

## CHAPTER I

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# The Antecedents

### Birth of a Profession

Any society's idea of what's "normal" is always a generation behind the times, sometimes two. Men and women form their basic attitudes and habits of thought before they reach their twenties, but the decision makers who run things usually don't get the opportunity until their forties and fifties. But children and young people absorb their viewpoints from the adults around them—parents, teachers, clergy, employers, relatives, and neighbors—whose bedrock assumptions were acquired in their own childhoods. So the twenty-year-old who follows a fifty-year-old mentor is acquiring concepts and mores solidified twenty years before that moment, and filtered through a layer twenty years older than that.

Professional baseball in America developed its fundamental rules, organization, and place in society between the years of 1870 and 1900. That means the men (and it was an exclusively male enterprise at that time) who invented its practices and presided over their rapid evolution grew up between 1840 and 1870—influenced by adults whose own image of American norms was centered in the 1820s and 1830s.

It's important to keep such chronologies in mind if one is to understand how the unique position of a major league baseball manager developed. The process doesn't stop. A Jeff Torborg, managing in 1992 at the age of 51, finished college in the 1960s and his playing career in the early 1970s; his own life experience included the turbulent Vietnam era, but his baseball background was drawn from coaches and managers whose "normality" was the world of the 1940s and 1950s. So his personal generation gap with a twenty-five-year-old in the 1990s is not twenty-six years—the difference in their ages—but more like forty years in the difference between their unspoken assumptions.

Now, a forty-year gap in perceptions today is much larger than it used to be. The world itself, and people's attitudes, changed more slowly in the past. The mind-set of 1850, operating in 1890, was certainly badly out of date, but not as far out of date as that of 1950 was in 1990. More to the point, at smaller intervals of say ten or twenty

years, the changes were less dramatic. The ballplayer of 1939 could imagine the world of 1921 much more easily than a player of 1989 could visualize 1971—in earning power, boss-worker relationships, family life, physical surroundings, political issues, and educational background.

So to grasp how baseball's pioneer managers began defining their profession in the 1870s and 1880s, we have to start with a picture of American society in the 1840s, when systematic baseball rules were being written (and published) for the first time.

That America—the one de Tocqueville wrote about—was essentially English in its derivation. The United States had been formed, after all, by people who considered themselves Englishmen: betrayed by the Crown, but unswervingly English in cultural heritage. In actual fact, major waves of immigration from Ireland and German middle Europe took place in the 1840s and the 1850s, and westward-striking settlers were already reaching the Pacific Coast. But societal norms, firmly in the hands of a settled middle class in the Northeast (Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore) were modeled on English institutions.

For these respectable merchants and farmers, the dominant team game was cricket, and the natural method of association was to form clubs. However one traces the evolution of baseball's playing rules, through dozens of local varieties and refinements in preceding decades, the organizational model is unambiguous: the cricket club.

As the new game took hold (with New York's Knickerbocker Club leading the way in promulgating a coherent set of written rules in 1845), the word *cricket* was easily changed to *baseball*—but the word *club* has remained unchanged to this day, although it is totally inappropriate to what became a purely commercial business enterprise more than one hundred years ago. The correct designation for the New York Yankees or Los Angeles Dodgers should be a baseball "firm" or "company." But we still call them clubs.

Well, clubs have members, who vote on the admission of new members. But they also have clubhouses and other property, dinners and other social affairs, financial records and occasional excursions. These must be supervised on a continuing basis, so a club must have a manager to manage its organizational functions. He may be a volunteer or an employee, but if the club is of any appreciable size with an elaborate program of activities, a professional manager is soon needed.

And if the club's primary avowed activity is playing cricket, the manager should be someone who knows something about the game, able to teach and develop players as well as handle the noncricket chores of scheduling, housekeeping, and administration.

So there existed, in New York and Philadelphia particularly in the 1840s, a body of professional cricket coaches who took positions as club managers.

The most prominent of these turned out to be Harry Wright.

He was born in 1835, in Sheffield, England, where his father was a professional cricket player. The next year, his father moved the family to New York, where he continued his cricket-playing career. Harry (whose full name was William Henry Wright) grew up to be an outstanding player himself for the same club, the St. George Cricket Club based in Hoboken, New Jersey. It used the same grounds (called Elysian Fields)

that the Knickerbocker Club used for its first baseball game (June 19, 1846) against an outside team under the rules written down by Alexander Cartwright. Was the eleven-year-old Harry a spectator? Possibly. But cricket was still the dominant game. In 1859, when an England-United States cricket match was played at Elysian Fields, a crowd of twenty-four thousand spectators turned out (requiring extra ferries to cross the Hudson River from Manhattan).

