, Spalding Scrapbooks, BHOFF.

³⁹ Final Document, Spalding Scrapbooks, BHOFF.

world. The same of 'town ball' . . . I do not know at all how Rounders is played.”⁴⁰

Mills, who had been in Europe, was the last of the committee members to examine the bowdlerized document provided by Sullivan. There is no evidence that the Commission met to discuss the findings, and Mills was the only member to provide a written opinion to Sullivan, although the other Commission members signed agreement with the letter. Mills could have had no idea the enormous effect this letter would have on the baseball world: it touched off a century-long discussion on the origins of baseball, and led to the establishment of the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, NY. The city of Cooperstown can thank Mills and his letter for its influx of tourist dollars every year. As this lengthy letter from Mills to Sullivan became the Commission's *de facto* final determination, and the vehicle that would launch Abner Doubleday's name into baseball fame, it is helpful to investigate its contents closely.

Though he did not devote much time to the Commission, Mills actually showed that he cared about the decision and was relatively impartial. If Mills was actually the head of the Commission, he was a good selection, for he was sincere in his investigation and was the only person who attempted to corroborate Graves's story. In the first paragraph of his letter, he made clear that he was not being swayed by patriotism, as others were: "I cannot say that I find myself in accord with those who urge the American origin of the game as against its English origin as contended for by Mr. Chadwick, on 'patriotic ground.'" In fact, he was open to the idea of the game being of English origin, and that it would not be "any the less admirable nor welcome on that account."⁴¹ He

⁴⁰ Mr. Sargent to James A. Sullivan, May 23, 1905, Spalding Scrapbooks, BHOF.

⁴¹ Thorn, *Baseball in the Garden of Eden*, 13. Mills's letter is printed in full.

stated that cricket arrived from England and “had a respectable following here...long before any game of ball resembling our national game was played anywhere.” Here he was establishing himself as an impartial judge, forgetting that twenty years earlier in a restaurant full of passionate, patriotic baseball men he had proclaimed that “patriotism and research” established the game of American origin.

Until now, his understanding was that the game of baseball as “substantially played to-day, originated” with the Knickerbocker club of New York. Alexander Cartwright of the Knickerbockers would later be given credit for inventing baseball, thanks to a sophisticated campaign by his son and grandson. In the rush to discredit Doubleday, baseball experts called Cartwright the “Father of Baseball” due to the fact that the Knickerbockers have the oldest known set of baseball rules. Mills’s belief in the Knickerbockers as founders anticipated the Cartwright movement, however, this was not the predominant thought in 1908.⁴²

Mills admired Chadwick, as did most everyone, and gave “full weight to his contention that Base Ball is of English origin.” But Chadwick’s argument rested solely in the similarities between baseball and rounders: that both games involved a pitcher tossing a ball to a batter, who attempted to strike it with a bat. Yet if these simple elements defined the game of baseball, then they would have to return to the days of “Rome, beyond Greece, at lest to the palmy days of the Chaldean Empire!” to find its beginnings.

Here Mills touches on a subject that has plagued the entire debate over baseball’s origins since before the Commission was established: what are the essential elements of baseball? At what point does a game involving a bat and ball become baseball? Plus an

⁴² See Thorn, *Baseball in the Garden of Eden*, Chapter 2: Four Fathers, Two Roads.

even more basic question: does it need a bat? In all the rush to debunk the Doubleday Myth, few authors have posed the question of what defines baseball, and fewer still have given good reason for including their selected elements. David Block in *Baseball Before We Knew It* provides the most detailed discussion of these elements, and determines that baseball evolved from an English game called “base ball.” Some elements that he discusses are: the use of a bat, the concept and number of bases, foul territory and the 90 degree in-bounds territory, the elimination of hitting runners with the baseball to put them out, the number of players on a side, the batting order, playing a set number of innings versus playing to a predetermined score, and the shape of the field. But even Block stops short of defining what elements define the game, and why. The advent of overhand pitching seems to be as much of a change as any of the above, yet most enthusiasts would include the underhand pitching era when talking about “modern” baseball.

Mills continued on this topic, comparing bat and ball games to electricity. Both have always been around, but at some point they were harnessed. “As I understand it, the invention or the origination of anything practical or useful, whether it be in the domain of mechanics or field sports, is the creation of the device or the process from pre-existing materials or elements.” In this respect, he gave a nod to the evolutionary aspect of the game, but with the understanding that at some point, it became baseball. Even though the elements existed in England and other places long ago, it became baseball in America: “I do not, myself, see how there can be any question that the game of Base Ball originated in the United States and not in England.” As part of his argument, he pointed to the fact that the game “was strange and unfamiliar [in England] when an American ball team first played it there.” His reference here was surely to the 1874 tour that Spalding participated

in, when the English were confused by the game. His logic is that if baseball as he knew it came from England, surely the English would have been more familiar with the game when, over thirty years prior, Americans displayed their game first-hand.

Mills then discussed Abner Graves's allegations. Three important elements from the Doubleday testimony stood out to Mills. The first was the event's timing. It predated the Knickerbockers, Mills's assumed inventors, by about six years. The second element was the location of the event. Graves alleged Doubleday showed him the game in Cooperstown, NY. Mills knew that one of the Knickerbockers, "Mr. Wadsworth," known now as Louis, was from upstate New York. He reasoned that Doubleday might have shown him the diagram that Wadsworth passed on to the Knickerbockers -- an idea John Thorn drolly calls the "double-play-combo idea."⁴³ Although Mills was unable to substantiate this idea, he did send a letter to Mr. Wadsworth (who, it turned out, died one week after the report was issued), and promised Sullivan he would send any information as soon as he obtained it.⁴⁴ It seems his mind had already made the connection, possibly due to the third element: that Mills knew Doubleday. They were members of the same veteran military organization, "the crack Grand Army Post," and he led the military escort of Doubleday's funeral procession. This emotional connection is probably why Mills's argument, heretofore at least reasonable, now delves into pure speculation: "I can well understand how the orderly mind of the embryo West Pointer would devise a scheme for limiting the contestants on each side and allotting them to field positions," and substituted

⁴³ Thorn, *Baseball in the Garden of Eden*, 23.

