

Baseball paper essay



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Word Count: 3844 From the sandlot to stadiums seating over fifty thousand people, the game of baseball has provided people of all ages with a common foundation; a sport we can all call our national pastime. Though its concept sounds simple, a game using a ball and a bat, millions of people all over the world have sought involvement in it by either playing at some level, or just sitting back and watching a game. With professional baseball attracting more and more fans each season, no one knows what limits this sport can reach. For the time being though, it has been a real “home run.”

Like any other sport, baseball developed over an extended period of time spanning way back to the 1600s. The first evidence of the sport was a game called rounders, which was played in England (Lewine 27). Players hit a ball with a bat, which is parallel to today's game, but the methods to how the defense put the runners out was the big difference. Similar to dodge ball, an infielder or outfielder had to throw the ball at the runners. If the ball hit a runner who was off base, he was out. This formula was called plugging and soon after, its popularity ceased as did the games (29). Soon after, a transition occurred and the name rounders changed to town ball and then to Massachusetts game, and finally the name baseball, developed by American

colonists, stuck. Rules did change over the period of them the names did, such as the number of players, distance between

bases and etc. Around 1840, the Americans solidified the rules and rounders had become baseball.

Even with evidence that baseball developed from rounders, it is believed that a United States Army general named Abner

Doubleday invented the sport in Cooperstown, New York, current home of the Hall of Fame (30). After many disputes,

Albert Spalding, a sporting-goods manufacturer and player of baseball, decided to have a commission decide who originated

the game. In 1908, the commission credited Doubleday with creating the game and it was based on a letter from Abner

Graves, a friend of Doubledays. In this document, Graves stated that he had been present as Doubleday conceptualized the

game in 1839 (30). As a result of this decision, historians research concluded that Doubleday had little to do with the discovery

of baseball and his friend Graves described plugging in the letter, that being a major fundamental in rounders. While all the

controversy over who invented the game persisted, people of all ages, and an early system of baseball organization developed

explored this new sport.

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A man by the name of Alexander Cartwright, a sportsman from New York started the first organized baseball club, the Knickerbocker Base Ball Club of New York (30). Along with establishing the first baseball club, he added a set of written rules, which are extremely parallel to the ones of today (30). Some of these rules, stated in 1845, include, the distance between all the bases being ninety feet, and having nine players on each side. No longer would players be plugging runners, but now they would be tagging them with the ball. The rule of forcing a player out at a base was also introduced in 1854. Finally, other rules changed over time such as the length of the game change to nine innings and the distance from the pitchers mound to home plate now being sixty feet. Another major landmark in the history of baseball, the invention of the newspaper box score, occurred in 1845 as well. With all these new advances, the game naturally began to spread across the country (32).

Not only did the famous Civil War (1861-1865) spread our nation into the north and south, but on a positive note, it also spread the sport of baseball all over the country. As an example, the union soldiers would play the game as a form of

recreation as the rest of the union troops and even confederate prisoners would watch (47). Something similar to a domino

effect started as the prisoners and soldiers came home from the war and taught their other peers how to play the game (47).

Through this manner, people in all cities, towns, and farms began playing baseball. Amateurs started playing on different

baseball clubs and this gave rise to professional baseball. Like any other pastime, some people will be better than others at it,

and this goes the same for baseball. Better players were attracted by teams through jobs or money and by 1869, the first club

to pay all its players, the Cincinnati Red Stockings, was started. Followers advanced on and by 1876, there were eight

professional teams, paying their players in some way or another. These eight teams made up the National League and they

played in Boston, Brooklyn, Chicago, Cincinnati, New York City, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, and Saint Louis. In 1903, the

American League was started, and it had teams playing in the same places as the national league with exception to teams in

Washington DC and Cleveland. Ironically, these same sixteen teams ended up creating the major leagues and played in the

same cities for fifty years to come.

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With this new contingency of teams, strategy and a new approach to the game came along during the Dead Ball Era (49). This period of time was denoted by this simply because the actual baseballs that were being used weren't nearly as lively as the ones used currently (49). The materials used for baseballs during this period of time from about 1890 to 1920 included a less dense cork and horsehide. For this reason, the ball did not travel as far as it does today, even when perfect contact is made between the bat and ball. The batter philosophy during that time consisted of hitting the ball where other people weren't, in the field, that is. An indication of this is shown by the batting leader of this era, Wee Willie Keeler, stated, " I hit em where they aint." Another major introduction to baseball history during this period was the concept of base stealing. A big base stealer during this time, King Kelly, demonstrated an ability and fame for running the bases and making that crucial steal. He paved the way for the big base stealers of our generations including Lou Brock who shattered the stolen base record during the 1970s originally held by Billy Hamilton, with 938 steals. Finally, the baseball player with the most stolen bases of all time, Rickey Henderson, is still playing today.

