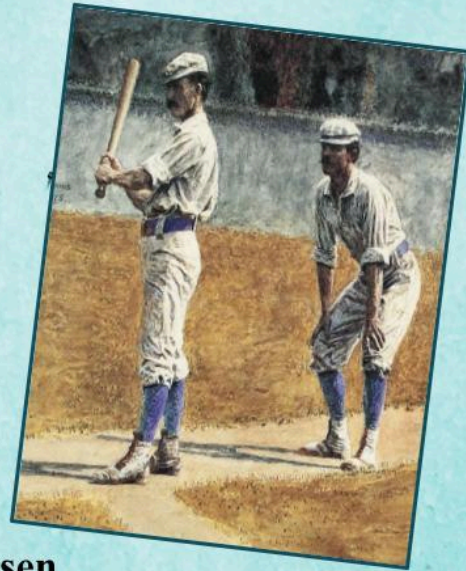


“WHAT CONSTITUTES AN AMATEUR BASEBALLIST:”

A CHALLENGE FOR THE CANADIAN ASSOCIATION OF AMATEUR BASEBALL PLAYERS IN 1880



Dennis Thiessen

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Introduction

As suggested by the words in quotes in the title above, my presentation explores the concept of the amateur baseballist (so termed by the *Toronto Daily Mail* of October 20, 1880) in Ontario in the latter part of the 19th century. I begin with Bill Humber’s recent book *Old Ontario At Bat: Baseball’s Unheralded Ancestry* (2024) and his portrayal of amateur baseball players and teams in Ontario in the 1870s. I then turn to the newly-formed Canadian Association of Amateur Base Ball Players (CAABBP) in 1880, its first and only year of operation, and the season that I dub the “Season of Protests.” Here I discuss how conflicts arose when neither the Association nor the teams in that Association had a clear and common understanding of what constitutes an amateur baseballist. I conclude with a comparison of the image of the amateur baseballist in Ontario at the end of 1880 with the definition of the amateur athlete emerging within the wider amateur sports community in Canada in the 1880s and 1890s.

“Amateurism” as Practiced by Amateur Baseball Teams in Ontario 1870-1880



Bill Humber provides a helpful portrayal of amateur baseball in the 1870s in his latest book *Old Ontario at Bat: Baseball's Unheralded Ancestry*. In the 1870s, there was no “official” or declared definition of the amateur baseballist. Humber’s analysis of amateur baseball in Ontario reveals a more implicit concept of amateurism, one that was embedded in the practices of the players and leaders of the province’s best amateur teams. Humber describes amateurism according to two broad considerations: the “home” of the players on the team, and the forms of support a player could receive from the team.

Many of the leading amateur teams in Ontario had rosters that combined local players (who were usually described as amateurs) and a few itinerant players, many of them Americans (who were considered professionals). The leaders of these “blended” clubs (amateurs and professionals) steadfastly insisted that their teams were amateur.

Support in various forms was available to all players, though likely it was more often provided to itinerant players. Arrangements were made for jobs or sinecures (positions requiring little or

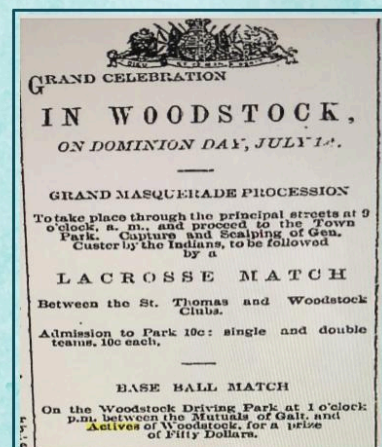
DIRECT AND INDIRECT PROVISIONS

ASSIST WITH EMPLOYMENT

- Arrange for jobs or sinecures
- Provide release time
- Assist with personal expenses

REWARD ACHIEVEMENTS

- Provide prizes, medals, trophies
- Share gate receipts



no work but giving the holder status or financial benefit), in which the players' employers were encouraged to provide release time, time off with or without pay for games, travel, practices, and the like. Assistance with such personal expenses as board and travel was also expected.