⁴⁴ AG. Mills to James Sullivan, Dec 31, 1907, Jan 6, 1908, Jan 20, 1908, March 23, 1908, Mills Commission Papers (Box 2, Folder 1), BHOE. See also Thorn, *Baseball in the Garden of Eden*, Chapter 1, for further discussion on the mysterious Mr. Wadsworth, on who Thorn has done much research.

the “plugging” rule – hitting the runner with the ball – with the force out rule. (Graves indeed claimed that Doubleday limited the number of players, but did not claim that Doubleday invented the force out.) Mills’s “orderly mind” assertion is an attempt to bolster his argument in light of his failure to find the connection between Doubleday and the Knickerbockers. He continued to persuade himself by noting that while Doubleday limited the players on each side to eleven instead of nine, this was a “minor detail.”

It was only after this lengthy introduction that Mills finally delivered his “deductions from the testimony submitted”:

First: That “Base Ball” had its origin in the United States.

Second: That the first scheme for playing it, according to the best evidence obtainable to date, was devised by Abner Doubleday at Cooperstown, N.Y., in 1839.

These two statements, read together and without the explanatory introduction, appear to be linked, but in opposite order of cause and effect. That is, Doubleday invented baseball, therefore it is of American origin. This was the only part of the Commission’s “final decision” that was published, and this is the way it has been interpreted ever since. Thus, the creation of the Abner Doubleday Myth.

When read in the context of the introduction, however, those two statements read very differently. They are not as connected as they appear. Mills was making two different statements. Mills had established the first statement by the end of his third paragraph, that the game evolved over time, but became baseball as they knew it in America. Whether it reached that point through the Knickerbockers, Doubleday, or someone else, it did not matter – it was a distinctly American game. This is a fair point that could still be argued today, as long as we could agree on our framework and

definitions of what makes baseball baseball.

He seemed to be trying to show his impartiality by agreeing with both Chadwick and Spalding. To his point that baseball evolved but was still American, Chadwick had been saying the same thing for years. Yet he agreed with Spalding that at some point the game became different enough from rounders or any other English game that it ceased being connected. In fact, when Sullivan first read Mills's letter, he only glanced at it, and upon seeing his admission in the first paragraph that it may have evolved from English games, sent a note to Mills: "as I glance over the first page, I am disappointed in your decision. I really had convinced myself that Base Ball was of American origin."⁴⁵

In his second statement, Mills was simply saying that the earliest evidence of the game evolving into what it was then was Graves's Doubleday assertion. Mills did not state that Doubleday "invented" baseball, or that it "sprung full-blown from the mind of young Abner,"⁴⁶ as most debunkers allege. Mills probably would have been open to any earlier testimony, or might have changed his mind back to the Knickerbockers had Mr. Wadsworth responded in the negative. In other words, it was not the Commission that determined that Doubleday invented baseball; it was Spalding who published the statements without the context, then ran with the idea, launching not only the Abner Doubleday Myth, but the Myth of the Abner Doubleday Myth.

Spalding cemented the idea of Doubleday as inventor when he wrote his history of Baseball called *America's National Game*. Spalding had been trying for a few years to get Chadwick to write a comprehensive history of the game, but Chadwick no longer had

⁴⁵ Ibid., 13.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 55.

the energy. When Chadwick passed on, he left Spalding with all of his materials and scrapbooks. So Spalding, in a final tour de force, took it upon himself to write a massive history of the game. In spite of its weaknesses, it is a valuable early contribution to baseball history. It takes him four chapters to cover the creation of baseball. Interestingly, he details the evolution of the game, from town ball to the Massachusetts game. Then, “the final step in the evolution of the game was the adoption of the diamond-shaped field and other points of play incorporated in the system devised by Abner Doubleday.” Still, the game continued to evolve, as the Knickerbockers made rules, and limited the number of players. Even Spalding viewed the game as evolutionary, but pointed to Doubleday as the moment when it became “substantially as played today.” Yet in case anyone was mistaken, he formally declared, “The founder of our National Game became a Major General in the United States Army!”⁴⁷

When the 1908 *Guide* came out, it contained a brief letter from Chadwick, “The counsel for the defense,” a letter from Spalding stating his position, and the last half of Mills’s letter.⁴⁸ Chadwick must not have attempted to get any information to support his theory, because he continued to promulgate the “basic principle” involved between the two games – the bat, ball, and bases. He probably did not take the argument that seriously, figuring most agreed with him.

Spalding, on the other hand, continued to put forth his thesis that patriotism would not allow for an English connection. In his letter, he once again stated his contempt for

⁴⁷ Albert Spalding, *America’s National Game* (NY: American Sports Publishing Company, 1911), 7. See Chapters 1-4.

⁴⁸ *Spalding’s Official Base Ball Guide*, 1908, 35-49.

anything English: “The tea episode in Boston Harbor, and our later fracas with England in 1812, had not been sufficiently forgotten in 1840 for anyone to be deluded into the idea that our national prejudices would permit us to look with favor, much less adopt any sport or game of an English flavor.”⁴⁹

Mills’s letter, undersigned by the entire commission (except Gorman, who died during the investigation), stated the commission’s final decision:

First: that “Base Ball” had its origin in the United States.
 Second: That the first scheme for playing it, according to the best evidence obtainable to date, was devised by Abner Doubleday at Cooperstown, N.Y., in 1839.⁵⁰

As with nearly everything else in life, Spalding won. Spalding achieved his victory over Chadwick. Patriotism, not research, made baseball American.

When the Commission’s decision was published, on March 20, 1908, Henry Chadwick was 83 years old. He read the decision in the *Guide* that day with dismay. He immediately sat down and typed a letter to Mills from his home in Brooklyn. The typo-ridden letter shows that Chadwick was not in good health. “I was so sure of my case that I failed to present detailed evidence,” wrote Chadwick. “The fact is, The whole matter was a Joke, between Albert and my self, for the fun of the thing.”⁵¹ Chadwick died one month later.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 45.

⁵⁰ *Spalding’s Official Base Ball Guide*, 1908, 49.

⁵¹ Henry Chadwick to A.G. Mills, 20 March 1908, Mills Commission Papers (Box 2, Folder 1), BHOE.

THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The matter was not a joke to many Americans at this patriotic time. A number of social ideas were coalescing around the turn of the century to form an unprecedented jingoistic fervor. The nation was growing into an industrial power and was ready to make a statement that it belonged on the world stage. This expansionist drive was accompanied by a Westward-looking philosophy that was anti-European and emphasized American superiority over its English cousins. This tenuously coexisted with American beliefs that England was its only equal in a world of uncivilized peoples. This was a time in Americans' eyes, then, for a passing of the torch. Many (mostly men) were ready and willing to assume the imperial burden.

