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The History of Baseball... Is the History of America



President
John F. Kennedy
at a 1962 game

Baseball is a great sport and great fun to watch. Baseball is also a great way to think about history. That's because sports teams don't exist separately from the world in which we live.

They are a part of that world and reflect what goes on in it.

When baseball began to be popular in America in the early 1800s, most people in the United States lived on farms, in rural areas or in small towns.

There were lots of wide, grassy fields on which to play, and many towns formed teams to play the sport based on the English game of rounders.

In fact, baseball was first called "townball," reflecting the small-town appeal it had.

As cities grew with the arrival of immigrant ethnic groups, baseball built a following among these new Americans in places like New York, Chicago and Detroit.

Baseball became so popular in the cities that the biggest ones had more than one team. Boston had the Braves and the Red Sox, Chicago had the Cubs and the White Sox, Philadelphia had the Phillies and the Athletics.

New York City, which was the nation's largest city, was so big it had three Major League teams—the Yankees, the New York Giants and the Brooklyn Dodgers.

When population shifted toward the West, teams moved with the people. The Boston Braves moved to Milwaukee in Wisconsin, the New York Giants moved to San Francisco, and the Brooklyn Dodgers to Los Angeles. One team, the Philadelphia Athletics, moved twice—first to the Midwest city of Kansas City, Missouri and then to Oakland, California. Later, as the nation's population shifted south, the Braves moved to Atlanta, Georgia, and new teams were established in Texas and Florida.

SOCIAL CHANGE

Baseball also has reflected social changes in U.S. history.

When racial attitudes discriminated against African Americans in the middle of the 20th Century, baseball did not allow blacks to play in the Major Leagues, leading to formation of the independent Negro Leagues.

When the nation began to open up to civil rights and racial equality, stars like Jackie Robinson and Larry Doby led the way for future African American stars.

Robinson broke the "color line" in modern Major League baseball when he signed with the National League's Brooklyn Dodgers in the late 1940s and went on to become rookie of the year, an All-Star and most valuable player during his career.

Doby followed close behind, becoming the first African American to play in the modern American League when he signed with the Cleveland Indians, going on to hit more than 20 home runs eight years in a row.

Robinson and Doby paved the way for some of the greatest athletes to play the game, including all-time home run king Hank Aaron, Willie Mays, Ken Griffey Jr. and Derrek Lee.

WORLD INFLUENCES

Today, as the world becomes more and more connected, Major League Baseball has become an international showcase.

As the Hispanic population has grown in the U.S., more and more of baseball's top stars are Hispanic American or from Hispanic countries.

Alex Rodriguez, Manny Ramirez, Vladimir Guerrero and Albert Pujols are All-Star hitters while Pedro Martinez, Johan Santana and Bartolo Colon are top pitchers.

As the Asian population grows, new stars from Asia are also making their mark.

In 2004, the American League batting title was won in by Japan's Ichiro Suzuki, who set a new single-season record for hits with 262. That same year, six of the top seven hitters in the race for the American League batting title that year were Hispanic. In the American League last season, the top three home run hitters were Hispanic, as were three of the four leaders in RBIs.

NAMES REFLECT HISTORY—AND GEOGRAPHY

The names of Major League Baseball teams are chosen for a variety of reasons. Some reflect the image a team wants to give of itself—fierce like the Tigers. Others reflect the history, culture or geography of team cities—like the Colorado Rockies. Here is a roster of Major League team names, and their connections to history and culture.

TORONTO BLUE JAYS

Blue jays are colorful and popular birds in Toronto, the largest city in Canada.

TAMPA BAY DEVIL RAYS

Devil rays are exotic, flat fish found off the coast of Florida.

TEXAS RANGERS

The Rangers were the Old West law enforcement force in Texas, and the name of the state police today.

BALTIMORE ORIOLES

Orioles are black-and-orange birds that were common to Baltimore, Maryland, and the Mid-Atlantic coast.

COLORADO ROCKIES

The Rockies get their name from the Rocky Mountains, which provide spectacular scenery and recreation in Colorado.

ARIZONA DIAMONDBACKS

Diamondbacks are rattlesnakes common to Arizona and the southwest U.S.

FLORIDA MARLINS

Marlins are big-game fish found off the coast of Florida and Miami.

SAN DIEGO PADRES

San Diego was founded by Spanish settlers and padres were the priests who played important roles in their Southern California communities.

HOUSTON ASTROS

Houston, Texas is home to the NASA space agency and the nation's astronaut team.

MILWAUKEE BREWERS

Milwaukee is famous for its brewing industry, which makes beers and other beverages.

NEW YORK METS

Mets is short for Metropolitan, a name that reflects New York's position as the largest city in the U.S. in population.

WASHINGTON NATIONALS

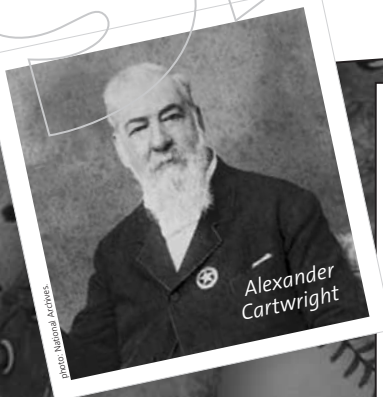
The new Nationals team brought Major League Baseball back to the nation's capital for the first time in 34 years.

ACTIVITY

BASEBALL NEWS

1. Baseball has always reflected the times in which it was played. Look at the roster of your favorite team and the changes in Major League Baseball this year. Using the newspaper as a resource, write a news-style story or paragraph discussing how baseball reflects changes in your city, in your state or in the nation.

2. Jackie Robinson was a history-making sports figure when he became the first African American to play in the modern Major leagues. His achievements changed the way things were done. Who are history makers today? Look through today's newspaper and find someone whom you consider a history maker. Write a paragraph explaining your choice.



ALEXANDER CARTWRIGHT

For years, it was said that Abner Doubleday invented the American game of baseball.

But a man named Alexander Cartwright has a better claim to the title.

In 1845 Cartwright came up with a list of rules for the game of "townball" that was becoming popular in communities around the country.

Most of the rules Cartwright came up with are still in place today, including the idea of foul territory, the distance between bases, the three-out inning and the elimination of retiring base runners by throwing the ball at them!

Cartwright was an engineer and bank clerk who was a founding member of the Knickerbocker Base Ball Club of New York City, baseball's first organized club. According to the National Baseball Hall of Fame, he later left New York and moved to Hawaii, where he became fire chief of Honolulu in the 1850s.

Abner Doubleday was a Civil War general for the Union army who for years was credited with inventing baseball by laying out a field in Cooperstown, New York, now home to the Baseball Hall of Fame.

Doubleday himself never claimed to have invented the game, and in fact was a student at West Point Military Academy in 1839, the year he was said to have created the Cooperstown field.



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