

# MR. GORMAN IN REAL NEW ROLE

## WILL DECIDE ON THE ORIGIN OF BASEBALL.

### Maryland Senator, Who Is an Old-time Ballplayer, Accepts Membership of Commission Which Will Pass Upon an Important Question—Senator Bulkeley Is Another Member—A. G. Spalding at Head of Movement to Settle Mooted Point.

Senator Arthur P. Gorman, of Maryland, has taken upon himself additional duties and important responsibilities, and is soon to appear in a real new role. He will find time aside from his arduous task of running the Democratic machine in Maryland, and in piloting the Democratic minority in the United States Senate around perilous rocks and over tempestuous waves, to decide with other gentlemen the mooted question of the origin of baseball. His work in his new field will not begin until next December, when the election in Maryland will be an event of the dim past, and when the Poe disfranchising amendment will have been interred under a weeping willow tree.

Mr. Gorman has sent the following letter to Mr. A. G. Spalding, who asked him to serve as a member of the Baseball Historical Commission:

United States Senate,  
Conference of the Minority,  
Mr. A. G. Spalding, New York city:

Mr. Dear Sir—I have the pleasure of acknowledging the receipt of your communication of the 23d, in which you inform me that I have been elected as a member of the commission to determine, if possible, the origin of baseball.

As you can readily understand, I have very little time to devote to matters other than those which claim my attention here. I shall be glad, however, to accommodate you in this connection, and will go very carefully over all the data which may be furnished by Mr. Sullivan, and make such suggestions as occur to me.

Very truly yours,  
A. P. GORMAN.

Senator Bulkeley:

Other members of the commission are: Ex-Governor Morgan G. Bulkeley, now United States senator from Connecticut, and the first president of the National League; Mr. A. G. Mills, of New York, an enthusiastic ballplayer before and during the Civil War and the third president of the National League; Mr. N. E. Young, of Washington, D. C., a veteran ballplayer and the first secretary and afterwards the fourth president of the National League; Mr. Alfred J. Beach, of Philadelphia, and Mr. George Wright, of Boston, both well-known as two of the most famous ballplayers in their day, and Mr. James E. Sullivan, secretary of the Amateur Athletic Union.

Mr. Gorman is an old-time ballplayer who many years ago was president of the famous old National Baseball Club of Washington. Not until a few years ago did he abandon back-yard practice; for it was his delight to "fire" hot balls at his son, now senator from Howard county. It was a charming sight to see father and son at practice, to watch the eagerness with which each tried to burn the other's hands and to note the smile which played around the lips of one when the other winced after "taking in" a "hot one."

Senator Bulkeley has written as follows to Mr. Spalding:

"I shall be glad to co-operate as one of a committee to examine such data as may be placed before us to enable us to decide as to whether what is known as the national game of baseball is of American or English origin. A convenient time for both Senator Gorman and myself would be when we are located at the national capital for the winter, and I presume that will be equally convenient for Mr. Young and Mr. Beach, both of whom could readily come to the capital for such consultations as were necessary in looking over the evidence submitted for consideration."

Senator Bulkeley's suggestion as to the time of the commission's meeting has been adopted and the members will confer in Washington in December.

A Mooted Question.

It will be a difficult question to decide the much mooted question of the origin of baseball, for authorities differ. In fact, baseball archaeologists are just now having the time of their lives. They seem to take unprecedented rivalry in poring over old-time books and periodicals, in reading moldy, time-yellow letters relating to the question and in searching for the gray-haired old sportsmen who were interested in baseball in its infancy. These latter, it is thought, will cast especially valuable light on some phases of the controversy, which are now matters of conjecture.

