



GAMES PEOPLE PLAYED

Sports in Minnesota Daily Newspapers 1860–1890

George S. Hage

ONE OF THE MOST noteworthy changes in Minnesota newspapers in the last third of the 19th century was the gradual introduction of news concerning sporting events. In the period immediately following the Civil War, the rare sports item was most likely to be of east-coast origin, transmitted by wire to one of three dailies in the state: the *St. Paul Daily Pioneer*, the *Minneapolis Daily Tribune*, or the *Winona Daily Republican*. And the sport reported was horse racing. But by 1876 an antecedent of the sports page, an abbreviated column of wire-service items headed "Sporting News," had made its appearance in what was briefly called the *Pioneer Press and Tribune*. The contests it most often reported were elitist sports — horse racing and sculling and sailing regattas — but more democratic baseball also asserted its claims for space, and both local and eastern games were reported with increasing frequency in the 1870s and 1880s. The press's attitude toward yet another sport — boxing — can best be described as ambivalent in this period; detailed accounts of fights alternated with expressions of outrage at their brutality.¹

¹In addition to the Minneapolis, St. Paul, and Winona papers, more than a dozen dailies appeared briefly or irregularly toward the end of this era, in cities such as Duluth and Stillwater. This article, however, focuses only on the three most continuous publications. The St. Paul paper itself underwent numerous name changes and mergers beginning in the 1860s. For more on Minnesota newspapers, see George S. Hage, *Newspapers on the Minnesota Frontier, 1849–1860* (St. Paul, 1967).

²John Rickards Betts, *America's Sporting Heritage: 1850–1950*, 52, 56 (Reading, Mass., 1974).

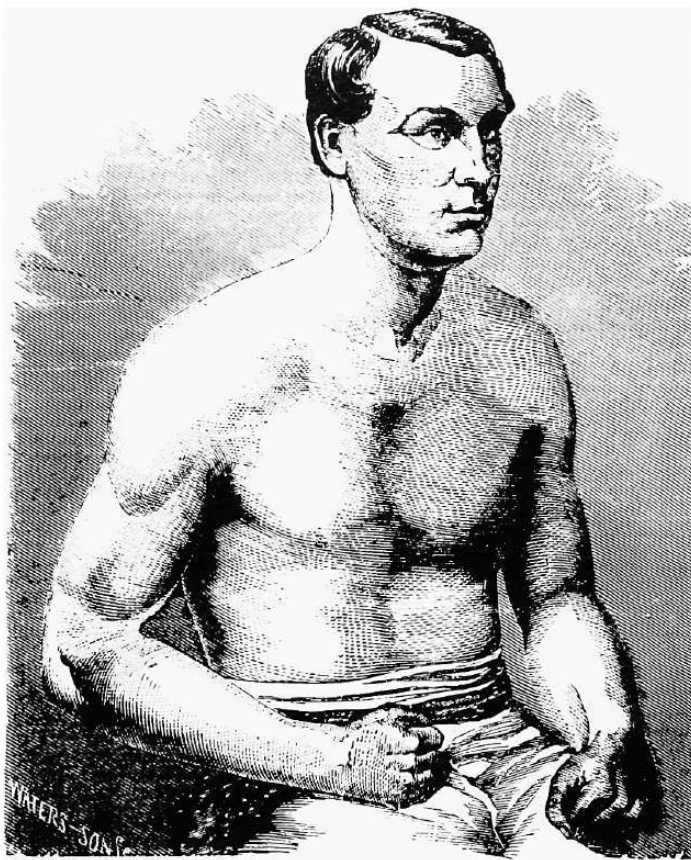
³Betts, *Heritage*, 64.

