

SPORTS

HEARD ON THE FIELD



Cross Wright Off MVP-Contenders List

There was a time, back in June, when Mets third baseman David Wright was a bona fide candidate to be the National League Most Valuable Player. No more. Since the All-Star break, Mr. Wright is batting just .212 with three home runs over 22 games, and the Mets are 6-16 in those games, falling nine games behind the first-place Atlanta Braves through Sunday. "It's not ideal, obviously," Mr. Wright said. "We're going to have to do quite a bit of work."
—Mike Sielski

Kovalchuk Contract Voided by Arbitrator

The battle for this year's top NHL free agent, Ilya Kovalchuk, will begin anew after an arbitrator upheld the NHL's decision to void the \$102 million contract he signed with the Devils on grounds of salary-cap circumvention. Mr. Kovalchuk decided to re-sign with the Devils on July 19, but the league voided the 17-year deal, which would have ended when Mr. Kovalchuk was 44. Since the new Collective Bargaining Agreement in 2005, NHL teams have typically signed high-priced free agents to long deals to lower their salary-cap number. Mr. Kovalchuk arrived in Newark last season after spending all of his career with the Atlanta Thrashers. He has 338 career goals.
—Kevin Clark

Jacobs Dons Words Of Support for Plax

On the ninth day of Giants training camp, running back Brandon Jacobs finally addressed the media. And it was definitely a statement-making day: He wore a T-shirt emblazoned with the message, "Free 17 Let Him Ball Out." The No. 17 jersey belonged to former teammate Plaxico Burress, who's imprisoned 100 miles west of the Giants' SUNY-Albany training-camp site as he serves out a two-year sentence on gun charges. Mr. Burress arguably sunk the Giants' 2008 season when he shot himself in the leg that November, but Mr. Jacobs encouraged Monday's gathering to get similar shirts custom-made. "It didn't take but a couple minutes, so you can get one too," he said.
—Aditi Kinkhabwala



THE WAY THEY WERE: At left, the Excelsiors of Brooklyn pose for a team photograph in 1860. At right, the Atlantics of Brooklyn pose for a team photograph in 1865.



Far left: Associated Press; Left and below: Library of Congress

The Rivalry That Made Baseball

A Game Between Brooklyn Teams 150 Years Ago Helped Turn a Mannerly Sport to a Competitive One

By JOSHUA ROBINSON

From his spot behind the plate, Excelsiors catcher Joe Leggett could make out every foul line and taunted the players by name. Each inning turned rowdier than the last.

This was not the way baseball was supposed to be played in 1860. Fans were expected to applaud admirable plays from both sides. Openly rooting against someone would have been like booing at the opera. The Excelsiors never expected anything so uncouth.

Mr. Leggett begged the crowd of nearly 20,000 to control itself. When it did not, he marched his team off the field. Within moments, confusion gave way to violence and a sprawling free-for-all broke out as angry fans poured onto the diamond. The game was abandoned and with it, so were any claims that baseball ever had to being cricket's urbane American cousin. A century and a half ago this month, it became a truly competitive sport.

"It was really a contest for the meaning of sportsmanship," said the historian Peter Morris. On one side, the Excelsiors stood up for the old-school principles of gentlemanly conduct

and an invigorating afternoon's exercise—this was a group that once called itself the Jolly Young Bachelor Base Ball Club. On the other, the working-class Atlantics, backed heavily by gamblers, played for championships. Gentlemanly conduct was mere detail.

Promoters, however, preferred baseball's more genteel side. They hoped to distinguish it from pastimes that were overrun with gamblers and gangsters, like boxing and horse racing, and put it on the same plane as diversions like the theater. So they made concerted efforts to draw women to the games and the newspapers regularly noted the number of ladies in attendance. Men were reminded to behave. Swearing, spitting, and chewing where heavily frowned upon.

Those minor crimes against etiquette paled in comparison to the Putnam Grounds fracas. That afternoon demonstrated that baseball had not been able to live up to the bourgeois standards promoters were hoping for.

"This game was the culmination of a tremendous buildup of excitement and popularity in the baseball world," said historian and finance executive Bill Ryczek, who wrote about the series in his book, *Baseball's First Inning*. "And, because it ended in such a disgraceful way—with a brawl and a row and an unfinished game—people wondered whether that would be the end of baseball. Would it recover?"

But there were more than philosophical disagreements at the heart of the Atlantics' and Excelsiors' rivalry. The Excelsiors had been holding a grudge

from 1858, virtually since the beginning of organized baseball, when an all-star team was selected to represent Brooklyn for a three-game series against the best of New York. The roster was stacked with Atlantics. Not one Excelsior made the cut.

"This was a real slap in the face to the Excelsiors and it changed their attitude toward winning," Mr. Thorn said. "All of a sudden, they decided they were going to show the Atlantics. So they started paying to acquire players."