Mr. Spalding, it is well known, favors the theory that the national game had its origin in the old colonial game of "one old cat" says:

"One old cat was played by three boys—a thrower, catcher and batsman. The latter, after striking the ball, ran to a goal about 30 feet distant, and by returning to the batsman's position without being put out, counted one run or tally. Two old cat was played by four or more boys with two batsmen placed about 40 feet apart. Three old cat was played by six or more boys with three batsmen, the ground being laid out in shape of a triangle. Four old cat was played by eight or more boys with grounds laid out in shape of a square. Four old cat required four throwers alternating as catchers and four batsmen, the ball being passed from one corner to the next around the square field. Individual scores or tallies were credited to the batsman making the hit and running from one corner to the next. Some ingenious American lad naturally suggested that one thrower be placed in the center of the square, which brought nine players into the game, and which also made it possible to change the game into teams or sides, one side fielding and the other side batting. This was for many years known as the old game of town ball, from which the present game of baseball may have had its origin."

Claims Origin From Cricket.

Mr. Henry Chadwick, "The Father of Baseball" (who is by birth an Englishman), on the contrary, argues that the game sprang from the old English pastime, "rounders." Still another well known baseball writer states that he can prove that one of the founders of the old Knickerbocker Baseball Club, of New York, said to be the first regular strictly baseball team ever organized, came onto the field one day in the early forties with the original game of baseball worked out on a piece of paper. His description, it is claimed, caught the fancy of the players of that time and the game was adopted then and there.

Thus it will be seen that the commission has no easy task to discharge. It must consider those claims and theories, and a dozen others, sift the chaff from the wheat and proceed with a view to considering every particle of evidence, no matter how unimportant it at first seems.

Mr. Henry Sargent, of Grafton, Mass., has furnished Secretary Sullivan, of the Historical Commission, with many useful facts. He says in part:

"Until about 1800 the ball game played in Massachusetts was called Massachusetts round ball. No game called town ball was known in Massachusetts. We did not know that in England a game called rounders was played. We believe that round ball was distinctively an American game. Four old cat and three old cat we regard as derivatives of round ball. In a match game of round ball there were 14 players on a side. Bases were called goals. There were four goals set in a square, not in a diamond. The runner going at full speed would frequently seize a stake placed in the ground at

each base, and swing around two or three times, owing to his impetus."

Round Ball and Modern Ball.

Continuing, Mr. Sargent states that baseball was first heard of in Massachusetts just before the beginning of the Civil War, when it was known as "The New York Game of Ball." Owing to the infrequency of the old-time games of baseball, says Mr. Sargent, interest in the contest was far greater, comparatively, than at present.

Whether or not round ball developed from the English game of rounders is a point meriting consideration by the commission. As also is the question of relation, if any, between round ball and modern baseball.

Mr. George H. Stoddard, former postmaster and a leading citizen of Upton, Mass., will undoubtedly prove a source of considerable information for the commission. He considers the modern game of baseball vastly inferior, in point of skill, to the old-fashioned game. Mr. Stoddard was an active player of round ball in his youth. He believes that round ball was played as long ago as when Upton first became dignified with the name of village. As the town was founded in 1785, round ball was certainly an ante-Revolutionary pastime. Mr. Stoddard knows that round ball was played by his father in 1820, and he has the tradition from his parent that two generations before, directly after the Revolution, it was played, and was not a novelty even then. Round ball was, in fact, the game of the period. Not until 1850, or thereabouts, did it become the medium of contests between teams from opposing towns. Up to that time it was played only by boys of the same town, simply as a local sport.

A Game in 1850.

Mr. Stoddard has a scrapbook containing clippings descriptive of all the match games of the Upton Excelsiors, a well-known Massachusetts team, of which he was president and one of its most capable players. The Worcester Daily Spy of October 12 and 13, 1850, describes at length a great game between the Upton Excelsiors and the Medway Union (the Union Club, of Medway). This game was the first, according to several authorities, at which an admission fee was charged.