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With all this new popularity, baseball had gained, we often wonder when it was actually denoted our national pastime. Well, with the beginning of the modern era of baseball, starting in 1900, the sport gained the recognition (50). During this period, boys every day would spend all their leisure time playing baseball during the warm weather, and players became more and more popular in the National and American leagues. Pitcher Cy Young, whose award is given to the best pitcher in the National and American leagues every year, dominated during this time and set the all time record for number of games won by a pitcher, with 511, over a twenty one year career. Even with the good, he did deal with the bad and has the all time record for losses by a pitcher, with 313. While you will always have a great pitcher, you will always have a great hitter. No one can fit this description any better than Ty Cobb (69). He was known for his arrogance and hard demeanor, but his various hitting records put a gleaming mask over those qualities. His batting average of .367 ranks highest for all time in that category. In addition to those numbers, his 4,191 hits over his career are second only to Pete Rose's 4,256.

In addition to the new records and popularity, baseball became even more majestic. Starting in 1903, the World Series joined all common men, women, and children during each October to celebrate the two best teams in the National and American leagues (McCarver 101). In fact, baseball had post-season competition before 1903, but the concept of having National and American league pennants came about in 1903, and were formally given the title, the World Series. It gave all fans a final opportunity to share baseball before the game disappeared into the cold silence of the winter ahead. During its early years, the World Series kept fans sitting by their transistor radios and as recent as today, fans of all ages receive maximum exposure of the championship games on their television sets at home (102). Players on each team need to perform under the highest of pressure and it pays off in the end when the winner becomes crowned, best baseball team in the world (102).

As popular and important to the average American as baseball was during the early 1900s, many were disturbed as scandal hit the diamond (Levine 74). The games reputation was hurt with the 1919 Black Sox Scandal. In the 16th World Series

match up, between the Chicago White Sox and the Cincinnati Reds, eight White Sox players were accused of throwing, or

trying to lose the World Series, in return for money obtained through gambling. The commissioner of baseball at the time, judge

Kenesaw Mountain Landis, banned the eight White Sox players from baseball permanently. Landis was a federal judge who

had a reputation for honesty, and he successfully restored the public confidence baseball had had before the incident. Now that

scandal was behind, as was the First World War, fans of all ages were about to experience a phenomenon for which a candy

bar had even been named (75).

Babe Ruth started playing professional baseball in 1914 with the Boston Red Sox. While everyone knows him as being a big

home run hitter, he actually started his career as a pitcher, and soon after made the change to the outfield. He started hitting

more and more home runs than anyone thought possible. This was shown by his totals of 50 homers in four different seasons,

which also includes the 60 home runs in 1927, fourth to Roger Maris 61 in 1961, and Sammy Sosas 66 and Mark

McGwires 70, both broken last year. His career total of 714 home runs is second all time to Henry Aarons 754. No one had

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experienced a player like Ruth and baseball in the 1920s was called the Babe Ruth era (82). This can be attributed to the tons of fans that flew to Yankee Stadium to watch him play. His success even helped to change baseball strategy in that more batters became full swingers, rather than a place hitter, meaning that the home run would soon become prevalent as one of the most important parts of baseball history. Another major player of this time was Lou Gehrig, the “iron-man” first baseman of the New York Yankees, who played in 2,130 consecutive baseball games, a record until Baltimore Oriole Cal Ripken Jr. broke it with 2,632 consecutive games (83).

Nothing is ever perfect and that's the way it went for baseball as the Great Depression of the early 1930s hit home. Baseball was professional and it was a business and like all other businesses, it suffered due to the financial hardships it faced (84). To alleviate the situations, radio stations donated money in order for the right to broadcast the games to help the team economic statuses. One big broadcast happened on July 6, 1933, as the first annual All-Star game was played in Chicago. Its still a Major League classic today as the best players from the National and American leagues congregate to play against each other

where one league will come out the winner (McCarver 115). A major breakthrough also occurred during this time with the installation of lights in some ballparks, which gave the fans a chance to see the games because of their working hours during the day. The first game played with a lit field took place in Philadelphia in 1935 in a battle between the Cincinnati Reds and Philadelphia Phillies.