By then, Harry was of age, and attracted more and more to baseball as the faster (but as yet less skillful) game. That year, he joined the Knickerbocker Club. He listed his profession as jeweler; the clubs of those days were primarily social societies whose members came from similar classes. The Knicks were mostly merchants and clerks and some "professional" men, so he fit in well enough; but his prime credential was his playing ability, since clubs were already proselytizing good players and then finding them appropriate jobs (or making exceptions)—a system colleges adopted all too thoroughly when they went into the sports business within a few decades.

Harry's instincts, however, apart from his training and athletic ability, were entrepreneurial. He was a businessman at heart. This blend—deep, sincere, and perceptive interest in the game and its techniques, and an eye for how to make a buck—soon became the driving force of the baseball world.

By 1863, he was staging "benefit games" with a 25-cent admission charge, and from one of them he cleared \$29.65 for himself (not trivial in 1863 dollars). But by August 1865, with the war over and the economy uncertain, he returned to cricket, accepting a salary of \$1,200 a year as cricket instructor at the Union Cricket Club of Cincinnati.

Interest in baseball was expanding explosively after the Civil War. Clubs no longer made any pretense of amateurism in scrambling for better players. In July of 1867, still in Cincinnati, Harry formed the Cincinnati Red Stockings Base Ball Team, of which he became captain and best player. By 1868, four of the team's players (including Harry) were openly professional, being paid just to play. And when Cincinnati businessmen put up some money for an all-professional team, Harry took charge of it. Thus the Red Stockings became the first truly professional baseball team in that every player was under contract for the full season.

That made Harry Wright the first baseball manager.

He was now thirty-four years old, and he knew his business. He played center field and maintained his salary of \$1,200. But he had a younger brother, George, who was only twenty-two, and a better player even than Harry. He signed him up to play short-stop, and paid him more: \$1,400. He recruited top players from all over the East. He paid the pitcher, Asa Brainard, \$1,100, and his third baseman, Fred Waterman, \$1,000. Five others got \$800 apiece and a substitute \$600.

Let's stop here for a moment and note the baseball mind at work.

Pitching had to be underhand (from a distance of forty-five feet) and the original idea that the pitcher's role was to put the ball in play rather than overpower hitters was still prevalent. (Balls and strikes as we know them weren't in use yet, and the batter had the right to ask for a high or low pitch; so if you didn't make pitches hittable, there would

be no game.) But it was already known that a pitcher with stuff and control could make batters hit the ball weakly in a desired direction. Good fielding would then produce outs.

Brainard was right-handed (and already knew how to keep batters off stride by changing speeds). Most batters were right-handed, and if they hit the ball solidly at all, they would tend to hit it to the left side of the infield.

So Wright put his best fielders at short and third—and paid them more than the others, on a level with the all-important pitcher. His own salary as an outfielder included his managerial duties.

Judge their abilities, put them in the right positions, and pay them accordingly. The managerial mind is taking shape.

Wright did not, of course, “invent” this use of position play. He got it from cricket, where fielders may be placed anywhere according to situation, and where the decision to place them is much more subtle and complex than in baseball. His genius lay in adaptation more than sheer innovation, and that has been the hallmark of good managing ever since. Football coaches “invent” new formations and tactics from time to time (and others quickly adopt the successful ones), but baseball managers adjust, tinker, revise, and make marginal (but significant) changes in what they already know will work.

The Cincinnati Red Stockings became the first legendary team. They went through the 1869 season undefeated, traveling coast to coast to play all comers (using the rail connection to California completed in 1868). In 1870, they ran their streak to 130 games without a defeat until the Atlantics in Brooklyn defeated them in extra innings before a crowd of nine thousand paying fifty cents for a ticket. No longer able to boast that they were undefeated, the Red Stockings became less of a gate attraction. No systematic promotional machinery existed. At the end of the season, the team disbanded, its financial backers disappointed.

But lessons had been learned. What was needed was a coherent way to determine an annual champion. The public had proved responsive to won-lost records. The best players expected guaranteed salaries. Investors needed structure. Over the winter, the first professional “league” was formed. The National Association of Base Ball Players, in existence since 1857, was the closest thing to a ruling body. It had hundreds of clubs as members. But it was dominated by amateurs in membership and philosophy. Now the leading players formed the National Association of *Professional* Base Ball Players, and that automatically meant a small number of clubs on whom public attention could be focused. They could schedule “official” games only with each other, keep track, publicize a pennant race, and produce an authentic champion.

The 1871 season began with ten such teams. One was in Boston, where its backers hired Wright as playing manager. He brought with him the name “Red Stockings”—and brother George. He also signed up two budding stars from the Chicago area, a pitcher named Al Spalding and an infielder named Ross Barnes.