Players could be rewarded as well for their accomplishments, in the form of prizes, medals and trophies, often at season's end through dinners or similar celebrations. Another type of recompense from club to player was the distribution of a portion of the gate receipts, or the enticement of cash from civic holidays wins, such as the \$50 offered for winning the July 1st challenge match in Woodstock described in the clipping above.

The Season of Protests (1880)

The status of amateurism was both on display and under fire among the leading teams in the five-year period 1877 through 1881. During this period, amateur teams played in two different associations in three of the five years:

AMATEUR BASEBALL IN ONTARIO 1877-1881



YEAR	ASSOCIATION	TEAMS	CHAMPION (How Champion Decided)	NOTES
1877	CABBP*	Hamilton London Bowmanville Guelph	London (3 games against each team-most wins)	Hamilton and London each claimed the championship. Judicial Committee declared London champion...
1878	CABBP*	Woodstock London Guelph Kingston Harriston	Woodstock (3 games against each team-most wins)	Guelph lost protest; accused Woodstock of using paid player and playing "trumped up" games against Kingston CABBP Disbanded
1879	No CABBP*	No CABBP Teams	No Official Champion Declared	Challenge Matches, Tours (e.g., Woodstock played 3 games against Harriston; Seven-Game Tour in New York State)
1880	CAABBP**	Woodstock Guelph Harriston Toronto Galt	No Official Champion Declared (One game- on the home grounds of the champions)	Woodstock, Guelph, Harriston protested each other for using/paying PRO players; unresolved CAABBP Disbanded
1881	No CAABBP**	No CAABBP Teams	No Official Champion Declared	Challenge Matches (e.g., Woodstock played 4 games against Toronto)

the Canadian Association of Base Ball Players (CABBP) in 1877 and 1878, and the Canadian Association of Amateur Base Ball Players (CAABBP) in 1880. The CABBP folded after the 1878 season. Its executive had declared Woodstock champions in December of that year. George Sleeman, President of the Guelph club, protested this decision in early 1879 on the grounds that the Actives (the Woodstock club) had paid their catcher, Virgil Lee. He also questioned Woodstock's wins against Kingston late in the season. In April, the members of the CABBP executive reconfirmed that Woodstock was indeed the champion club of the Association for 1878. The executive then resigned, leaving amateur baseball in Ontario without an Association for 1879.

The CAABBP also folded after the 1880 season. In 1879 and 1881, then, there was no Association or organizing body, as amateur teams essentially played challenge matches. Not surprisingly, in each of the five seasons, there were disputes or protests about which team won the championship (1877, 1878, 1880) or was the "best" club (1879, 1881). Only two champions were "officially" declared: London Atlantics in 1877 and Woodstock Actives in 1878.

At the beginning of 1880, at a meeting of amateur baseball clubs in Ontario, George Sleeman had been selected as the first President of the CAABBP (this in addition to his Guelph club presidency). He then expressed the hope that the Association "would be noted for its enthusiasm and freedom from anything professional." (May 22, *Toronto Globe*)

To determine its championship, the CAABBP returned to the older challenge system (sometimes called the Woodstock system). The challenging team had to beat the current holder of the Emblem (the prize awarded to the championship team, donated by Sleeman) in a game played on the champion's home field. Conveniently for Sleeman, Guelph was designated as the holder of the Emblem at the start of the season, and thereby became the club to beat for the championship.

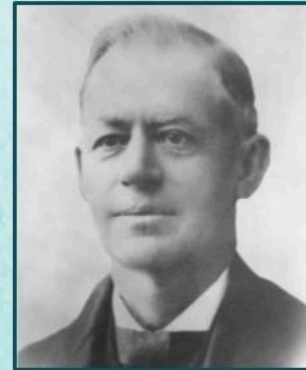
During the 1880 season, the Guelph Maple Leafs (through Sleeman) protested five of their games played against the other two leading clubs, three games against the Harriston Browns and two games against the Woodstock Actives. Each of the protests claimed that Harriston and then

Woodstock had used paid or professional players.