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In their developing attention to sports, Minnesota newspapers were attuned to a trend that had set in throughout the country. A sports historian noted that at the start of the 19th century "only the turf held any interest for the average American," and at mid-century horse racing was still the sport most likely to get coverage. For example, in 1845 James Gordon Bennett's *New York Herald*, which knew a thing or two about popular taste in news, sent eight reporters to cover a race between two touted thoroughbreds. As for boxing, both the *Herald* and Horace Greeley's *New York Tribune* covered and deplored the major fights in the same breath if not the same column. The *Tribune*, for example, gave six full columns to the fight between John C. Morrissey and John C. Heenan on October 22, 1858, even as it denounced the prize ring as sinking according to "its natural gravity of baseness. It is in the grog-shops and the brothels and the low gaming hells."²

While an ambivalence toward boxing continued well past mid-century, the other sports suffered no such handicaps. They became increasingly popular as cities grew in size and number and as more leisure time became available. The reporting of sports got a boost in the 1880s with Joseph Pulitzer's invasion of the New York publishing field and the subsequent yellow-journalism feud with William Randolph Hearst. At least one historian credits Pulitzer's *New York World* with establishment of the first separate sports department.³

But it was American magazines that did the most to satisfy and encourage the mounting interest in sports. Scores of magazines devoted to horse racing, boxing, hunting and fishing, baseball, and bicycling (the propriety of women's bicycling became a sports-publishing controversy in the 1890s) were launched in the two previous decades, inspired by the success of an earlier trio that managed to survive the Civil War: *Spirit of the Times*, founded in 1831, the *National Police Gazette*, in 1845, and the *New York Clipper*, in 1853. Their circulations seem minuscule by today's standards; even the *Police*



TOM SAYERS, the champion of England



JOHN C. HEENAN, the champion of America

Gazette, after settling on a lurid editorial mix of buxom chorus girls and brawny prize fighters, exceeded 150,000 steady circulation only in the advance and wake of a major fight.⁴

IT WAS ALL BRAWN, unmixed with beauty, that figured in the first sports event given extended coverage in a Minnesota newspaper. This was the fight in 1860 between Tom Sayers, British ring champion, and his American challenger, John Heenan, known as “the Benicia Boy” to American fight fanciers. London correspondents of the *New York Times* and *Wilkes’ Spirit of the Times* whipped up interest in advance of the fight by accounts that featured the evasive tactics of both training camps to thwart police efforts to arrest the fighters for disturbing the peace. These stories were reprinted, sometimes as late as two weeks after initial publication.⁵

The *St. Paul Daily Pioneer and Democrat* of May 5, 1860, carried the most detailed account — three versions of it, in fact, one each reprinted from the *London Times*, *Wilkes’ Spirit of the Times*, and *Bell’s Life in London*. The *Times* account was the most graphic. By the 20th round, it related, Heenan had been practically blinded, and Sayers’ right arm had been put out of commission. “In all the closes Heenan’s immense strength prevailed, and he threw the champion easily, till in both

the 21st and 22d rounds, Sayers was knocked off his legs. Still he came up gaily, though carefully, and generally managed in most of the struggles to give one or more of his heaviest blows on Heenan’s left eye, which was now almost gone like the other. The scene gradually became one of the most intense and brutal excitement. There were shouts to Heenan to keep his antagonist in the sun — to close with him and smash him, as he had only one arm, while the friends of Sayers called to him to

⁴ Betts, *Heritage*, 62. *Spirit of the Times* (1831–1861) was founded by William T. Porter, who later established *Porter’s Spirit of the Times* (1856–1861). After Porter’s death in 1858, coeditor George Wilkes continued publication until an 1859 court injunction prohibited his use of Porter’s name. *Wilkes’ Spirit of the Times* (1859–1902) appeared immediately thereafter. George Wilkes was also cofounder and editor of the *National Police Gazette*; Norris W. Yates, *William T. Porter and the Spirit of the Times: A Study of the Big Bear School of Humor*, 190–196 (Baton Rouge, 1957).

⁵ Heenan’s nickname refers to the gold-mining camp and town in the San Francisco bay area of California where he first learned to fight. For more biographical information, see Nat Fleischer, *Heavyweight Championship: An Informal History of Heavyweight Boxing from 1719 to the Present Day*, 59 (New York, 1949); Ralph Hickok, *Who Was Who in American Sports*, 131 (New York, 1971); John Grombach, *The Saga of the Fist*, 42 (Cranbury, N.J., 1977).

take his time, as the American was fast blinding, and must give in. . . . At this time several policemen came upon the scene, and did their best to force their way into the ring, but the crowd which now amounted to some 3,000 kept them back by rushing on the ropes, shouting and cheering the combatants to the utmost. During all this, the men fought on with varying success.

