

History of baseball

Origins of baseball

The distinct evolution of baseball from among the various bat-and-ball games is difficult to trace with precision. While there has been general agreement that modern baseball is a North American development from the older game [rounders](#), the 2006 book *Baseball Before We Knew It: A Search for the Roots of the Game*, by David Block, argues against that notion. Several references to "baseball" and "bat-and-ball" have been found in English and American documents of the early eighteenth century. Szymanski, Stefan, and Andrew S. Zimbalist (2006). *National Pastime: How Americans Play Baseball and the Rest of the World Plays Soccer* (Brookings Institution Press, 2005), ISBN 0815782586, p. 220, n. 19. The earliest known description is in a 1744 British publication, *A Little Pretty Pocket-Book*, by John Newbery. It contains a wood-cut illustration of boys playing "base-ball," showing a set-up roughly similar to the modern game, and a rhymed description of the sport. The earliest known unambiguous American discussion of "baseball" was published in a 1791 [Pittsfield, Massachusetts](#), statute that prohibited the playing of the game within 80 yards of the town's new meeting house. Szymanski and Zimbalist (2006), p. 220, n. 19. The English novelist [Jane Austen](#) made a reference to children playing "base-ball" on a village green in her book [Northanger Abbey](#), which was written between 1798 and 1803 (though not published until 1818). The first full documentation of a baseball game in North America is Dr. Adam Ford's contemporary description of a game that took place in 1838 on [June 4](#) (Militia Muster Day) in Beachville, [Ontario, Canada](#); this report was related in an 1886 edition of *Sporting Life* magazine in a letter by former [St. Marys, Ontario](#), resident Dr. Matthew Harris. In 1845, [Alexander Cartwright](#) of New York City led the codification of an early list of rules (the so-called [Knickerbocker Rules](#)), from which today's have evolved. He had also initiated the replacement of the soft ball used in rounders with a smaller hard ball. [How Products Are Made: Baseball](#) While there are reports of Cartwright's club, the [New York Knickerbockers](#), playing games in 1845, the game now recognized as the first in U.S. history to be officially recorded took place on [June 19, 1846](#), in [Hoboken, New Jersey](#), with the "New York Nine" defeating the Knickerbockers, 23–1, in four innings.

History of baseball in the United States

Semiprofessional baseball started in the United States in the 1860s; in 1869, the first fully professional baseball club, the [Cincinnati Red Stockings](#), was formed and went undefeated against a schedule of semipro and amateur teams. By the following decade, American newspapers were referring to baseball as the "National Pastime" or "National Game." The first "[major league](#)" was the [National Association](#), which lasted from 1871 to 1875. The [National League](#), which still exists today, was founded in 1876. Several other major leagues formed and failed, but the [American League](#), established in 1901 as a major league and originating from the minor Western League (1893), succeeded. While the two leagues were rivals who actively fought for the best players, often disregarding one another's contracts and engaging in bitter legal disputes, a modicum of peace was established in 1903, and the [World Series](#) was inaugurated that fall. The next year, however, the National League champion [New York Giants](#) did not participate as their manager, [John McGraw](#), refused to recognize the major league status of the American League and its champion, the [Boston Americans](#). The following year, McGraw relented and the Giants played the [Philadelphia Athletics](#) in the World Series.

Compared with the present day, games in the early part of the 20th century were lower scoring and pitchers were more successful. The "inside game", whose nature was to "scratch for runs", was played rather more violently and aggressively than it is today. [Ty Cobb](#) said of his era especially, "Baseball is something like a war!" This period, which has since become known as the "[dead-ball era](#)", ended in the 1920s with several rule changes that gave advantages to hitters and the rise of the legendary baseball player [Babe Ruth](#), who showed the world what power hitting could produce and thus changed the nature of the game. Two of the changes introduced were a move to bring the outfield fences closer to the infield in the largest parks, and an introduction of extremely strict rules governing the size, shape and construction of the ball, causing it to travel farther when hit; the aggregate result of these two changes was to enable batters to hit many more home runs.

In 1884, [African American Moses Walker](#) (and, briefly, his brother Welday) had played for the [Toledo Blue Stockings](#) of the major-league-level [American Association](#). An injury ended Walker's major league career, and by the early 1890s, a "gentlemen's agreement" in the form of the [baseball color line](#) effectively barred African-American players from the majors and their affiliated minor leagues, resulting in the formation of several [Negro Leagues](#). The first crack in the agreement occurred in 1946, when [Jackie Robinson](#) was signed by the National League's [Brooklyn Dodgers](#) and began playing for their minor league team in Montreal. Finally, in [1947](#), the major leagues' color barrier was broken when

Robinson debuted with the Dodgers. Although the transformation was not instantaneous, baseball has since become fully [integrated](#).