1880 LETTER: GEORGE SLEEMAN (GUELPH)



“...the Harriston Browns and the Actives of Woodstock, unable to defeat the Maple Leafs, introduced professionals into their teams, and with this aid the Browns succeeded in winning a game from the Leafs by one run. This game was protested...the Judicial Committee gave the game to the Maple Leafs and ruled the Browns out of the Association



...the Actives had employed a professional catcher named Brown, who was and still is under contract with Boston... I as President of the Association, informed the Actives that it was clearly wrong to play suspended or expelled professional players in amateur games.”

After the season ended, the representatives of the three leading clubs wrote letters that were published in the *Toronto Globe* and the *Toronto Daily Mail*. The letters from Edward H. Winan, Secretary of the Harriston Browns, and W. H. Millman, Vice President of the Woodstock Actives (and Vice President of the CAABBP), both disputed Sleeman's protests and made the case for why their respective teams deserved the Emblem. The letter from Sleeman in response defended his protests, and re-asserted his claim that the Guelph Maple Leafs were the rightful champions of the CAABBP for 1880.

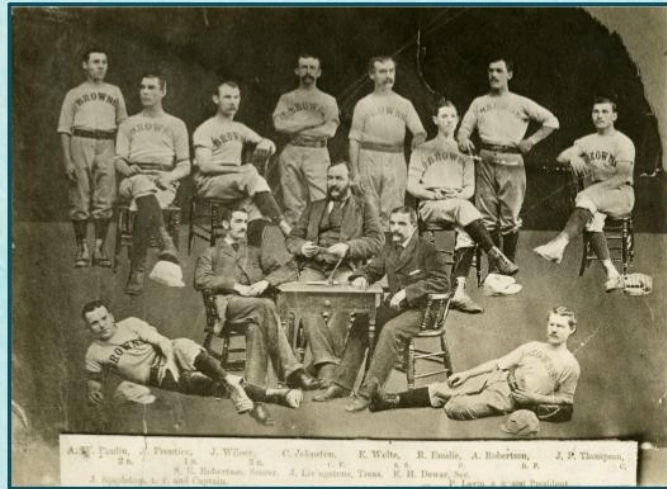
The images which follow include excerpts from the Winan and Millman letters highlighting the arguments and counter arguments made by the representatives of each of the contending teams.

1880 LETTER: EDWARD H. WINAN (HARRISTON)



“Brown (of the Actives) certainly is a professional, and no doubt his services are paid for in some shape, as are also the services of other members of the Actives club. But are not Hunter, formerly of the Springfields and Tecumsehs, and Maddock, Smith, and Hewer, of the extinct professional Maple Leafs, also professional players? In all other sports a man once a professional always must remain so, and I cannot see why baseball should be an exception to the rule.

Mr. Sleeman...(cannot deny that he divides) gate money among the Maple Leaf players. What difference does it make how a man is paid so long as he is remunerated for his services?”



1880 LETTER: W. H. MILLMAN (WOODSTOCK)



“We offered to play them (Guelph) without our regular catcher if they would bar Hunter, who is quite as much a professional as Brown. The Actives are all purely amateurs, and were proved to be so at a meeting of

the Association, and the Maple Leafs all got a percentage of gate money (which is no small amount), this makes them all professionals.”



In his response to Millman's letter (published October 8th), Sleeman also commented on his protests against Harriston and his objection to their use of professionals. Though not identified in Sleeman's letter, the paid Harriston players included Bob Emslie, William Mountjoy and J. P. Thompson.

Sleeman protested all three championship games played against Harriston in Guelph: June 14 - Guelph beat Harriston 4-0; July 26 - Guelph beat Harriston 6-4; and August 21 - Harriston beat Guelph 3-2. On September 4th, the Judicial Committee of the CAABBP met to consider the three protests. It ruled in favour of Guelph, as Harriston was found guilty of using paid or professional players. The August 21st game won by Harriston was awarded to Guelph. Harriston was suspended from the CAABBP, a suspension which they appealed.