Sayers seemed to be getting weaker each time he was knocked off his legs, and Heenan more and more blind. It appeared all a chance whether the English champion would be struck senseless or Heenan remain sightless and at his mercy. Sayers now tried getting away and leading his opponent around the ring. In one of these runs he got a heavy blow on the head while on the ground. An appeal of foul play was made, but it was overruled, as the blow was supposed to be struck in the heat of fighting, and Heenan, it was truly said, could scarcely see whether his antagonist was up or down. . . . In the thirty-eighth round Heenan got Sayers' head under his left arm, and, supporting himself by the stake with his right, held his opponent bent down, as if he meant to strangle him. Sayers could no more free himself than if a mountain was on him. At last he got his left arm free, and gave Heenan two dreadful blows on the face, covering them both with blood, but Heenan, without relaxing his hold, turned himself so as to get his antagonist's neck over the rope, and then leant on it with all his force. Sayers rapidly turned black in the face, and would have been strangled on the spot but that the rules of the ring provide for what would otherwise be fatal contingencies, and both the umpires called simul-

taneously to cut the ropes. This was done at once, and both men fell heavily to the ground, Sayers nearly half strangled. The police now made a determined effort to interfere, which those present seemed equally determined to prevent, and the ropes of the ring having been cut the enclosure itself was inundated by a dense crowd, which scarcely left the combatants six square feet to fight in. Umpires, referees, and all were overwhelmed, and the whole thing became a mere close mob round the two men fighting."

Even so, the fight continued for four more rounds. The police stopped it in the 42nd. "How the fight would have terminated but for the interference of the police it is now literally quite impossible to say or even speculate," the *Times* account concluded.

MINNESOTA NEWSPAPERS, like those elsewhere in the country, were of two minds about the prize ring. While the *St. Paul* paper indulged in reports, the *Stillwater Messenger* was of the other mind. Its edition of May 18, 1860, commented primly: "A large majority of our papers come to us with sickening details, in display type, of the prize fight between the champion bullies of England and America — Heenan and Sayers. We have no taste for that kind of literature. The affair is a burning disgrace to the two governments, and we will not lumber our columns with a recital of the brutal collision."

This bipolar attitude toward the ring continued to characterize Minnesota newspapers through the next several decades. Sometimes both poles could be found in the same newspaper, as in the case of the *St. Paul*



SAYERS against the rope in Round 37 of the championship bout with Heenan

Daily Pioneer for November 20, 1868. It cited the *Cincinnati Enquirer's* judgment on the decline of the prize ring, the patronage of which had been reduced to thieves and blackguards. But it also reprinted the *Enquirer's* account of the fight that provoked the condemnation. After relating that one of the manly combatants had tried to gouge his opponent's eyes, the article concluded: "But we did not intend to enter into the details of the fight, which have already been given our readers in full. We have simply endeavored to give an idea of the base means resorted to to win the fight. The pugilists of ten years ago, hardened as they were, would have blushed at the idea of such brutality. Prize-fighting, even at its best, is an outrage upon civilization, but when it results in such an outrageous affair as did that of Thursday last, it is time that the community at large should take the matter in their own hands and put a stop to it."

In St. Paul the *Daily Pioneer Press* seems to have resolved this dichotomy by publishing only the briefest of accounts of ring battles. "A brutal prize fight took place in Philadelphia between Paddy O'Brien and Tom Burns," the issue of January 9, 1883, reported. "Burns won in eleven rounds, terribly punishing his opponent." And from England: "A prize fight took place at Birmingham to-day between Cosnett and Cooper. Fifty-one rounds were fought, when the appearance of the police caused a stampede. Both contestants were badly mauled and neither able to claim victory."⁶

A different type of prize-fight news was the wire item carried by the *Minneapolis Daily Tribune* of January 7, 1869, from Chicago: "To prevent the recurrence of the numerous prize fights that have disgraced this vicinity, the city authorities will endeavor to obtain the passage, at the present session of the state legislature, of an act modeled after the Ohio law, which imprisons for one year the principals of a premeditated prize fight, with an additional proviso empowering the arrest of persons training for a fight. The measure is certain to pass."