The Spanish-American War of 1898 was one manifestation of this impulse. Jingoists were the driving force behind the war. They felt that a belligerent foreign policy would not only give the country the respect it deserved, but would also cure certain ills from within. Seeing the influence of women in politics and religion, they believed the country was becoming feminized. Jingoists, found in Congress and throughout the nation, believed that the venerable Civil War veterans were a dying breed, and that just as the Civil War created a generation of honorable men, a war against Spain would accomplish the same. Many Americans, appalled by the Spanish treatment of Cuba, sympathized with their neighbors and supported a war for Cuba's liberation. The *Maine* explosion came at a propitious time for those desiring a war to prove their imperial

supremacy.⁵²

Social Darwinism was another impulse leading to war. As ideas from the scientific community became more accepted, intellectuals and politicians applied evolutionary concepts of “the survival of the fittest” to nations. After the Panic of 1893, jingoists tied this concept to the economy, believing that they needed to pursue a vigorous foreign policy to avoid economic destruction. The notable difference between Darwin’s ideas and the Social Darwinists’ teachings was that the latter believed they could control the evolutionary process. Fearing extinction, they called for and celebrated virtues of manliness and virility. Believing that they needed to conquer or be conquered, they went on the offensive.

Frederick Jackson Turner’s frontier thesis also emphasized the virility of the west. Turner presented his paper, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History,” to historians in Chicago in 1893. This paper presented a Western-oriented view of American history, and claimed that Europeans morphed into Americans as they grappled with an unsettled land. The harshness of the frontier and the abundance of free land begat such virtues as independence, virility, individualism, optimism, energy, and mobility. Thus, with his announcement of the closing of the frontier, many believed in the need to find new frontiers abroad to retain those key western values.

Even ministers began to revere manly characteristics, in a movement known as “muscular Christianity.” In the 1850s, Englishmen Thomas Hughes and Charles Kingsley published *Tom Brown’s School Days* (1856) and *Two Years Ago* (1857), starting

⁵² See Kristin L. Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood: How Gender Politics Provoked the Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

a genre that fused Christian principles with manly characteristics. Neither of these books actually used the phrase, “muscular Christianity,” which was probably introduced in a review of Hughes’s novel in the *Saturday Review*.⁵³ Hughes, who was influenced heavily by Thomas Carlyle, liked the description, while Kingsley preferred “manly” to “muscular.” Regardless, both united Christianity with such concepts as manliness, morality, health, and patriotism. Kingsley preached imperialism as the means to manliness, a fading quality in an increasingly urbanized and industrialized English society.⁵⁴ Kingsley thought that sedentary life in the city and repetitive, stagnant jobs on the assembly line were effeminate and demasculinizing. Idleness was also a sin, especially because it led to moral corruption. Physical exertion was the way to Christ and manliness.

While the movement grew for a time in England, it gained few converts across the Atlantic, at least during the mid-nineteenth century. Still a nation mostly of farmers, Americans after the Civil War resisted muscular Christian teachings because they did not feel underworked, and thought exercise with health as its end was unnecessary. Also, Protestant churches emphasized nurturance, sensitivity, refinement, and the more “feminine” characteristics of Christ. During the mid-century, Protestant Americans were accepting of this feminization of religion because they saw the female as the embodiment

⁵³ “Two Years Ago,” *Saturday Review* 3 (Feb. 21, 1857): 176. See also Clifford Putney, *Muscular Christianity: Manhood and Sports in Protestant America, 1880-1920* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 11.

⁵⁴ C.J.W.-L. Wee, “Christian Manliness and National Identity: The Problematic Construction of a Racially ‘Pure’ Nation,” in *Muscular Christianity: Embodying the Victorian Age*, ed., Donald E. Hall (NY: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 66-90.

of religious teachings.⁵⁵

Something changed toward the end of the century that led to a widespread acceptance of muscular Christianity. Cities increased by as much as fifty percent during the 1880s because of the boom in American industrialism.⁵⁶ As Americans migrated from the country to the city in increasing numbers, the vices of the city became more apparent. This led to the same worries of idleness, which they believed was feminine, that England experienced a quarter century earlier. Americans struggled to gain the same sense of fulfillment in the factory or office as they had on the farm. One contemporary declared:

A hundred years ago there was more done to make our men and women hale and vigorous than there is today. Over eighty percent of all our men then were farming, hunting, or fishing, rising early, out all day in the pure, bracing air, giving many muscles very active work, eating wholesome food, retiring early, and so laying in a good stock of vitality and health. But now hardly forty percent are farmers, and nearly all the rest are at callings—mercantile, mechanical, professional—which do almost nothing to make one sturdy and enduring.⁵⁷

A sports and nature boom followed, as there was a concerted effort by many to promote and live a more active lifestyle. John Higham, in his essay, “The Reorientation of American Culture in the 1890s,” attributed this emphasis on exercise and the outdoors to three things. First, Americans did not trust their new city environment. Second, outdoor activity provided an “imaginative release from institutional restraints and confinements Americans had accepted since the Civil War.” Finally, nature meant virility and was a “remedy for the artificiality and effeteness of late nineteenth century life.”

Owen Wister’s *The Virginian* (1902) and Zane Grey’s *The Cast of the Plainsmen* (1905)

⁵⁵ Putney, *Muscular Christianity*, 24-25.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁵⁷ William Blake, “Is American Stamina Declining?” *Harpers* 79 (July 1889): 241. See Putney, *Muscular Christianity*, 30.

both emphasized the Western hero and the virility of the outdoors, especially the taming of the outdoors.⁵⁸ This new intellectual belief in vitality arose in response to “patterns of confinement in life and thought.” The principle innovators of this thought, including Turner, “associated Europe with the constraint and decrepitude they abhorred,” and were therefore anti-European in their social and moral attitudes. In contrast, they associated America with the “freshness and openness they sought to revive.”⁵⁹

Yet it was Europe that led the sporting revolution. America was playing catch up, but it caught up quickly. Frederick Paxson highlighted the rise of sport in America in an article written in 1917. A student of Turner, Paxson wrote that “it was the open frontier that kept America young during its first century of national existence,” and that after the closing of the frontier, “the search for sport revealed a partial substitute for pioneer life.” Sport was more than just a diversion; it was becoming essential to the understanding of America. It changed the “character, personal conduct, and public opinion” of the nation. All this physical activity was creating a healthier and more temperate America.⁶⁰

Ministers played a large role in pleading for more physical activity. Churches and athletic clubs joined forces to create organizations such as the Young Men’s Christian Association, the Playground and Recreation Association, and the American Association for the Advancement of Physical Education. The Boy Scouts were created a short time

⁵⁸ John Higham, “The Reorientation of American Culture in the 1890s,” in John Weiss, ed., *The Origins of Modern Consciousness* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1965), 28-29; see also Deborah L. Madsen, *American Exceptionalism*, (Jackson, Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 1998), 124-127; Oriard, *Sporting with the Gods*.