Both sides were, in fact, guilty of covert professionalism. And it was at that time that the Excelsiors picked up one of baseball's earliest stars, pitcher Jim Creighton.

In 1860, pitchers stood 45 feet from "home base," as it was known, and threw underhanded without snapping their wrist. Their job was only just beginning to shift from feeding batters a ball they could hit to recording outs. The catcher, meanwhile, crouched much further back for the sake of his hands—the invention of the baseball glove was still more than a decade away. Snaring the ball consistently was enough to make a catcher great.

By those standards, the Excelsiors' battery of Mr. Creighton and Mr. Leggett was the best anyone had ever seen.

Mr. Leggett had the surest hands in the game. And Mr. Creighton was the first pitcher to throw hard and accurately. His blossoming career was cut short in 1862 when he died at the age of 21 due to complications stemming from a cricket injury.

But in 1860, he was at the

height of his powers, and the Excelsiors were soaring. The time was ripe to issue a letter of challenge to the hated Atlantics.

The teams met for Game One on July 19 at the Excelsiors home ground on Court Street in Red Hook, where they won, 23-4. The defending champion Atlantics had never been humbled so emphatically. But, somewhat surprisingly in light of later events, the visitors and their fans among the crowd of 10,000 took the defeat quite well. At least the newspapers were impressed by the "orderly nature of the huge crowd."

'It was really a contest for the meaning of sportsmanship,' historian Peter Morris said.

The fans at Game Two, a 15-14 victory by the Atlantics in Bedford, were almost as polite.

By the time Game Three rolled around on August 23, the series had been in the headlines for a month and there was plenty of hostile talk floating around. People promised, according to the *New York Times*, "that the Excelsiors would not be allowed to win in a close contest." The gamblers turned out in force. Over 100 policemen were deployed.

The afternoon began badly for the Atlantics, as the Excelsiors took a 5-1 advantage in the first inning. The reigning champions chipped away at the deficit and, by the end of the sixth, had come back to trail 8-6.

What happened next etched

the series in baseball history for all the wrong reasons.

The crowd overwhelmed the 100 policemen as the Excelsiors escaped the chaos. The Atlantics converged on the game's lone umpire, a former ballplayer named Henry Thorn, whose word was usually treated as gospel. But he had never had to try to keep a cool head in a crucible of 20,000 seething fans.

Thorn did his diplomatic best. Still, his verdict came out with all the clarity of a Russian novel.

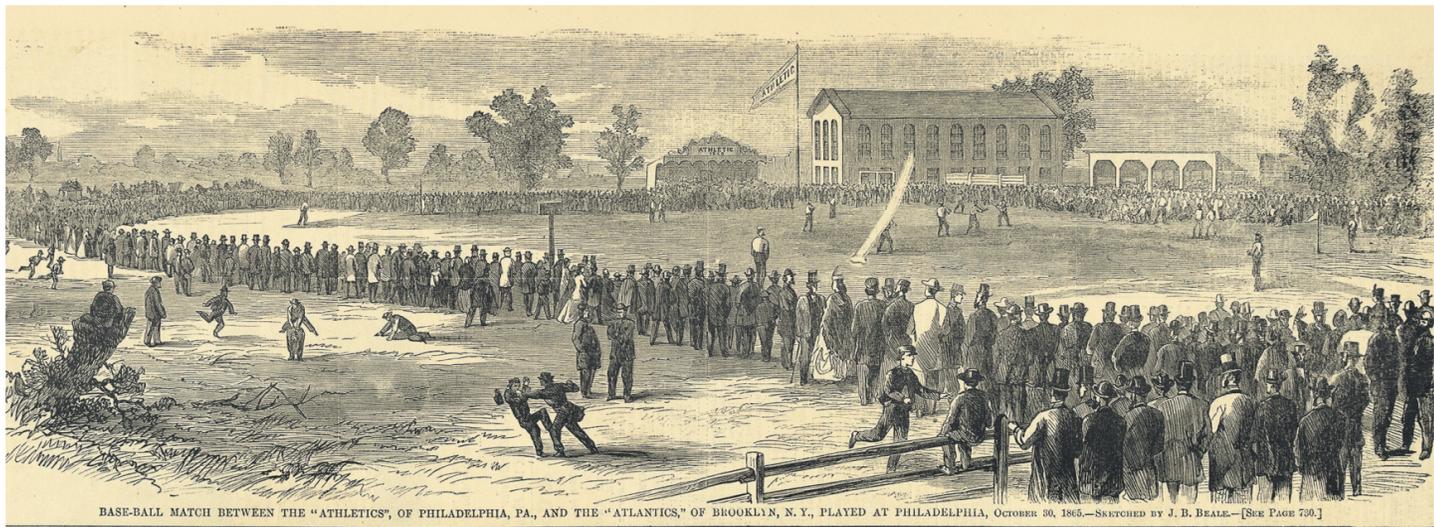
"My decision on the matter is that the game was won by neither party," he began telling the players. At various points, he even seemed to award the series to the Atlantics, in spite of the Excelsiors' lead.