OF THE MORE genteel sports that increased their followings after the Civil War, only horse racing and rowing commanded attention — and that not often — in the pages of the Minnesota dailies. Polo and tennis went unnoticed. Most items about horse racing were limited to a paragraph reporting the winner and perhaps the size of the purse for such-and-such a race at such-and-such a track, invariably in the East, or the price paid for a thoroughbred of some renown. Such reports were usually couched in rather prosy language. Accounts of crew races, however, were likely to reflect greater enthusiasm, as in a wire item from Poughkeepsie in the *Minneapolis Daily Tribune* of August 5, 1868. "An exciting boat race came off yesterday, p.m., at Sing Sing, between Charles Ward of Ward Bros., and Jared Ray-

mond, of this place. The course was one mile and a half south and return, for a purse of \$100 a side. At the start Raymond took the lead and maintained it till after he turned stake boat [*a vessel moored to mark the course*], when one of his outriggers broke; Ward then passed him and won the race. The judges decided in Ward's favor. Time not given. The affair caused much excitement, and Sam Collier offered to match Raymond against any amount of money that Ward could raise. About \$3,000 changed hands on the result, Raymond being the favorite from the start, \$2 to \$1."

Anglophobia and national pride, as well as interest in crew, are reflected in the treatment by the *Daily Pioneer Press* of an international rebuff in 1881. A wire story reporting that Cornell University had failed to send an entry form for the Henly Regatta before the March 1 deadline was introduced by a double-decked headline almost as long as the item: "Balked by a Quibble/The Cornell Crew Prevented from Taking Part in the Henly Regatta by an Exasperating Exhibition of Stubbornness." The same issue's editorial column called attention to the news with the comment: "The Cornell crew are barred from participating in the royal regatta on the Thames by the application of a technical rule, which may save the noble Britishers the humiliation of a defeat at the hands of the Yankee boys."⁷

Race reports of the period were written in chronological form; the reader was expected to follow through the account in order to learn who won, especially if the headline did not disclose the winner. The opening sentence was likely to tell everything except the winner's name. An account of a "national championship" single-scull race in New York is a case in point:

"Saratoga, N.Y., Aug. 28. The single scull race over the three-mile course with turn, on Saratoga Lake, for a purse of \$500, given by John Morrissey, added to three entrance fees of \$100 each, and the championship of America, took place this morning, Charles E. Courtney, of Union Springs, James Riley of Staten Island, and Fred K. Plaisted, of New York, contestants. In the early morning a light breeze made ripples on the lake. At 10:30, Curtis, the referee . . . decided it safe to row. At 10:50 . . . the men appeared. Soon after pools were sold on Courtney even over Riley and Plaisted, and bets were made at odds that Plaisted would beat Riley. At 12:30

the men took to the water together, settling down to thirty-six strokes each. Courtney passed the half-mile leading, but Plaisted had a small lead at the mile. Below the mile Plaisted got off the course, and locked oars twice with Riley. They reached the turning point nearly together, Courtney seeming fresh and cool. Riley got on the return course first. Before reaching the half-mile on

⁶*Daily Pioneer Press*, August 13, 1887.

⁷*Daily Pioneer Press*, May 27, 1881.



FRED PLAISTED displaying his rowing medals

the return Plaisted gave up. . . . Courtney getting a short lead after passing the mile stake, which he kept to the end, with a thirty-four stroke. He came to the starting boat three lengths ahead of Riley in 20:47 $\frac{3}{4}$, and landed seemingly fresh and free from fatigue. Riley protested at being fouled by Plaisted, but the referee gave the race to Courtney, he not being blamable. There was a large crowd of spectators present, and all pleased. Some expressed a desire to see Courtney and Riley again, offering to put up several hundred dollars for a purse."⁸

Detailed accounts of sporting events in Minnesota dailies were infrequent, but when they did appear they managed to convey a lively impression of the drama of the contest, for all their quaintness of style. An example was a *St. Paul Daily Pioneer-Press* account in 1875 of a university regatta, also held at Saratoga. The story carried a multi-decked headline of the type that had become increasingly popular since mid-century: "College Athletes/Second Day of the University Regatta at Saratoga./Cornell Seniors Repeat the Achievement of Cornell Freshmen./A Splendid Contest in which Every Crew Did Magnificently./Ithaca Wild with Joy — Congratulations / Showered on the Victors. / Graphic Description of the Race — the Single Scull Race."