In the years ahead, war would reach all bases and hit home with many of the players. When the United States entered the

Second World War in 1941, many of the ball players served in the armed forces, such as Joe DiMaggio, Ted Williams, and

Bob Feller. Before leaving for war though, one player made baseball history that will certainly be tough to ever break. Joltin

Joe DiMaggio reached base successfully over a 56 game hitting streak. After Joe and the other players left, players that were

too young, too old, and physically deteriorating were playing Americas pastime. Naturally, to many fans liking, after the war,

the players came back. Attendance at ballparks across the country soared, and with the new invention of the television, many

fans were in their living rooms taking in the action without having to be at the park (Lewine 94). Another major event occurred

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in 1947 when second baseman Jackie Robinson entered Major League Baseball from the Negro Leagues. Before this year,

African American baseball players experienced prolonged segregation and weren't allowed to play in the Major Leagues.

Therefore, the Negro Leagues exhibited some of the finest African Americans to play baseball, but did not receive the publicity

that Major Leaguers did. Finally, Robinson became the first African American male to play Major League ball and did so with

the Brooklyn and Los Angeles Dodgers. Many other black males entered the major leagues thereafter including pitching

phenomenon Satchel Paige, who threw his first major league pitch at the age of 43. During this period of time, the dominant

team throughout all of professional baseball was the New York Yankees.

From 1949 through 1953, the Yankees won five

straight American League pennants and World Series under the direction of manager Casey Stengel.

As the 1950s came to a close, a door opened toward franchise shifting and expansion teams (100). Some instances in which

this was the case took place in Boston with their hometown team the Braves, moving to Milwaukee. This was the first time a

National League team franchise moved to another city since 1900. A year later marked the first move of an American League team with the Saint Louis Browns moving to Baltimore and changing their name to the Orioles. Before 1958, all major league franchises played in the Eastern and Midwestern parts of the United States. Now teams have been established on the West Coast, South, Southwest, and Canada. As an example, the Brooklyn Dodgers made their move to Los Angeles in 1958. In the early 1960s, the American and National Leagues each added four more teams. In addition to that the numbers of games each season, during and before that time 154, was changed to 162, and remains the case today. The M and M brothers, Mickey Mantle and Roger Maris, both gave our country something exciting and record-breaking that caught the public's eye immediately. The year was 1961 and these two New York Yankees both combined to hit 115 home runs together, (Mantle hit 54 and Maris hit 61) and as a team ended up winning the World Series that year too. Roger Maris 61 homers in 61 was the all time record for home runs in a baseball season until 1998, last year, when both Sammy Sosa and Mark McGwire both

shattered his record. Another fun addition to attending baseball games was the installation of special promotion days. On May 28, 1967, the Detroit Tigers gave all fans a baseball bat upon entrance to the stadium, and this special promotion day was coined, “ Bat Day,” and it has become the commonplace among all baseball teams annually (McCarver 140).

The explosive 1960s also included what was called “ The Year of the Pitcher. (Lewine 125)” Representing the American

League, Denny McLain crushed the opposition and finished the season with totals of 31 wins, the first time a pitcher

accumulated 30 wins in a season since 1934, six losses, and a 1. 96 earned run average. On the other side, Bob Gibson

represented the National League and he racked up totals of 22 wins, nine losses, and a 1. 12 earned run average, the lowest

earned run average for a pitcher to pitch over 300 innings (White 245). While these pitchers and many others throughout both

leagues succeeded, the hitters on the other hand didnt shine. One of the greatest center fielders ever, Willie Mays only hit 23

home runs that season, a feat very far from his third place spot on the all time home run list with 660. Boston Red Sox

outfielder for 21 years, Carl Yazstremski batted .301 that year, the highest average in the American league! Base stealing was

reintroduced back into baseball and a new generation of speedsters took for the base-paths, such as Oakland Athletic Bert

Campaneris, and Lou Brock, who has the second most steals on the all time list.

With the close of the 1960s came a period of time in which money began to have a profound influence and impact on baseball

(Lewine 147). The 1970s, or the age of the new professionals, as it has been called, brought player salaries to new highs, had

team managers fired due to overpaid players and careless owners, and brought baseball to television in a new way. During

early 1970, the exalted baseball player, like a veteran who has come close to the end of his career, such as Hank Aaron or

Willie Mays, was making \$100, 000. By 1979, the average major leaguers salary was \$121, 000. All time strikeout and

no-hitter leader Nolan Ryan was earning one million dollars a year during that season. Free agency also took a big part in the

money revolution of 1970s baseball (149). Players would file for free agency and be allowed to demand a trade and this

became the commonplace among many major leaguers. Reggie Jackson for example went from being an Oakland Athletic, to a

Baltimore Oriole, and finally to a New York Yankee in a three year period from 1975 to 1977. Former manager Billy Martin

was fired four times in eight years, and twice by Yankee owner George Steinbrenner, just as an example. This can be a result

of the power gained by the Players Association, which gave a loss of power to both owners and managers (151). Managers

such as martin therefore had a reputation for getting into bump-ups with his players. Finally, televised baseball gave families a

cheap replacement for sitting in the stands while they sat in their living rooms and took in an afternoon of baseball. Color

commentators such as Howard Cosell and Joe Garagiola became household names for their insight with the “ Game of the

Week” broadcast. The success of broadcasting the games on the major television networks has lived on today as we currently

have the “ Game of the Week” on FOX network as well as many other local stations broadcasting their respective games.