⁵⁹ Higham, 45.

⁶⁰ Frederick Paxson, “The Rise of Sport,” *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 4 (1917): 143-168. Quotes from page 167.

later (1908 in England, 1910 in America), but the organization's oath to be "physically strong, mentally awake, and morally straight" canonized the YMCA's teachings that the body, mind, and spirit were linked. All were important for personal health.⁶¹

For this reason, many began to see playing sports as a beneficial, character building exercise. Seeing a "boy problem," consisting of hooligan lower class kids and effete upper class kids, muscular Christians established summer camps, the BSA, and urged boys to play sports.⁶² Billy Sunday gave up his professional baseball career for the ministry and preached the virtues of the vigorous life. These muscular Christians believed sports taught kids and men self-control and helped them overcome sins of idleness.

Baseball and football were the most popular sports, and each offered a solution to the boy problem, baseball for the mid- to lower-classes and football for the upper-class. According to one editorial, a father should urge his son to play baseball "not only for the good of his body, but for the good of his mind and his morals." The game exercised "every muscle . . . fairly," and was an "excellent training for character," because it required "swift and accurate judgement" and "instant decision" making. Apparently it was even good for the eyes, as "old base ball players usually have excellent eyes long after other men of their age have been driven to spectacles." As a result, the "body glows with perfect health. . . . Therefore play base ball."⁶³ Whether or not this columnist fully believed baseball instilled these virtues, he certainly thought the game gave children in

⁶¹ Putney, *Muscular Christianity*, 57-64; 114.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 99-109.

⁶³ "All Boys Should Play Baseball," by W.R. Hearst, *New York Journal*, April 4, 1905, Doyle Papers, BHOE.

the city something productive to do with their time.

Football was taken up by college students in an attempt to rid themselves of the stigma “dude,” which referred to bookish, feminine, upper class types. Teddy Roosevelt was the ultimate dude-converted-man, as he practiced such manly activities as politics, war, and sports.⁶⁴ His strenuous life was followed by many. Stephen Crane said that playing football helped him know the intricacies of battle when he wrote *The Red Badge of Courage*.⁶⁵ Boxing saw a revival during this time, and basketball was invented at the YMCA in 1891 as an indoor activity for the boys during the winter.⁶⁶ As one education writer claimed in 1901, “manly social games, like football, basket-ball, baseball, are our best resources in developing . . . almost every characteristic of virility.”⁶⁷

Many even saw baseball and football as the reasons for victory in the Spanish-American War. “We owe a great deal to base ball,” wrote one editorial, “It is one of the reasons why American soldiers are the best in the world—quick-witted, swift to act, ready of judgment, capable of going into action without officers, as foreign experts observed with amazement during the Spanish War.”⁶⁸ Albert Spalding wrote in his 1905 *Spalding Guide*, “Wellington said that ‘the battle of Waterloo was won on the cricket field of England,’ and President Roosevelt is credited with a somewhat similar statement

⁶⁴ Putney, *Muscular Christianity*, 33-39.

⁶⁵ Gerald Linderman, *Embattled Courage: The Experience of Combat in the American Civil War* (NY: Free Press, 1987), 294.

⁶⁶ Elliot Gorn, *The Manly Art: Bare-Knuckle Prize Fighting in America* (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 1986).

⁶⁷ Johann F. Herbart, *Outlines of Educational Doctrine* (NY: The Macmillan Company, 1901), 189. See also Anthony Rotundo, *American Manhood: Transformation in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era* (NY: Basic Books, 1993), 241.

⁶⁸ “All Boys Should Play Baseball,” by Hearst.

that ‘the battle of San Juan Hill was won on the base ball and foot ball fields of America.’”⁶⁹ Not only did playing sports win the war for them, but the act of going to war also lifted the citizen from the sedentary life to the strenuous life.

Protestant ministers opposed the war at first, but eventually “drap[ped flags] from pulpits and float[ed them] from steeples” to prove that “the church of God is not emasculated as some would have us think.”⁷⁰ Christians saw the war as a chance to cure effeminacy in men and to spread the gospel and civilize people, as opposed to the jingoists who saw the war as a chance to “let blood” and “go out and kill somebody.” But by the end of the war, especially when things deteriorated into guerrilla warfare in the Philippines, ministers doubted the war’s imperial aims and wondered aloud whether physical discipline could be taught in other ways, such as scouting and on the playground. Sports became the “moral equivalents of war,” further legitimizing the manliness one could gain by playing sports.⁷¹

This emphasis on manliness corresponded with a sharp rise in national pride. A nation that lived the strenuous life was not in danger of extinction. Success on the battlefield and in Olympic competition confirmed and increased an American sense of superiority. This belief is reflected in the correspondence of Sullivan and Spalding. As the men involved in the debate were former athletes, it is no surprise that they believed the manly game of baseball could only be American. Their comments give insight into why Americans believed in their superiority over England.

⁶⁹ *Spalding Guide*, 1905.

⁷⁰ “The President Should be Sustained,” *Congregationalist* 83 (April 7, 1898): 486. Quoted in Putney, *Muscular Christianity*, 164.

⁷¹ Putney, 163-170.

The disdain these men had for England is best seen in their attack on Chadwick, who symbolized England. Chadwick, also known as the “Father of Baseball,” was above reproach until he had the temerity to suggest that baseball’s roots were English, although it took some time for the patriots to stand up to him. The origins debate had been around since before the 1888 tour, when “arguments had reached an esoteric stalemate among cognoscenti, with a certain chauvinistic disposition” favoring an American birth “offset by a reverent faith in Chadwick.”⁷² But over the next twenty years, as the patriotic feelings intensified, the men became more emboldened. William Rankin, a writer for various New York newspapers, quoted Chadwick’s opinion that townball (a precursor to baseball) was an Americanized edition of rounders, then got excited: “Oh, fudge! Cut out that talk about town ball and rounders when talking about Manhattan Island. . . . One might just as well argue that Mr. Edison ‘modified’ the old English candle and formulated the incandescent light in use now, as to say base ball sprung up from rounders or its ‘Americanized edition, town ball.’”⁷³

Chadwick was in his eighties while the debate took place, and some patriots planned on holding their tongue until the octogenarian passed on, when they could “wipe up the floor with his peculiar theories.”⁷⁴ Timothy Murnane, another sportswriter, was “all primed to explode the rounders fallacy,” but “to spare the grand old man’s feelings,” he decided to withhold his attack until the Great “Umpire call[ed] time” on Chadwick.⁷⁵

⁷² Mark Lamster, *Spalding’s World Tour: The Epic Adventure that Took Baseball Around the Globe – and Made it America’s Game* (New York: Public Affairs, 2006), 53.