The description, quoted from the *New York Tribune* of July 14, was indeed graphic. "At 10:45 the signal gun boomed the word of command to the crews to gather at

the starting line. The threatening breeze did not deter them, and they began slowly to center at the rendezvous, waiting for word to fly. At last they were ready. The antique gun missed fire, and Mr. Gunster, reduced to nature's signal, called out, 'Are you ready?' A moment of dead silence and suspense, while each man counts three under his breath, then they go —

"SHOT LIKE THE ARROW FROM THE BOW.

"The start was made at 12:03 $\frac{1}{2}$. The 78 oars flashed at once, and in all the line not a boat missed its stroke. Harvard, according to its old tradition, gained at the start. The Cornell crew, the men of the hour, gained next best, and pulled away neck and neck with Harvard. At first the difference was scarcely perceptible, but soon Cornell was seen to pass."

The article continued its stroke-by-stroke account, noting the positions of the 13 teams at the half-mile point, and subtly foreshadowing the conclusion with descriptions of the rowing styles of the five front-runners — Harvard, Cornell, Dartmouth, Columbia, and Yale.

"THE FIRST DISASTER OF THE RACE

came to Yale, who fouled at the first flag on her course which may have contributed to set her back a little. Cornell pulled a steady and deliberate stroke, after the manner pursued by her freshmen on the same water yesterday, and made astonishing headway with apparent ease; but Harvard had evidently set her mind on a good lead, and managed to keep it by an effort for a long distance. Columbia, too, began to draw up about the mile flag, and for a short time was second in the race, according to the referee, though the Cornell bow does not think she was ahead of him at any time."

The account continued for several paragraphs without incident. Then: "For a mile and a half Princeton kept a decent position. At this point she lagged perceptibly, and it was remarked on board the referee's boat that she was likely to take a low position. Mr. Nicoll, the captain, noticing the sudden drag of his boat, turned and observed that Mr. Geo. Parmley, of New York, who pulled No. 4 was

"STARING STRAIGHT BEFORE HIM WITH A FIXED LOOK

and worked feebly at his oar. He had hardly called to him, 'For heaven's sake, Parmley, what's the matter?' before Parmley dropped his oar and fell back, sick and fainting, without reply, into the arms of Mr. Van Linep behind him. The reward of a long period of labor and abstinence vanished in a moment. The life went out of the boat, and she fell mournfully out of the race — a log on the surface of the lake. The misfortunes of Brown and Yale were less serious, consisting of crabs, though these animals are by no means a joke in a boat race. The Brown

⁸ *Pioneer Press*, August 29, 1877.

men, up to the mile and three-fourths, were well forward in the 2d division, behind Yale and Wesleyan, but ahead of Princeton, Bowdoin, Hamilton, Union, Amherst and Williams. At this point, however, Bradbury, No. 2, caught a crab, and Williams, Amherst and Bowdoin went by them flying. Williams and Yale caught two crabs apiece. The Wesleyans struck down a flag. These accidents changed the face of things at the rear considerably. In front, Cornell, by a remarkably quick dash made without any apparent extra effort, had drawn ahead of Harvard and Columbia, so that she had clear water, and the other two were left to struggle desperately with one another. Wesleyan was pulling up very fast here, and Dartmouth looked as if she could keep on at the same pace for a week without difficulty.

"NOW WAS THE TIME FOR COOK

to be heard from. Cornell was gaining more and more, and the most effective spurt, not to be useless, must come soon. Cook says he did call for it, but it didn't come. The boat moved up a little on Dartmouth, but seemed to drag in a discouraged way, and it was plain before the two and a half mile flag was reached that Yale was a beaten boat. At two miles and a half Cornell had a lead of several lengths, which had been obtained without quickening their stroke, and apparently without extra effort. As the seven and eight crews crossed the last half mile line, the usual hoarse roar greeted them from the grandstand, and sent

"A FLAME OF EXCITEMENT

into every oarsman. Cornell put in a hard stroke — not exactly a spurt, but which had the same effect. Harvard, though plainly tired, answered to the spurt, but Columbia, throwing every pound upon her gilded oar blades, made a superb spurt, and opened between Harvard and herself a gap which separated her by a hair's breadth from Cornell. Within five lengths of the line

"A CRAB WAS CAPTURED

on the port side of the boat, which made her tremble from prow to rudder, and she stopped almost short. Harvard gained a good length. It was a perilous splash, dash and flounder with Columbia for a moment as Harvard swung up, but she gathered herself bravely together, and after a few limping strokes on five legs, the boat caught the swing again, and just swooped over in time — a second and a half ahead of the crimson."⁹

The account concluded with a list of the crews and their times, and finally, a report of the festivities and celebrations at Saratoga and Ithaca.