In his comments about Guelph, Winan accused the Maple Leafs of using professional players and of paying their players with a share of the gate receipts. Winan contended that his players have "never been proved ineligible," a statement that implied that his players were neither paid nor professional. As for the Woodstock Actives, Winan agreed with Sleeman's concern about the professional status of Lew Brown, the Woodstock catcher. Furthermore, he believed that most of the Woodstock players were paid for their services "in some form."

On the matter of the amateur status of players, note Winan's comments on two violations of the amateur code. Regarding direct or indirect payment to players, Winan stated: "What difference does it make how a man is paid so long as he is remunerated for his services?" This suggested that any form of payment could compromise a player's or team's amateur status, a position that had been rarely stated in the amateur baseball community in Ontario in the 1870s.

In Winan's reference to four players on the Guelph team (Hunter, Maddock, Smith, Hower) who had played on previous professional teams, he stated: "A man once a professional must always remain so." This position suggested that it would be unacceptable for an amateur baseball player to play on or against a team where one or more players were paid (and thus were professional). Furthermore, it also was unacceptable to play on or

TWO VIOLATIONS OF A PLAYER'S AMATEUR STATUS

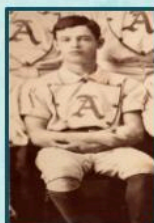


DIRECT OR INDIRECT PAYMENT TO PLAYERS

“What difference does it make how a man is paid so long as he is remunerated for his services?”



Lewis Brown



Tip O'Neill



Virgil Lee



Bob Emslie



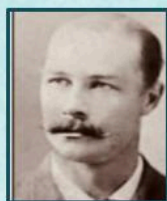
Wm. Mountjoy



J. P. Thompson

USE OF FORMER OR CURRENT PROFESSIONAL PLAYERS

“A man once a professional must always remain so.”



Bill Hunter



Charles Maddock



James Hewer



Billy Smith

against a team where one or more players had previously been on the roster of a professional team. Like the above quote on forms of payment, this stance was not part of how most amateur players or teams in Ontario operated.

As noted above in Sleeman's letter, he protested two games won by the Woodstock Actives, a 17-2 loss in Woodstock (on August 27th, not a championship game) and a 1-0 loss in a championship game played in Guelph (on September 8th). Both protests were based on the addition of Lew Brown to the Woodstock lineup. Brown was a professional catcher under contract to the Boston Red Caps of the National League. He was serving a one-year suspension from the NL club. Sleeman stated that it was “clearly wrong to play suspended or expelled players in amateur games.” The Judicial Committee of the CAABBP met to consider the protests. During the Committee's deliberations, Sleeman proposed that Guelph would play Woodstock for the championship on a neutral field (Hamilton) if the Actives did not include Lew Brown on their roster.

Millman countered with a proposal to play a game for the championship without Brown only if the Maple Leafs agreed to play without Hunter, their catcher, since he was “quite as much a professional as Brown.”

No such game was played. Nor was any other final game played between Guelph and Woodstock to decide the championship. No official champion was declared. Despite the reports in the *Toronto Globe* and the *Toronto Daily Mail* that Guelph was the champion (thereby retaining the Emblem), the season ended with no official champion declared by the executive of the CAABBP. Nor was any final decision made on the three Harriston protests (which were still under appeal), or any decision announced on the two Woodstock protests.

In the bigger picture, there was also no Association under which to play in 1881. The CAABBP folded, just as the previous Association (CABBP) had done in 1878. The *Toronto Daily Mail* (October 20, 1880) called for a new Amateur Association to be formed, one that would determine “what constitutes an amateur baseballist.” Presumably a new Association would also develop a process for handling any challenges or protests that might arise about the amateur status of a player or club.