With a conservative mood ending the 1970s, Ronald Reagan was our president after a landslide victory in the election of

1980, and baseball took a disturbing turn with a major strike in 1981(“
History The 1980s” –

[http://www. majorleaguebaseball. com/](http://www.majorleaguebaseball.com/)). Spiraling player salaries pitted
players against owners in a series of pitched battles on

the labor front (Lewine 187). When players and owners failed to reach a
contract agreement, the players struck on June 11,

1981 and did not play for fifty games wiping out one third of the season
schedule. After a compromise ended the strike,

television ratings went down. Some players were charged with drug abuse,
but with the strike, decreasing television ratings,

and the drug problems, baseball lost little popularity. Perhaps this is the
result of dazzling play and major offensive bursts. In

both the National and American Leagues, players hit a total of 2, 634 home
runs during 1987, the most that decade. Mark

McGwire came into baseball that year, and earned American League Rookie
of the Year honors, with his 49 home runs that

season, just the beginning of what he would end up doing eleven years to
follow. Finally, that season, Reggie Jackson, or Mr.

October as he was well known as for his World Series performances, retired
with a lifetime total of 563 home runs (White 34).

With Jackson retiring, many new players, who are now veterans with record-breaking careers, came into the game during this

decade, such as San Diego Padres outfielder Tony Gwynn, Baltimore Orioles shortstop Cal Ripken Jr., and third baseman

Wade Boggs, who accumulated seven consecutive 200 hit seasons. Finally, on September 4, 1985, Cincinnati Reds

player/manager, Pete Rose, broke a record that has still stood today and has the potential of doing so for a long time ahead.

Rose broke Ty Cobbs long-standing record by hitting his 4,192 hit putting an exclamation point on a career that was definitive

of his nickname, “Charlie Hustle (White 37).”

As the 80s came to a close, the big hair was cut, people stopped walking like Egyptians, and baseball entered a new decade

in which records would be broken, highly regarded veterans would retire, and a new contingency of young players would carry

the Major Leagues through the millennium. One player that any average family would know as a household name retired during

the 1993 season. Yes, Nolan Ryan was in a class by himself as he was known as the strikeout king, with the most ever

strikeouts, 5,714, over his 26-year career, another all-time record for years of service (“All-Time Leaders”

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[http://www. majorleaguebaseball. comz](http://www.majorleaguebaseball.com)). In addition to these records, he also has the most no-hitters of all-time with seven, and

is twelfth on the all time list with 312. Other players who played since the early 1970s that retired with their names in the record

books for their top accomplishments include George Brett, Robin Yount, Paul Molitor, and Carlton Fisk. While these

phenomenal men who played our national pastime retired, new faces with talent have climbed onto the baseball bandwagon.

New York Yankees shortstop Derek Jeter has brought his quick glove and bat to the field as well as having broken many

womens hearts (“ Derek Jeter” <http://espn. go. net/>). Pitchers such as Chicago Cubs starter Kerry Wood, who in his rookie

season last year, recorded 20 strikeouts in one game, look to follow in Nolan Ryans footsteps. Jeter and Wood are just two

examples of the pool of talent from which the future of baseball will obtain its players. While all these new kids on the block

infiltrate in and out of baseball, veterans have set an impact on baseball universally and there is no better example of this than in

1998. Mark McGwire and Sammy Sosa broke one of the most prestigious baseball records, the single season home run total.

Roger Maris 61 home runs in 1961 stood as a record for 38 years until these two men belted 70 and 66 home runs

respectively. Can this major record-breaking predict what professional baseball players have to offer us in the future? Well, we

can safely assume that baseball into the new millenium can only bring us the same excitement that it has for the past hundred or

so years. After all, it is still designated as our national pastime.

For centuries, baseball has changed drastically whether it be the players, teams, records, and all the like. While all things change though, and

as it is stated “ the only thing that is constant is change,” one thing has remained the same throughout its duration as one of the major sports

(McCarver 209). It has united people in times of good and bad, and for that reason was coined our national pastime. You can find thousands of

kids each Saturday during the spring at little league games. You can see a stickball game proceeding at a local park. You can even sit in an

air-conditioned room in front of the television watching the “ Game of the Week.” With the millions of people involved in baseball in some way

or another, there is no wonder why it is called our national pastime.