⁷³ William Rankin, “Base Ball’s Birth,” December 11 (no year), Spalding Scrapbooks, BHOE.

⁷⁴ Mills to Spalding, March 1, 1905, Spalding Scrapbooks, BHOE.

⁷⁵ Myron Townsend, “Boston Traveler,” Jan 16, 1905. Source unknown, Spalding Scrapbooks, BHOE.

Spalding joked about “skin[ning Chadwick] alive on his Rounders theory,” and although he worried about “be[ing] arrested for manslaughter,” he was insistent that “our good old American game of base ball must have an American dad.” Mills assured him that it was only a matter of time before the “feeble old man” would pass away, and to hold off until then.⁷⁶ Exasperated, the men called Chadwick a “liar” in an attempt to win the argument by besmirching his character.⁷⁷

Sullivan assured D.J. McAuslan, whom he wrote asking for information on the early origins of the game, that he could give his opinions freely, that “this thing of setting yourself up against such good writers as Chadwick should not deter you.”⁷⁸ Plenty of respondents were happy to acquiesce. “We had too much national pride in those days,” wrote H.H. Waldo, “to adopt anything that was English in our Sporting Life.” Phillip Hudson was “confident that Base Ball is strictly an American game.”⁷⁹

The majority of respondents involved in this debate took umbrage at any suggestion that their national game was connected to England. They believed American sports were manly, as opposed to the more relaxed English sports. Many agreed with an editorial that claimed it was “the only game that exercises all the muscles of the body, and at the same time trains the mind, the eye, and the character. . . . It calls for a union of

⁷⁶ Spalding to Mills, Feb 7, 1905; Spalding to Murnane, Jan 25, 1905; Mills to Spalding, March 1, 1905, Spalding Scrapbooks, BHOE.

⁷⁷ Spalding to Rankin, Feb 20, 1905, Spalding Scrapbooks, BHOE. The “old fool” comment was found in the bound Spalding Scrapbook, written by Sullivan on a cut-out newspaper article written by Chadwick. See Henry Chadwick, “Baseball’s Origin,” *New York Sun*, May 14, 1905, Bound Spalding Scrapbook, BHOE.

⁷⁸ Sullivan to D.J. McAuslan, Sept 16, 1905, Spalding Scrapbooks, BHOE.

⁷⁹ H.H. Waldo to Spalding, July 7, 1905; Philip Hudson to Sullivan, July 23, 1905, Spalding Scrapbooks, BHOE.

physical health and mental alertness.”⁸⁰ Another editorial demanded that all boys play baseball because it was good for the body, mind, and morals. It “exercised all muscles fairly,” caused the “body to glow with perfect health,” and forced boys to make “instant decision[s].”⁸¹ Spalding believed that baseball was a “man maker,” because it demanded “Brain and Brawn,” which he was quick to add, “American manhood supplies these ingredients in quantity sufficient to spread over the entire continent.” He further claimed that while horse racing improved horse breeding, “Base Ball has done something better, it has resulted in improvement in man breeding,” because the baseball player was the perfect medium between the pugilist, who was a “thug,” and the horse jockey, who was a “half-developed little creature.”⁸²

Henry Chadwick agreed that American sports produced a manly character. He concurred that the “grand manly sport” of baseball improved the “physique of Americans,” and required “the highest degree of physical and mental ability to excel in it.” Moreover, Americans were not only “acquir[ing] the English taste for manly exercises,” but were taking the lead in the “great race for supremacy in the arena of sports.”⁸³ Because he was English, Chadwick gave a nod to England’s adroitness and manliness at sports, but this is far more than most American’s would concede. This is one of the reasons why these men believed in their superiority over Britain, namely, that they were more physically fit.

⁸⁰ April 15, 1905. “The Noble Game of Baseball” ? Journal, NY. Spalding Scrapbooks, BHOFF.

⁸¹ “All Boys Should Play Baseball,” by W.R. Hearst, *New York Journal*, April 4, 1905. Doyle Papers, BHOFF.

⁸² Albert Spalding, *America’s National Game* (NY: American Sports, 1911), 5, 534.

⁸³ “Rule Makers Should equalize the Attack and Defense,” by Henry Chadwick, Doyle Papers, BHOFF.

On the other hand, many saw the English as elites who played effete sports. Since many perceived the elite in America as feminine, they easily carried that stigma to the more refined English. Upon his return from his 1888 tour, Spalding said that cricket was a game for the elite and baseball a game for the masses and defended the democratic game of baseball.⁸⁴ Spalding harangued against cricket in his book, *America's National Game* (1911), giving some clues as to how Americans viewed the elite English as feminine. He believed the “genteel” game of cricket was too slow and not combative enough for the American. The English played it because it was “proper,” and “because it is easy and does not overtax their energy or their thought.” The British cricketer, according to Spalding,

having finished his day's labor at noon, may don his negligee shirt, his white trousers, his gorgeous hosiery and his canvas shoes, and sally forth to the field of sport, with his sweetheart on one arm and his Cricket bat under the other, knowing that he may engage in his national pastime without soiling his linen or neglecting his lady. He may play Cricket, drink afternoon tea, flirt, gossip, smoke, take a whisky and soda at the customary hour, and have a jolly, conventional good time . . .⁸⁵

The American, on the other hand lived in a democratic society and played a democratic game. “Knowing no arbitrary class distinctions,” the American youth may interact with the President’s son, especially if he knows the game of baseball. Moreover, the American “may be a veritable Beau Brummel in social life,” but “when he dons his Base Ball suit, he says goodbye to society, doffs his gentility, and becomes—just a Ball Player!” And although his girlfriend may be in the stands, “she is not for him while the

⁸⁴ Allen Guttman, *Games and Empires: Modern Sports and Cultural Imperialism* (NY: Columbia University Press, 1994), 93.