Five hundred dollars was offered by Bill Lawrence, of the Mechanics' Club, of Worcester, to the first team that scored 100 runs. The contest lasted two days. The Uptons won, scoring 100 runs to Medway's 54. A total number of 250 innings were played. The "bases" were wooden stakes. The "thrower" (pitcher) stood 85 feet from the "knocker." One of the rules was as follows:

"If a player while running the bases be hit with the ball thrown by one of the opposite side before he has touched the home bound (boundary) while off a base, he shall be considered out."

Calvin Judson Fluke, the best "thrower" for the Medways, is now living in Milford, Mass.

Mr. Stoddard also believes that the Tri-mountain Club, of Boston, played roundball before it became acquainted with baseball. Mr. Stoddard says:

"Four old cat and three old cat were as well known to Massachusetts boys as was roundball. My father played them both about 1800 and 1820. The games then bore about the same relation to rounders that 'scrub' no wbeats to baseball. If the boys assembled and found that there were not enough on hand to make up a team for roundball, they would content themselves with four old cat or three old cat."

Way Back in 1822.

Timothy Taft, now living in Worcester, aged 87, played roundball as early as 1822. J. A. Mendum, of 591 Dudley street, Dorchester, Mass., is another member of the early ball-playing fraternity who enters the lists against Mr. Spalding. According to Mr. Mendum, who is now 83 years old, baseball did not originate with the formation of the Knickerbockers, of New York, September 23, 1845, a date frequently mentioned in this connection. On the contrary, he states that 15 years before that time, in 1810, he, with other pupils of the grammar school in School street, Portsmouth, N. H., played the genuine game of baseball regularly during the summer on Wednesday and Saturday afternoons. The commission will investigate this claim with due care and deliberation.

Another man who disputes the statement that the Knickerbockers were the first players of bona-fide baseball is Abner Graves, a mining engineer of Denver, Col. "The American game of baseball,"

says Mr. Graves, "was invented by Abner Doubleday, of Cooperstown, N. Y., either the spring prior or following the 'Log Cabin and Hard Cider' campaign of General William H. Harrison for the presidency. Doubleday was then a boy pupil of Green's Select School in Cooperstown, and the same, who as General Doubleday, won honors at the battle of Gettysburg in the Civil War. The pupils of Otsego Academy and of Green's Select School were then playing the old game of town ball in the following manner:

Four-inch Flat Board Bat.

"A 'tosser' stood close to the 'home goal' and tossed the ball straight upward about six feet for the batsman to strike at on its fall, the latter using a 4-inch flat board bat. All others wanting to play were scattered about the field, far and near, to catch the ball when hit. The lucky catcher took his innings at the bat. When a batsman struck the ball he ran for a goal 50 feet distant and returned. If the ball was not caught or if he was not 'plinked' by a thrown ball, while running, he retained his innings, as in old cat.

"Doubleday then improved town ball, to limit the number of players, as many were hurt in collisions. From 20 to 50 boys took part in the game I have described. He also designed the game to be played by definite teams or sides. Doubleday called the game 'baseball,' for there were four bases in it. Three were places where the runner could rest free from being put out, provided he kept his foot on the flat stone base. The pitcher stood in a six-foot ring. There were 11 players on a side. The ball had a rubber center overwood with yarn to a size somewhat larger than the present day sphere, and was covered with leather or buckskin. Anyone getting the ball was entitled to throw it at a runner between the bases and put him out by hitting him with it.

Sixty Years Ago.

"I well remember some of the best players of 60 years ago. They were Abner Doubleday, Elihu Phinney, Nels C. Brewer, John C. Graves, Joseph Chaffee, John Starkweather, John Doubleday, Tom Johnson and others who played on the Otsego Academy campus; although a favorite place was on the 'Phinney farm,' on the west shore of Otsego Lake."

As General Harrison was nominated in 1889 at the National Whig Convention, held at Harrisburg, Pa., baseball, according to Mr. Graves, had its birth either in that year or the one following—five or six years prior to the organization of the Knickerbockers.