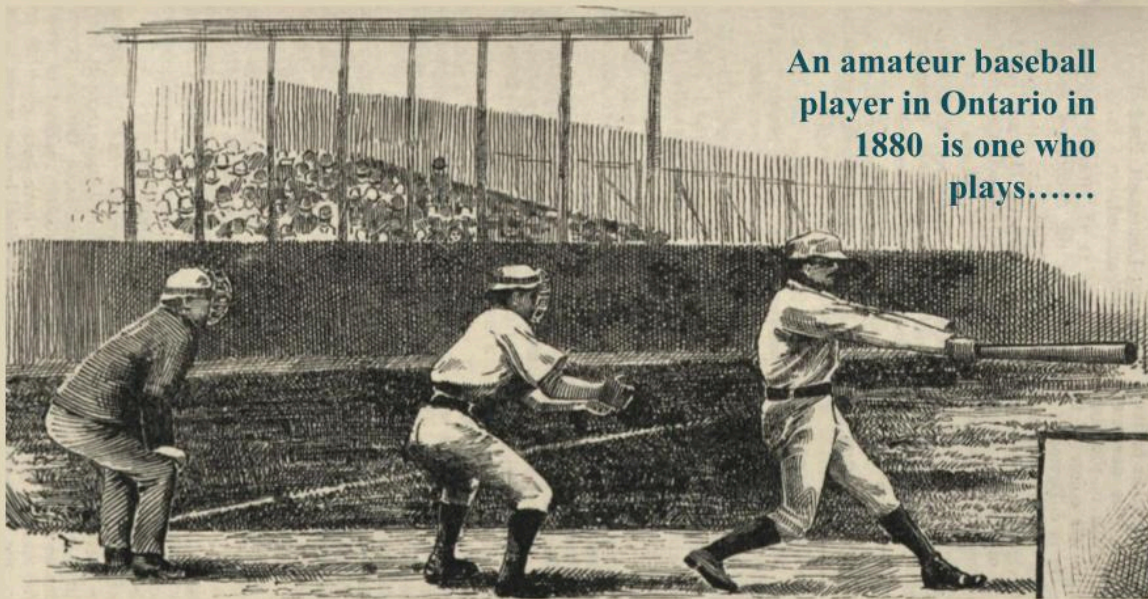
In the table on the next page, I take up the *Daily Mail's* call with my proposal of a conceptualization of the amateur baseballist in Ontario at the end of 1880. The amateur baseball player in Ontario in 1880 is one who plays...

Baseball as an avocation: An amateur baseball player plays the game for recreation or as a pastime, but not on a full-time basis and not for his livelihood.

On a team where most players live and work in the town they represent on the field: The few players who joined the team from elsewhere in Ontario or from the United States were encouraged to work and live in the town during the season.

With support and reward from the Club: The club took a “not-for-profit” approach to amateur baseball in which the money generated for an amateur team was used to run the team. The club’s funds were not directed at commercialism, regular salaries, or profit.

WHAT CONSTITUTES AN AMATEUR BASEBALLIST



An amateur baseball player in Ontario in 1880 is one who plays.....

- ~ Baseball as an avocation
- ~ On a team where most players live and work in the town they represent on the ball field
- ~ With support and reward from the club
- ~ For the love of the game and for the win
- ~ With or against players who are paid for their play

Clubs did not pay players directly for playing baseball but could provide some assistance with living expenses or employment. See Nancy Bouchier: *For the Love of the Game: Amateur Sport in Small-Town Ontario 1838-1895* (2003), chapter 5.

For the love of the game and for the win: Boosterism (playing to win for team and town) co-existed with the love of the game. An emphasis on winning did not necessarily lead to seeking players who required payment (professionalization).

With or against players who are paid for their play: Amateur baseball players sought to play against or with professionals to improve their own knowledge and skills of baseball, and to get a sense of how they compared to professionals.

I conclude with a comparison of the image of the amateur baseballist in Ontario at the end of 1880, as discussed above, to the amateur images emerging in other sports and athletic organizations in Canada between

1884 and 1902.

“Amateur” as a concept in sport emerged in the 1850s and 1860s, initially in England and then in the United States and Canada. The initial distinction between (gentleman) amateur athlete and professional athlete was based on social status (class, position and/or education). During the 1870s and into the 1880s, money—more than social status—was the recognized professionalizing agent in all three countries. The professionals were paid for their skills and the amateurs were not.