For all the skill of the writer in evoking the excitement of the contest, an Ivy League regatta on the lake at Saratoga must have seemed very far removed from most

readers of the *Pioneer Press* in 1875. Of broader interest, perhaps, were the very brief but more frequent items about local noncompetitive sports, such as those that announced the opening of winter skating ("The young people were in their element yesterday, enjoying the first good skating of the season") or told of fishing or hunting: "Mr. G.W. Tinsley and a party of Eastern friends, went out to the vicinity of Litchfield, on Wednesday last, to devote a little time to duck shooting. They spent a day and half in the pursuit, and arrived home last evening, bringing with them as evidence of their skill with 'shooting irons' one hundred and eighty-four ducks and one grouse. We are under obligations for a brace of birds that found their way into the PIONEER office."¹⁰

A NONCOMPETITIVE SPORT in the 1880s that attracted many adherents — and not a little criticism — was roller skating. An article about its popularity is of particular interest because it furnishes a rare example of journalistic enterprise for that period. Apparently without the stimulus of an event, a reporter undertook a pair of surveys bearing on the sport — one of opinion and a second of facilities and the investments they represented.

"Never probably has any sport, custom or practice risen into such prominence as a 'rage' or 'craze' as roller skating has attained of late years," the article began. "The roller rinks, which have increased and multiplied with great rapidity within the past few years, are not thronged every night, but upon very many nights — especially when the band plays, and some star skater is brought upon the floor to entertain the envious masses with his skillful gyrations — there are more people in the rinks than attend church on Sundays."¹¹

The writer went on to tell how other amusements were losing out to skating, to the dismay of managers of other places of entertainment. But it was the immorality of the sport that was most disturbing, in the eyes of Methodists and other evangelicals, according to the article. Skating rinks themselves might be harmless, but "the associations which almost invariably and of necessity surround them, their tendency is to corrupt good morals, and therefore they ought to be condemned and interdicted altogether." An orthodox church member, talking to the reporter on the subject, put his objections in the following way:

"I have no doubt in my own mind that young people meet at the rinks who should not be thrown together. Acquaintances are easily made, no introductions, but

⁹ *St. Paul Daily Pioneer-Press*, July 15, 1875.

¹⁰ *St. Paul Daily Pioneer*, December 8, 1870, October 14, 1871.

¹¹ *Sunday Pioneer Press*, February 22, 1885.

only ability to skate well, being required. Then young fellows and girls go there by appointment to meet each other, and these meetings, I have reason to know, are not always for good purposes. Then, the girls at the rink fall down and the young men tumble over them, and this sort of thing can't go on without breeding undue familiarity, and blunting the edge of modesty. There are always a lot of mashers about, too, whose only object in being there is to capture a victim of the other sex."

Because some of the critics claimed that roller skating was injurious to health as well as morals, the reporter interviewed a number of doctors, who were named in the article, and found that they knew of no instances in which roller skating had been injurious; to the contrary, if indulged in moderation, it was believed to be healthful.

The reporter next talked to several ministers from around the state who were attending a conference in St. Paul. He reported that clergymen, particularly those outside the urban area, saw the pastime as a threat to morals, a corrupting influence, and one that cut down on attendance at weeknight services. To complete his investigation, the reporter engaged in a truly impressive survey of rinks. He reported 11 in Minneapolis, four in St. Paul, and one or two each in 34 other towns, most of them built in 1884 and ranging in cost from \$1,000 in Worthington to \$10,000 in Red Wing. Quite obviously it was the controversial nature of the sport, with its moral and social implications, that accounted for the special attention accorded roller skating by the *Pioneer Press*.

