

from
THE BASE-BALL SEASON
1886

Baseball was first played in the United States in 1845 and grew steadily in popularity. Organized baseball became fully professional in 1876 with the formation of the National League of Professional Baseball Clubs. As organized labor unions forced first the ten-hour work day and then the eight-hour day for blue-collar workers, spectator sports such as baseball became popular ways for Americans to spend their newly won free time. This article from *Harper's Weekly* reflects the broad popularity of this national pastime.

THINK THROUGH HISTORY: Analyzing Issues

What did this author think were the most important aspects of baseball in 1886?

That base-ball, commonly referred to as the "national game," has suffered no loss of popularity since the close of the last season is made manifest in more than one way. Nearly fifteen thousand people paid half a dollar each to see the opening game of the National League championship series at the Polo Grounds in this city on Thursday of last week, and were rewarded with a superb exhibition of the popular sport, eleven innings being required to decide the contest between the New Yorks and Bostons, the former club winning by a single run. On the same day the League championship race was opened at Washington with a game between the Washingtons and Philadelphias in the presence of five thousand people, and at St. Louis by the St. Louis and Detroit League nines before a similar number of spectators. The other two clubs of the National League, the Chicagos and Kansas Citys, were prevented from play on the opening day by a rain-storm at Kansas City. Here, then, were nearly twenty-five thousand people engaged on one day in watching the exciting games of but one of the several professional base-ball associations of the country, and with two of the clubs of this association idle!

It is small wonder, in the presence of these facts, that prosperity marks nearly every branch of business connected with the national game, or that the manufacturers of balls, bats, uniforms, shoes, masks, catchers' gloves, chest pads, and other accoutrements boast of a larger trade than ever before. The fascination of the game has seized upon the American people, irrespective of age, sex, or other conditions. It would require a large volume to record merely the names of the uniformed base-ball clubs of the country which are to-day struggling for all sorts of local, State, inter-State, and national championships....

Source: "The Base-Ball Season," in *Harper's Weekly*, May 8, 1886, p. 302.