Some clubs or associations in Canada established their own definition of the amateur (examples include the Montreal Pedestrian Club in 1873, the Canadian Association of Amateur Oarsmen in 1880, and the Montreal Amateur Athletic Association (MAAA) in 1881). In 1884, the Amateur Athletic Association of Canada was established. The AAA of C adopted the MAAA definition, one that was compatible with definitions adopted in the United States in 1879 and in England in 1880.

CANADIAN DEFINITIONS OF AN AMATEUR



Amateur Athletic Association of Canada 1884

An amateur is one who has never competed for a money prize or staked bet, or with or against any professional for any prize, or who has never taught, pursued or assisted in the practice of athletic exercise as a means of obtaining a livelihood.

Amateur Athletic Union of Canada 1902

An amateur is a person who has not competed in any competition for a staked bet, monies, private or public or gate receipts, or competed with or against a professional for a prize; who has never taught or assisted in the practice of any athletic exercise or sport as a means of livelihood; who or has never, directly or indirectly, received any bonus or a payment in lieu of loss of time while playing as a member of a club, or any money considerations whatever for any services as an athlete except his actual travelling and hotel expenses, or who has never entered into any competition under a name other than his own, or who has never been guilty of selling or pledging his prizes.

As illustrated in the next table, the definitions of the amateur athlete were negative (what he was not to do) and anti-professional (usually based on the alleged undesirable behaviours of a professional athlete). Had the AAA of C existed in 1880, it likely would have recommended suspension of both the named paid players and the three teams for violations of the amateur definition, based on the argument that each team had paid or professional players who “pursued an athletic exercise as a means of obtaining a livelihood.”

AMATEUR BASEBALL PLAYER IN ONTARIO

An amateur baseball player in 1880 is one who has:	Criteria	An amateur baseball player in 1902 is one who has not:
Played and lived in the town or city that the baseball club represents	Residence	N/A
Accepted a job or sinecure for services rendered to a baseball club	Employment	Received indirect payment through a job or sinecure arranged for their service as a baseball player Taught or assisted in the practice of any athletic exercise or sport as a means of livelihood
Accepted funds for accommodation, meals, and travelling expenses	Expenses	Received direct or indirect money considerations whatever for services as a baseball player except his actual travelling and hotel expenses
Received payment by employers for time away to play games or practices	Time	Received a bonus or payment in lieu of loss of time while playing as a member of a baseball club
Received periodic, ad hoc, or one-off payments for playing on a baseball club	Payments	Competed for a staked bet, monies, public or private or gate receipts as compensation for competing for a club
Accepted prizes, medals, trophies, etc	Rewards	Sold or pledged his prizes
Competed with or against a professional for a prize	Professionals	Competed with or against a professional for a prize
N/A	Identification	Ever entered into a competition under a name other than his own

Between 1884 and 1902, the Amateur Athletic Association of Canada (renamed the Canadian Amateur Athletic Union, or CAAU in 1898) periodically revised the definition of the amateur athlete, as illustrated in the table on the previous page. In the table above, the column on the right lists what an amateur athlete in 1902 should not do according to the category of the violation of the amateur code (shown in the middle column). The left column lists what an amateur baseball player in Ontario in 1880 should do wherever possible opposite the same categories in the

middle column.

As is evident from the three letters concerning the 1880 protests, the leaders of amateur baseball teams and associations were likely aware of the discussion of amateurism in the wider amateur sports community in Canada. What many amateur baseball clubs in Ontario deemed to be acceptable “amateur” practices in the 1870s and 1880s were (or eventually became) violations in the AAA of C’s and (after 1898) the CAAU’s definition of the amateur athlete. Three examples from categories in the table above illustrate some of the differences between the concept of the amateur baseball player in 1880 and the amateur athlete in Canada in 1902 (as represented by the definition used by the CAAU):

Time: Broken-time payments for expenses incurred and/or loss of wages while participating in a sport (such as practice, games, travel, etc.) were a common practice in amateur baseball but a growing problem in the amateur sphere for most Amateur Athletic Associations around the world and for the Olympics until the 1970s.