⁸⁵ Albert Spalding, *America's National Game* (NY: American Sports, 1911), 2-3.

game lasts.” Americans’ blood was too “red-hot” to be satisfied by the relaxed nature of cricket. Spalding’s juxtaposition of the two countries and their games is a commentary on how Americans saw themselves as exceptional and different from the rigid English class system. Spalding’s oft-quoted alliteration shows that he believed baseball exemplified such peculiarly American traits as “Courage, Confidence, Combativeness; American Dash, Discipline, Determination; American Energy, Eagerness, Enthusiasm; American Pluck, Persistency, Performance; American Spirit, Sagacity, Success; American Vim, Vigor, Virility.” In fact, baseball was such a fast-paced sport that it was “too lively for any but Americans to play.”⁸⁶ Henry Chadwick concurred when he wrote that baseball was “peculiarly suited to the American temperament.”⁸⁷

This claim for manhood lay behind the origin debate with Henry Chadwick, as shown in Spalding’s use of masculine and feminine terms to describe each country’s game. The cricketer may “play Cricket, drink afternoon tea, flirt, gossip, smoke, take a whiskey-and-soda at the customary hour, and have a jolly, conventional good time,” but “not so the American Ball Player,” whose first business is to play ball, sliding in mud “four inches deep” if necessary. “Cricket is a genteel pastime. Base Ball is War!” The game was “too lively” for the English and for women. While they may watch the game and keep score, “neither our wives, our sisters, our daughters, nor our sweethearts, may play Base Ball on the field.” They can play cricket, tennis, basketball, and golf, but “Base Ball is too strenuous for womankind.” An image contrasts the two games, showing a cricketer waiting to hit, while behind him stand a few spectators chatting while enjoying

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Frederick Ivor Campbell, “Via: Henry Chadwick,” *Harvard Magazine* 90 (Sept Oct 1987), 6061.

the action. The baseball players, on the other hand, are rolling in the dirt, stirring up a dust cloud. While the catcher tags the runner, the grandstand is packed with faceless fans watching the battle.⁸⁸ Spalding spoke confidently about the distinction between the two games, and by extension the English and American tendencies, because he witnessed it first-hand, during his two tours in 1874 and 1889. One of the great insights from his tours, however, is not what he or the other Americans saw, but what the English saw and how they described it.

During the 1874 tour, the English press were confused by the game. One writer wondered why a man would want to be accused of stealing a base, and why the umpire called “ball one” when four balls (pitches) had already been thrown. The only way they seemed to be able to describe it to its readers was that it resembled their “schoolboy” game of rounders.⁸⁹ Two things were most prominent to them about baseball. The first was the expert fielding of the players. Over and over again, the press commented on how adept the Americans were at catching and throwing the ball. Although they were impressed, and thought cricket fielders could learn a thing or two from the American fielders, still they thought that cricket’s focus on the hitter made the game more beautiful than baseball: “That the use of the bat is not the most important feature in base ball is at once evident. Thus, one of the chief beauties of cricket is absent from the game.”

Interestingly, the English cricketers had no interest in fielding: “You couldn’t get our fellows out to practice shying the ball...this is looked on as the drudgery of the game, and

⁸⁸ Spalding, *America’s National Game*, Chapter 1.

⁸⁹ See the Spalding Scrapbooks, volume 1. Specifically, an article from the *New York Clipper* quoting the *London Sportsman*, dated March 7, 1874. No title. Also, “Base Ball at Lords,” *London Post*, August 4, 1874.

is done by the hirelings or professionals.”⁹⁰ The different approach to fielding may sound like a small thing, but this may have confirmed in Spalding’s mind that Americans were more likely to do the dirty work, and thus more manly than the English.

The second thing the English noticed about the game was its duration and speed. They noted that a game “rarely, if ever exceeds two hours in duration.” While Spalding looked upon this as one of the main selling points of the game, the English saw it as symptomatic of an unfocused and hurried American nation: “The Americans as a nation are so busy, so bent upon getting on, that the greatest merit a game can possess in their eyes is that it can be played in less than three hours. But with us a game that lasts all day, or even two days, is on that account all the more popular.”⁹¹ It is interesting that the English so readily noted the difference in pace of the games, and were so ready to use it as a microcosm to define the young nation: “as a man’s nature is most readily detected in his unguarded moments, so the characteristics of a nation appear most clearly in its games.”⁹²

When the Americans brought baseball to England again in 1889, there were a few notable differences in the reaction of the press. They still used rounders to describe it to their readers; one called it “rounders gone wrong,” another “glorified rounders.”⁹³ They had the same admiration for the “clever catching of the Yankees,” or expert fielding, but with a slight difference. Before, they missed the artistry of the batting they got with

⁹⁰ Article in the *London Saturday Review*. No title or date. Spalding Scrapbooks, volume 1.

⁹¹ “Our Athletic Cousins,” *London Post*, August 5, 1874. Found in Spalding Scrapbooks, volume 1.

⁹² *London Saturday Review*, Spalding Scrapbooks, volume 1.

⁹³ See Spalding Scrapbooks, volume 9. The first comment from an article dated March 13, 1889. The second from an article dated March 19, 1889, “Life in London.”

cricket, but enjoyed seeing terrific catching and throwing. This time, the pitching and fielding were too dominant for their liking. Between 1874 and 1889, overhand pitching replaced underhand pitching, a natural development as pitchers sought an edge. But to the English, the batter was so outmatched that “our English love of fair play is offended.” The English were accustomed to seeing the batter be the aggressor, and “for this reason baseball will never be popular in England, where we love above all things to see a fair and well contested fight.”⁹⁴

This comment touches on another element involved, connected to class distinctions, that caused Americans to see themselves as different than the English. As Michael Oriard has written, “Initially, sport in America was perceived as simple physical activity; by century's end it had become the carrier of a potent ideology.”⁹⁵ Part of that ideology was a win-at-all-costs attitude. Americans practiced this belief on the sporting field by practicing the letter of the rule. They kept the rules, but whatever chicanery one could muster in the effort to win, including finding loopholes, one was to be commended for doing so. The English, however, lived by the spirit of the rules in their sporting life. Oriard has defined the latter as sportsmanship, which adheres to a code of ethics by obeying the letter and intent of the rules, and the former as gamesmanship, in which one practices the letter of the rule, but refuses to conform to the code. Amos Alonzo Stagg, a football and baseball coach for the University of Chicago, commented on this difference in interpreting what constituted fair play: “The British play a game for the game's sake,”

⁹⁴ “Life in London,” March 19, 1889. Spalding Scrapbooks, volume 9.