But the first winning team turned out to be the Athletics of Philadelphia, whose leading player, Al Reach, had been one of the first open professionals back in Brooklyn in the 1860s. The schedule was thin—no team played more than 35 “championship

games"—and Philadelphia wound up with a 22-7 record, Boston with 22-10, and Chicago (taking the name "White Stockings") with 20-9.

The next year, the schedule was almost twice as long, and the superior quality of the group Wright had gathered started to show. The Red Stockings won the next four championships, winning more games each year. Players jumped from team to team, often in midseason, whenever more money was offered or to play with "outside" teams, but Wright was able to keep his players together.

When the Red Stockings won 71 and lost only 8 in the 1875 season, the growing non-competitiveness of such loose arrangements reached a dead end. A civic booster in Chicago named William A. Hulbert convinced Spalding and Barnes to "come home" and forestalled the disputes that would follow by advancing his own idea for a better way to organize. He conceived of a National League of Base Ball *Clubs*. Serious businessmen would be in complete control of the team's affairs, giving it continuity; the league would have centralized authority over scheduling and respect for one another's contracts; it would have unified policies about admission prices, discipline, and conditions of play.

That way, the "manager" of a club could concentrate on collecting and training playing talent, without the distractions of business management, raising capital, and paying bills; and sensible league rules could produce better-balanced competition, to convince the public that its games would be more competitive, honest, and "official." The players, now simply employees with no role in administrative decisions for which most had no talent and little interest, could concentrate on the special skill they did possess: playing ball. And in such an arrangement, there would be no ambiguity about responsibility and control, setting a pattern that has remained fundamental to this day: You do what the manager says, or you don't play.

### Shakedown Cruise

The newly formed National League embarked on uncharted seas. The element of compulsion—to abide by league rules—had never before been seriously attempted. And the role of the individual club manager, in a league organization, lost the complete autonomy it had when each club was a law unto itself in a loosely formed association. The manager now had a responsibility to the league as a whole, and a league president to whom he was accountable for his behavior, so that he had lines of authority upward to contend with, as well as downward.

And the test came right away.

There was, at this point, a degree of separation between "manager"—fully in charge—and "captain," the player who was the team leader expected to train teammates and make tactical and strategic decisions regarding games. When the manager was a player—like Wright and Spalding (who was brought back to Chicago by Hulbert with the managership as an incentive)—he was, *de facto*, his own captain. But in some



cases, the manager was really just that, a business manager with no on-field expertise, and he needed a player-captain who was really in charge of the ball playing.

In 1876, the first year of the National League (and therefore of "major league baseball" as we have come to think of it), these were the teams and their managers:

CHICAGO	Albert Spalding, also the only pitcher
BOSTON	Harry Wright, bench manager, available as outfield substitute
NEW YORK	Bill Cammeyer, business manager only
PHILADELPHIA	Al Wright, business manager only, no relation to Harry and George
ST. LOUIS	Herman Dehman, first baseman
HARTFORD	Bob Ferguson, third baseman
LOUISVILLE	Chuck Fullmer, shortstop
CINCINNATI	Charlie Gould, first baseman

The fact that Cammeyer and Al Wright were not players proved to be of enormous significance. Harry Wright, we noted, was a rare combination of athlete and entrepreneur, as Spalding would prove to be. But Cammeyer was all entrepreneur. It was he who had the idea, way back in 1862 (during the war) to build a fence around a field so that one could charge admission, not just rely on passing the hat around. He had the diamond graded, built a clubhouse for player use, put some benches under a long wooden shed as the first "grandstand," and surrounded the six-acre enclosure with a seven-foot fence. (The playing area of a modern field is about two acres.) Inside the fence he also built a saloon, a storehouse for equipment, and offices. Admission was ten cents in the 1860s.

So when the National Association was formed in 1871, it was natural enough to have a New York team, but the best place to play was still over in Brooklyn—still a separate city at that time—at Cammeyer's Union Grounds. The New York Mutuals, inheritors of a name that referred to a club formed by firemen of the Mutual Hook and Ladder Company No. 1 back in the amateur pre-Civil War days, became a charter member. When Hulbert put forth his league arrangement, Cammeyer certainly grasped the possibilities better than most, got a franchise, and called the team the Mutuals, although it continued to play in Brooklyn.

The Philadelphia entry also adopted a hallowed name, the Athletics. More than one club had used it already. Back in the early 1860s, a Brooklynite named Al Reach, who was one of the first professionals, had made his fame with the Athletics.

Now, the key feature of the disciplined business organization Hulbert envisioned was inviolability of scheduling. The "championship" games were, after all, a minority of the total games being played by each club. Local and barnstorming rivals provided other moneymaking opportunities; but the league had to have top priority among its members. The credibility of the pennant race—the chief new marketing play—depended on every team completing its full schedule to the extent that weather would permit.

In September of 1876, the Mutuals and the Athletics were supposed to make a west-