Payments/Expenses: Though Winan (of Harriston) commented that any form of payment to players was a violation of the amateur code, much of amateur baseball in Ontario supported such direct or indirect payments.

Professionals: Notwithstanding Winan’s declaration “Once a professional always must remain so,” most amateur teams in Ontario paid itinerant players (professionals) and played exhibition games against professional teams.

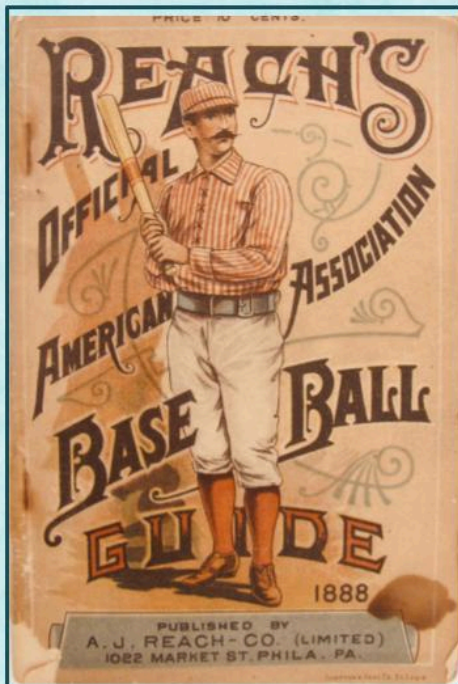
What might have become a significant tension between amateur baseball and the AAA of C/CAAU did not occur in the 19th century. In the 1880s and 1890s, there was little or no formal affiliation between amateur baseball in Ontario and the AAA of C/CAAU. Most amateur baseball clubs, leagues or associations in Ontario thus were under no obligation to adopt the AAA of C/CAAU definitions of the amateur, or to use that definition when adjudicating protests such as those that occurred in 1880.

In short, in the amateur sports community in Canada, amateur baseball was an outlier. From 1880 and into the first decade of the 1900s, amateur baseball players and amateur baseball teams in Ontario continued to

develop their own brand of amateurism through an organic process that played out locally and/or regionally according to the unique circumstances and preferences of the players, teams, and communities in these regions.

As a postscript, I conclude with a nod and a wink to four “amateur players” from the three Ontario teams involved in the 1880 dispute.

FOUR AMATEURS WHO PLAYED PROFESSIONAL BASEBALL IN THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION BETWEEN 1882 AND 1892



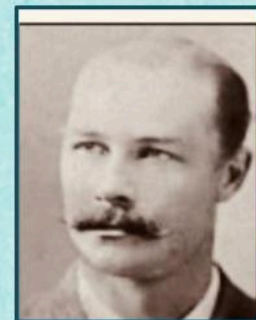
Tip O'Neill



Bob Emslie



Bill Mountjoy



Bill Hunter

FOUR MAJOR LEAGUE PROFESSIONALS, 1882-1892

Tip O'Neill: NY Mets-1882 (League Alliance); NY Gothams-1883 (NL); St. Louis Browns 1884-1889, 1891 (AA); Chicago Pirates-1890 (PL); Cincinnati Reds-1892 (NL)