⁹⁵ Michael Oriard, *Sporting with the Gods: The Rhetoric of Play and Game in American Culture* (NY: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 11.

but Americans “play to win. . . . The British, in general, regard both the letter and the spirit [of the rules]. We, in general, regard the letter only. Our prevailing viewpoint might be expressed something like this: Here are the rules made and provided for. They affect each side alike. If we are smart enough to detect a joker or loophole first, then we are entitled not only in law but in ethics to take advantage of it.”⁹⁶ This ethos lay behind Spalding’s assertion that cricket was a pastime, while baseball was war. According to Spalding, the American was compelled to do whatever was necessary to win the battle.

One particularly cranky English critic summed up many of the English observations in a rambling, belittling article. Confirming Spalding’s portrayal of clean cricket versus down-and-dirty baseball: “Look at that broad-shouldered chap in spotless--*Bang!* By Jove *what* a downer! He’s not spotless now either; plastered with Surrey slime from neck to ankle.” On the pace of the game: “What *are* they up to? Look to me like a lot of tipsy fellows in a fog. Somebody sprawling every half minute.” On the fielding: “Yes, they *do* catch well, certainly, and throw straight, only nothing seems to come of it.” On rounders: “Game resembles a glorified--and more dangerous--Rounders, only nobody has made a ‘rounder’ yet.” On the lack of fair play: “*they don’t seem to score at all!*”

Probably the most notable observation of the press, however, was the physique of the men. The baseball players seemed to dwarf the English cricketers, according to the reports. Cap Anson, who stood 6’2” had a “splendid physique” that warranted one author’s “unqualified admiration;” and yet there were other “veritable giants” larger than he. In one cartoon surely designed to denigrate the game, a couple of English schoolboys

⁹⁶ Ibid, 1516. Quoted from Amos Alonzo Stagg and Wesley Winans Stout, *Touchdown!* (NY: Longmans, Green, 1927), 13031, 5758.

challenge the Americans to a game of rounders. The caption reads: “Base-ball, the American game about which so much has been said, is simply ‘rounders.’” But what is most noticeable is the image of the huge Americans in the cartoon. They are broad-shouldered and muscular. If this was their impression, then Spalding, a large man for his time (also 6’2”), surely must have noticed this difference.

For Spalding, this was a confirmation of the strenuous life; that baseball created men who were healthy, large, and strong. Baseball had lifted him from a foster home to become a magnate. It created physically fit soldiers and helped them to win wars. It was America’s National Game, and was a symbol of the success of the young, winning, country. This was the ultimate importance of baseball: that it created winners. It was a tool for physical fitness, which separated Americans from the world.

That claiming a manly image was important to Spalding is reflected in his account of his life in baseball. Spalding created an image of himself as a selfless, beneficent provider of baseball joy to the public. He wanted the public to believe that it was his calling in life to provide joy and entertainment, a release, to others; that his motives had nothing to do with money. In one chapter of his book, he makes a “plea for the baseball magnate,” attempting to dispel the idea that baseball owners’ lives are free from stress and worry because of their wealth. Rather, winning is more relief than joy, the stress of the job kills men prematurely, and they get all the blame for failure and none of the success. But they sacrifice for the enjoyment of the public.

According to Spalding, this was a calling or burden given to him, not chosen. The game was thrust upon him by fate. He claimed that in his early teens, after he moved to Forest City, IL, he would sit “far beyond the outfield” and watch the older boys play ball,

wishing he could join them, but too afraid to ask and too afraid he would fail. But as fate would have it, one boy hit a ball so far that it came soaring in Spalding's direction. "Talk about special Providence!" Spalding would say. "Impulsively," he reached out, caught the ball with his right hand, held it for a moment, and threw it home "on an air-line to the catcher." After the game, one of the boys complimented Spalding and asked him if he would like to play with them the next day. "Blushing, I managed to stammer that I would...and from that day when sides were chosen I was usually among the first to have a place."⁹⁷ In this fanciful tale, Spalding wants his reader to believe that he sat far beyond the outfield, where one would have to hit the ball "square on the nose" in order to get to him, yet upon catching it, he was able to throw it to the catcher on the fly. Moreover, the kids, upon seeing this display of athleticism, did not immediately ask him to play, but waited until after the game to extend the invite for the next day's contest.

Spalding felt the need to set the record straight in response to inaccurate rumors regarding his introduction to the game. According to the rumors, when he was thirteen, a Civil War veteran explained the game to him, and Spalding immediately organized two teams, then moved to Chicago where he "volunteered" his services to pull an "unfortunate club out of its deplorable situation." Although he "dislike[d] to shatter this beautiful fairy tale," Spalding wanted his readers to know that he was a "country boy" who was too bashful to speak to anyone. He was homesick living in a boarding home, and in the "dark days of utter loneliness," before baseball rescued him from his abyss.

If the whole tale sounds like something out of a dime novel, that is because it is. *Baseball Joe* was a series of novels written by Howard Garis under the pen name Lester

⁹⁷ Spalding, *America's National Game*, 511.

Chadwick, a nod to Henry Chadwick. Written just one year after Spalding's *America's National Game*, it played on boys' growing fascination with the national game. In the series' first book, *Baseball Joe of the Silver Stars*, two local rivals engage in a contest. A player on the Silver Stars comes to the game with a "well-formed lad" who was "a stranger in town." This stranger was Joe Matson, soon to become known as Baseball Joe. As with Spalding, his family had recently moved to town due to the office a local factory made to Joe's father. A local neighbor and Silver Star player invited him to the game that day. As they were entering the stadium, a ball was hit over the fence in their direction. "Look out!" yelled the boy, "Duck, Joe, duck!":

But Joe did not dodge. Instead, he spread his legs well apart and stood ready to catch the swiftly-moving horsehide in his bare hands. Ping! the ball came in between Joe's palms with vicious thud, but there it stuck, and a moment later the newcomer had tossed it back over the fence with a certain and strong aim.⁹⁸

Throughout the twelve-book series, Joe would go on to become a dominant pitcher, become a big-league pitcher, tour around the world, and in his older days, become a club owner. It is almost as if the author lifted the story from Spalding's life.

These stories portray the common rags-to-riches theme, but there is something deeper at play in Spalding's retelling of his humble beginnings: some element of Spalding's manliness was at stake. During this time the wealthy had a litany of epithets that were used against them: foppish, dainty, dandy, and dude. These terms mostly intended to convey the idea that the upper-class were effeminate, privileged, lazy, soft, spoiled, and bookish. Moreover, they suggested that this was inherently the way the rich were, and that it was the result of a life free from the usual worries of how to get by and provide for oneself and one's family. Being born wealthy made them this way, and being

⁹⁸ Lester Chadwick, *Baseball Joe and the Silver Stars* (New York: Cupples and Leon Company), 6.

born wealthy was just a gift; not something they achieved. Never having had to struggle with life, never having to get dirty by working, and having everything provided to them -- this was seen as feminine.