Major League baseball finally made it to the West Coast of the United States in 1958, when the Brooklyn Dodgers and New York Giants relocated to [Los Angeles](#) and [San Francisco](#) respectively. The first American League team on the West Coast was the [Los Angeles Angels](#), who were founded as an expansion team in 1961. Pitchers dominated the game in the 1960s and early 1970s. In the early 1970s the [designated hitter](#) (DH) rule was proposed. The American League adopted this rule in 1973, though pitchers still bat for themselves in the National League to this day. The DH rule now constitutes the primary difference between the two leagues. Despite the popularity of baseball, and the attendant high salaries relative to those of average Americans, the players have become dissatisfied from time to time, as they believed the owners had too much control and retained an unfair share of the money. Various job actions have occurred throughout the game's history. Players on specific teams occasionally attempted strikes, but usually came back when their jobs were sufficiently threatened. The throwing of the [1919 World Series](#), the "[Black Sox scandal](#)", was in some sense a "strike" or at least a rebellion by the ballplayers against a perceived stingy owner. But the strict rules of baseball contracts tended to keep the players "in line" in general.

This began to change in 1966 when former [United Steelworkers](#) chief economist (and assistant to the president) [Marvin Miller](#) became the [Baseball Players Union](#) executive director. The union became much stronger than it had been previously, especially when the reserve clause was effectively nullified in the mid-1970s. Conflicts between owners and the players' union led to major work stoppages in 1972, 1981, and 1994. The [1994 baseball strike](#) led to the cancellation of the World Series, and was not settled until the spring of 1995. During this period, as well, many of the functions "such as player discipline and umpire supervision" and regulations that had been administered separately by the two major leagues' administrations were united under the rubric of [Major League Baseball](#).

On a happier note, 1995 was the year [Cal Ripken, Jr.](#) played in his 2,131st consecutive game, breaking [Lou Gehrig](#)'s record. The number of home runs increased dramatically after the strike. [Mark McGwire](#) and [Sammy Sosa](#) both shattered [Roger Maris](#)'s long-standing single season home run record in the late 1990s. In 2001, [Barry Bonds](#) established the current record of 73 home runs in a single season. Bonds has also gone on to hit more homers in his career than any player other than [Hank Aaron](#). Even though all three sluggers have been accused in the [steroid](#)-abuse scandal of the mid-2000s, their feats did do a lot at the time to bolster the game's renewed popularity.

Baseball around the world

The history of baseball in [Canada](#) has remained closely linked with that of the sport in the United States. As early as 1877, a professional league, the International Association, featured teams from both countries. While baseball is widely played in Canada, and many minor league teams have been based in the country, the American major leagues did not include a Canadian club until 1969, when the [Montreal Expos](#) joined the National League as an expansion team. In 1977, the expansion [Toronto Blue Jays](#) joined the American League. The Blue Jays won the World Series in 1992 and 1993, the first and still the only club from outside the United States to do so. In 2004, Major League Baseball relocated the Expos to Washington, D.C., where the team is now known as the [Nationals](#).

The first formal baseball league outside of the United States and Canada was founded in 1878 in [Cuba](#), which maintains a rich baseball tradition and whose national team has been one of the world's strongest since international play began in the late 1930s. Professional baseball leagues began to form in other countries between the world wars, including the [Netherlands](#) (formed in 1922), [Australia](#) (1934), [Japan](#) (1936), and [Puerto Rico](#) (1938). After [World War II](#), professional leagues were founded in many [Latin American](#) nations, most prominently [Venezuela](#) (1945), [Mexico](#) (1945), and the [Dominican Republic](#) (1951). In [Asia](#), [Korea](#) (1982), [Taiwan](#) (1990), and [China](#) (2003) all have professional leagues.

Many European countries have pro leagues as well, the most successful beside the Dutch being the Italian league founded in 1948. Compared to those in Asia and Latin America, the various European leagues and the one in Australia historically have had no more than niche appeal. Recently, the sport has begun to grow in popularity in those nations, most notably in Australia, which won a surprise silver medal in the [2004 Olympic Games](#). In 2007, the [Israel Baseball League](#), featuring six teams, was launched. Competition between national teams, such as in the [Baseball World Cup](#) and the [Olympic baseball tournament](#), has been administered by the [International Baseball Federation](#) since its formation in 1938. As of 2004, the organization has 112 member countries.

Since the early 1970s, the annual [Caribbean Series](#) has matched the league-winning clubs from Puerto Rico, Venezuela, Mexico, and the Dominican Republic. The Confédération Européenne de Baseball (European Baseball Confederation), founded in 1953, organizes a number of competitions between clubs from different countries as well as national squads. The inaugural [World Baseball Classic](#), held in March 2006, had a much higher profile than previous tournaments featuring national teams, owing to the participation for the first time of a significant number of players from Major League Baseball.

The [117th meeting](#) of the [International Olympic Committee](#), held in Singapore in July 2005, voted not to hold baseball and [softball](#) tournaments at the [2012](#)

[Summer Olympic Games](#), but they will remain [Olympic sports](#) during the [2008 Summer Olympic Games](#) and will be put to vote again for each succeeding Summer Olympics. The elimination of baseball and softball from the 2012 Olympic program enabled the IOC to consider adding two different sports to the program, but no other sport received a majority of votes favoring its inclusion. While baseball's lack of substantial appeal in much of the world was a factor; more important is the unwillingness of Major League Baseball to have a break during the Games so that its players can participate, something that the [National Hockey League](#) now does during the [Winter Olympic Games](#). Because of the seasonal nature of baseball and the high priority its fans place on the integrity of major-league statistics from one season to the next, it would be more difficult to accommodate such a break in MLB.