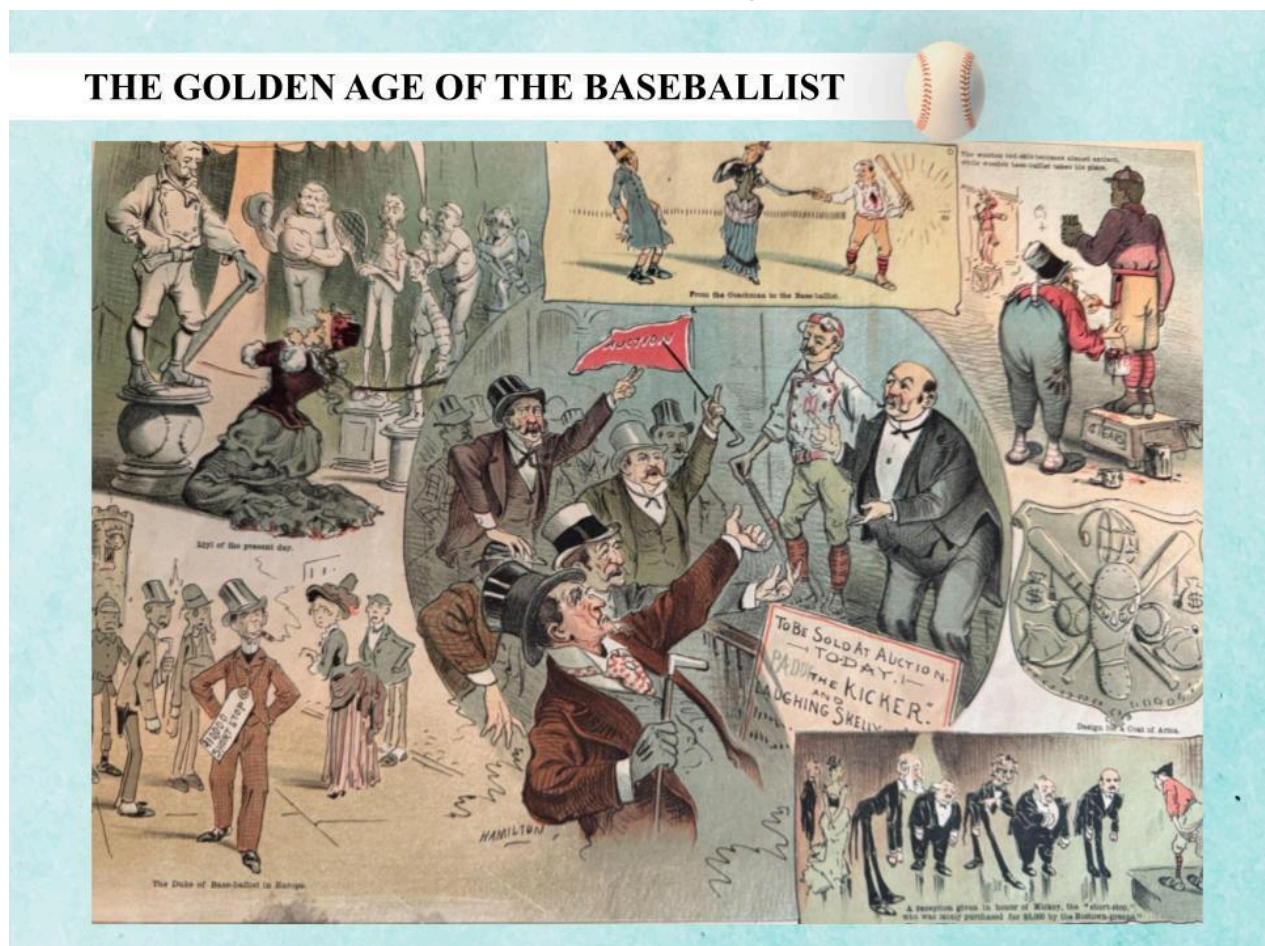
Bob Emslie: Baltimore Orioles-1883-1885 (AA); Philadelphia Athletics-1885 (AA)

Billy Mountjoy: Cincinnati Red Stockings-1883-1885 (AA); Baltimore Orioles-1885 (AA)

Bill Hunter: Louisville Eclipse-1884 (AA)

These four Canadian players (Tip O'Neill, Bob Emslie, Billy Mountjoy, and Bill Hunter) played professional baseball in the US, mainly in the American Association (AA). Tip also played in the League Alliance, the National League (NL), and the Players League (PL).

I leave you with an image from the *Judge*, a satirical magazine based in New York, from November of 1887, honouring the BASEBALLIST.



“Baseballist” was a term of honour used more frequently in the 19th century for what we might call a ballplayer today.

Dennis Thiessen
November 2025