This was a stigma the wealthy sought to overcome. Teddy Roosevelt was one of the few who did it successfully. He did it through the strenuous life, and by getting into the dirty world of politics.⁹⁹ Spalding, while not born rich, still felt the need to proclaim his humble beginnings. The key to success in claiming the “masculinity of the poor but honest versus the femininity of the rich but corrupt,” was to show that rather than being successful, they achieved success. Richard M. Huber said “success was not simply *being* rich or famous. It meant *attaining* riches or *achieving* fame. You had to know where a man began and where he ended in order to determine how far he had come.”¹⁰⁰ In *Baseball Joe*, Joe falls in love with Mabel Varley, but he must compete for her with Mr. Beckworth Fleming. Fleming is rich and “foppish,” and on the same social level as Mabel. But Fleming, as with those who are born rich, is corrupt, and tries to obtain Mabel through deceit. Joe, on the other hand, has lived a full life of work and accomplishment, a life full of achievement. “Fleming cannot *achieve* success like Chadwick’s hero,” says Greg Sojka. In creating his own rags to riches story of a shy, unassuming country boy with humble beginnings, Spalding is claiming the manliness of achievement.

⁹⁹ See Arnaldo Testi, “The Gender of Reform Politics: Theodore Roosevelt and the Culture of Masculinity,” *The Journal of American History*, 81, no. 4 (March 1995), 1509-1533.

¹⁰⁰ Richard M. Huber, *The American Idea of Success* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1971), 1. Quoted in Gregory Sojka, “Going 'From Rags to Riches' With Baseball Joe: Or, A Pitcher's Progress,” *Journal of American Culture* 2, no. 1 (Spring 1979): 113-21.

CONCLUSION

It took three years, some manipulating, and a lot of editing, but Spalding won the argument with Chadwick. As with baseball, he did what he had to do to win. In fact, he was displaying the very same qualities in winning the argument that he so passionately argued were inherent in baseball and American: “Courage, Confidence, Combativeness; American Dash, Discipline, Determination; American Energy, Eagerness, Enthusiasm; American Pluck, Persistency, Performance; American Spirit, Sagacity, Success; American Vim, Vigor, Virility.” The argument was, in fact, a microcosm both of Spalding’s life and of his very argument that Americans were winners. Early in his baseball career, he joined the Boston Red Stockings, a stacked team that would win five championships, becoming baseball’s first dynasty. Jumping ship at the right time, he brought the most talented ball players to Chicago with him, and as owner, presided over baseball’s second dynasty. Spalding loved winning, and was brilliant at stacking the deck to improve his chances. In a friendly argument with an old friend over baseball’s provenance, it was no different; and yet it would be easy to dismiss Spalding as a greedy liar. Sure, he cared about expanding his Sporting Goods empire, but the truth is that Spalding also cared deeply about the game and the country that gave him so much.

Had Spalding been alive to see the opening of the Baseball Hall of Fame Museum in Cooperstown thirty years later, he would have basked in the glory of the ceremonies. Baseball’s commissioner, Judge Kennesaw Mountain Landis, presided over the gala

affair. It was more than a celebration of the men inducted into the Hall of Fame. It was called the “Baseball Centennial Ceremony.” After being introduced with band music, Charles Doyle, the master of ceremonies, announced, “one hundred years ago, in this same village, Abner Doubleday invented this game. Now, for the first time, his achievement is to be officially honored.” Doubleday was mentioned at least three times in the opening remarks, and the Cooperstown mayor invited those listening on the radio to visit the “cradle of baseball.” And to the men gathered, the game was still a reflection of America. Addressing the crowd, Landis said: “I should like to dedicate this museum to all America. Lovers of good sportsmanship, healthy bodies, keen minds. For those are the principles of baseball. So it is to them, rather than to the few who have been honored here, that I propose to dedicate this shrine of sportsmanship.” Patriotism might not have been as vivid in 1939, but the idea that baseball developed the body and mind still persisted.

It may sound silly to hear the men involved in the debate put so much emphasis on the physical benefits due to the speed and action of the game, especially compared to the relaxed pace of the game today. But the game was different back then. Games usually lasted one and half hours, rarely exceeding two hours. The game has gradually slowed, and today the average game is about three hours. Meanwhile, football has supplanted baseball as the national pastime, due to a combination of factors, the amount of action surely being one of those factors. To hear baseball romantics today speak of pitching duels and the drama of the “inaction” of the game would make Spalding shudder. In his era, the game was fast and high-scoring. Fans loved scoring then and now, only then, teams could score many runs and still keep the game short and quick. In 1904, there was

some discussion of introducing the game to the English again. The writer of the article called baseball a “short, sharp game...You want runs to make baseball attractive.”¹⁰¹ Mark Twain, when speaking to Spalding’s returning baseball tourists in 1889, said that baseball was “the very symbol, the outward and visible expression of the drive, and push, and rush and struggle of the raging, tearing, booming nineteenth century!”

It is incredible that thirty years after the decision, during the Hall of Fame ceremonies, the Abner Doubleday Myth was so persistent. For all his efforts to spread the game to the world, Spalding’s most successful legacy was to crown Doubleday, posthumously, the honor of baseball’s inventor. While baseball never caught hold in the countries he proselytized, the Doubleday myth has persisted for a century. As recently as 2011, John Thorn felt the need to spend the first chapter of his book *Baseball in the Garden of Eden*, discussing the myth. Doubleday has become a Forrest Gump-like character, someone who was supposedly present at the inception of baseball (not true), the Civil War (true), and the San Francisco cable car (sort of).

The correspondence of the Special Base Ball Commission provides special insight into how these men felt about baseball, the English, and America and its role in the world. They believed they were bigger, stronger, and more masculine than the English, and their beliefs were confirmed through their interactions with the British. America was ready to confront the world on its own terms and take a leading role in the world. The country had beaten the British in war, and had, for the most part, beaten them in sports.

¹⁰¹ Spalding Collection, Chadwick Diaries, Volume 35. “Baseball for Birmingham.” No author, unknown newspaper. 02/15/04.

Spalding was not about to let Chadwick and the British beat them out of the claim to the greatest sport in the world.

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