NO SUCH CONTROVERSY characterized the early references to baseball in Minnesota dailies. Indeed, most of the early stories suggest that the papers were not quite sure how this new pastime should be treated — as a social event, the newest rage, or as a joke. "The Hastings base ball club came up last night on the [steamboat] Itasca, for the purpose of playing the return game of ball with the Minneapolis club, today," the *St. Paul Pioneer* of May 4, 1866, reported, but one searches in vain through successive editions for an account of how the game came out. "The Passagassawaukeag base ball club of Belfast, Maine, was beaten in Augusta the other day by a club bearing a name not one quarter as long," chuckled the *Winona Daily Republican* of October 9, 1869.

¹² *St. Paul Daily Pioneer*, April 24, 1869. A fuller account of this sport is Cecil O. Monroe, "The Rise of Baseball in Minnesota," in *Minnesota History*, 19:162-181 (June, 1938).

¹³ *Pioneer Press*, March 27, 1877. In this year the Red Caps and 12 other teams belonged to a minor league baseball association, the League Alliance, headquartered in Washington, D.C. After one year, membership dwindled to six teams and the league was dissolved, but the Red Caps continued to play ball; Robert Obojski, *Bush League 1975*, 9 (New York, 1975).

A club closer to home was the object of heavy-handed ridicule by the *St. Paul Daily Pioneer* in 1869 when it was sued by John B. Cook and Isaac W. Webb, owners of a livery stable, for nonpayment of debts. After noting that St. Paul had indulged a number of enthusiasms, referred to as "pets," over the years, the writer started edging up to the point: "One of the latest pets St. Paul has had was the 'Base Ball Club.' It grew in public estimation rapidly, merited praise, and received it in large measure, and in return shed around the name of this city a degree of lustre that gave us a splendid name abroad and glory and honor at home. Our people gloried in this reputation. They basked (we think that is the word) in the world-wide reputation of this organization; and when a tournament was to be given in this city by this distinguished club they contributed largely of their means, for the reason that the organization was a pet, the pride of the city, a well-spring of hope, a joy forever, as the famous, pregnant philosopher-poet has it. . . . Our pets went forth from conquering, to conquer, until, like the famous Macedonian hero, they could not find anything worth contending with. They hung their clubs on sour apple trees (not having any willers) and sat down, sorrowful and sad, and — smoked."¹²

Not until several paragraphs later did the writer get around to telling that Cook and Webb's livery stable was suing some 50 members of the North Star Base Ball Club for unpaid bills totaling \$237 for horse hire. A deputy sheriff was having some difficulty serving summonses, the writer said, because some of the defendants "never were members of the club, and did not have anything to do with it. It would not be surprising if Messrs Cook & Webb should ultimately find that we never had a base ball club in this city."

In less than a decade, however, the paper was treating players of the game more seriously. An item in the column "All About Town" announced, "All base ball clubs that have completed their organizations and desire to secure games with the Red Caps, of St. Paul, can do so by communicating with Mr. Joseph Miller, manager, St. Paul. The Red Caps desire to make a list of games as soon as the weather will permit."¹³

SUCH EVIDENCE of improved status may have been due in part to the success of the home team in the inevitable competition with Minneapolis. But even then, game accounts were not extensive. An item headed "The Diamond Field/The Red Caps Beat the Minneapolis Club Again by a Score of 11 to 4," recorded that "Those who attended the game of ball yesterday witnessed one of the most interesting games ever played in the State. The score was larger than many previous games show, but this was owing principally to the heavy batting of the Reds, who pounded Salisbury for nine base hits in four innings; and compelled him to leave the pitching and go

to the center field at the commencement of the fifth inning. There he did good service, taking in two hard running flies. O'Leary, of the Browns, captured a hard running fly, and so did Ely, of the Reds. The fielding of both clubs was unusually good, especially that of Magner, of the Reds, in the right field. It was one of the old time Red Cap games, and shows that they are getting back to business." The account was followed by a box score.¹⁴

That reference to getting back to business doubtless alluded to the preceding season, when the Red Caps suffered at least one humiliation at the hands of an upstart team from down the river, the Winona Clippers. The *Winona Daily Republican* reported sports infrequently, but on the occasion of a victory over the Red Caps, it provided more detail than most baseball accounts of the period. In its column of "City and Vicinity" news, June 29, 1876, and under the heading of "The Diamond Green/First Game of the Series Between the Clippers and Red Caps, — The Clippers Victorious," the account read:

"The opening game of the series of six to be played between the Clippers of Winona and the Red Caps of St. Paul, took place on the grounds of the latter club on Wednesday, in presence of an assemblage numbering about fifteen hundred people, among whom were a great many ladies. The Clippers were very courteously treated throughout the visit, not only by the Red Caps, but by the citizens of St. Paul generally, and the visit was in every way a satisfactory and pleasant one. The weather was, on the whole, favorable, but a strong wind prevailed, which made the throwing at times difficult and uncertain. Great commendation is merited by the excellent order which prevailed. No betting was allowed on the grounds, and indeed, the police arrangements generally were most admirable. Rev. J.P. McKibben, of St. Paul, was selected as umpire.¹⁵ He was formerly a player himself, and his prompt and impartial decisions gave thorough satisfaction. The small score shows good playing on both sides. The Clippers won the toss and sent the Reds to bat. They led off handsomely by scoring three tallies, and for the first half of the game they led decidedly; but in the fifth inning the Clippers began to feel more acquainted with the grounds, and got down to business. The Reds went out in that inning without a man reaching the first base, and from that time the Clippers went on steadily, doing their heavy work in accordance with their proverbial successful playing in the latter part of the game.

"When the Red Caps closed their ninth inning without another tally, the friends of the Clippers filled the air with their applause and the Winona boys felt exceedingly well and took their last goose egg with complacency. Owing to the great distance from the ball grounds to the telegraph office, the news was slow in reaching Winona,

but when it did come shouts and cheers went up with a will. The boys here at once made arrangements for meeting the club in style, and a large crowd assembled at the depot with the Germania band. As the Clippers alighted from the train they were greeted with hearty cheers and congratulations.

"A speech was delivered by Jas. T. Bowditch, Esq., and the crowd then formed in procession and marched to the Jewell House, where a fine supper was served. A tremendous bon fire added to the demonstration and the victory was the talk of the hour."

The account then reverted to the game itself, noting that the Winona pitcher was hard for the St. Paul batters to hit, that the fielding was about equally divided, but that in running bases the Clippers surpassed the Red Caps. Not until the box score did the reader learn the tally, 6 to 4. After noting that the Clippers got half the gate receipts, amounting to about \$165, the story concluded: "The *St. Paul Dispatch* reported the game, yesterday, on the fourth inning, when it stood four to one in favor the Red Caps, and headed the notice, 'A Bad Showing for the Winona Visitors.' After that the Reds took five goose eggs and the Clippers won the game, which will probably remind the *Dispatch* of the old adage about counting chickens, &c."

Obviously baseball had come to mean a great deal to at least some Minnesota cities by the mid 1870s, and no daily newspaper that reflected the life of its city could afford to ignore it. And indeed the columns headed "Sporting News" and "The Sporting World" began to appear with greater frequency in Minnesota dailies, mixing accounts of local baseball games with wire service reports of games elsewhere, and even taking note, in time, of football ("The sophomore class of the State university will play a game of foot ball with the juniors at 2:30 this afternoon"). Sports coverage had staked its claim to newspaper space, and that claim could only grow more insistent in the years ahead.¹⁶

¹⁴*Pioneer Press*, August 29, 1877. According to the *Minneapolis Tribune*, August 6, 1877, the Minneapolis Browns, St. Paul Red Caps, and Winona Clippers were the state's three professional teams. They formed the Minnesota League in order to compete among themselves for the title of state champion. See also Joe McDermott, "Forty-five Years of Baseball in Minneapolis," in *Minneapolis Journal*, March 24, 1912, Sports sec., p. 3.

¹⁵Further information on J. P. McKibben is lacking. The *St. Paul City Directory*, 1876, listed only a Rev. William McKibben of Central Presbyterian Church; in 1877 there appeared a Joseph McKibbin, bookkeeper.

¹⁶*Daily Pioneer Press*, October 29, 1881.

THE ILLUSTRATIONS on pp. 322 and 323 are from *Wilkes' Spirit of the Times*, February 18, 25, May 12, 1860; the one on p. 325 is from the cover of *Sports and Amusements* (Minneapolis), August 5, 1892.



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