Hearing no great ambiguity, the Atlantics agreed with the parts they liked and pronounced themselves the rightful winners. It was the Excelsiors, they insisted, who had chosen to abandon the contest.

The Excelsiors were so put off by the whole affair that they never gave their opponents the satisfaction of conceding. Nor did they ever claim victory. They preferred instead to leave the whole unsavory business in the past. They never faced the Atlantics again.

Today, historians largely side with the Excelsiors and consider them the effective champions of 1860. "The Atlantic fans were out of control," Ryczek said. "The Excelsiors were largely blameless."

By the end of the decade, the Excelsiors had all but disappeared. Baseball, despite its sullied image, had outlived the team and its sporting sensibilities.



BASE-BALL MATCH BETWEEN THE "ATHLETICS," OF PHILADELPHIA, PA., AND THE "ATLANTICS," OF BROOKLYN, N. Y., PLAYED AT PHILADELPHIA, OCTOBER 30, 1865.—SKETCHED BY J. B. BEALE.—[SEE PAGE 730.]

This sketch is of a baseball match between the Brooklyn Atlantics and Philadelphia Athletics played in Philadelphia on Oct. 30, 1865.

Take a Number

The Mets and Yankees: On the Mound, In the Field

PITCH EFFECTIVENESS: This measures two key aspects of pitching—strike percentage and total bases allowed. By doing this, it tells us how often a pitcher can throw a pitch for a strike and not allow damage by opposing hitters. MLB total average is .474—fastball (.479), curve (.438), change (.466), cutter (.502), knuckle (.455), slider (.459).

METS (PEFF, ALL PITCHES)	BEST PITCH (PEFF)	YANKEES (PEFF, ALL PITCHES)	BEST PITCH (PEFF)
1 Francisco Rodriguez (.556)	Change (.593)	1 Mariano Rivera (.602)	Cutter (.610)
2 Johan Santana (.547)	Cutter (.659)	2 Alfredo Aceves (.567)	Slider (.664)
3 Bobby Parnell (.528)	Fastball (.547)	3 Phil Hughes (.536)	Slider (.611)
4 R.A. Dickey (.516)	Fastball (.578)	4 Andy Pettitte (.506)	Curve (.614)
5 Hisanori Takahashi (.500)	Change (.573)	5 David Robertson (.506)	Fastball (.524)

*minimum 30 throws Source: Inside Edge

RUNS SAVED: This statistic looks at every defensive play (diving catches, turning double plays, throwing out runners) and assigns it a value in terms of runs lost or prevented. Runs Saved is the overall grade for a fielder—anything above 0 is considered good and +10 is above-average. Here are the current top three and bottom two fielders on the Mets and Yankees.

METS	RUNS SAVED	POS. RANK	YANKEES	RUNS SAVED	POS. RANK
1 Ike Davis, 1B	+12	2nd	1 Robinson Cano, 2B	+14	1st
2 Angel Pagan, CF	+6	10th	2 Brett Gardner, LF	+11	2nd
3 Jeff Francoeur, RF	+5	10th	3 Lance Berkman, 1B	+5	8th
1 Alex Cora, 2B	-7	31st	1 Mark Teixeira, 1B	-4	27th
2 David Wright, 3B	-6	28th	2 Derek Jeter, SS	-4	32nd

*of top 35 position players, 175 pitchers Source: Baseball Info Solutions



The Lineup

HOME	AWAY
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TONIGHT 8:05 P.M. at Rangers MY9
The Yankees' A.J. Burnett (9-9, 4.93 ERA), who was a late scratch on Sunday, tests his back spasms. In his last outing, Mr. Burnett surrendered seven runs in the fifth inning. He faces C.J. Wilson (10-5, 3.30 ERA), who lost to the Yankees earlier this year.

WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
8:05 p.m. at Rangers	8:10 p.m. at Royals	8:10 p.m. at Royals	7:10 p.m. at Royals	2:10 p.m. at Royals
YES	YES	YES	YES	YES

PROJECTED STARTING PITCHERS:

Vazquez	Sabathia	Moseley	Hughes	Burnett
Lee	Chen	Davies	O'Sullivan	Bullington



TONIGHT 7:10 P.M. Rockies SNY
The Mets have their hands full when they go up against Ubaldo Jimenez (17-2, 2.61 ERA), one of this year's best pitchers. Mr. Jimenez has won his past two starts, unlike Mike Pelfrey (10-6, 4.16 ERA), who hasn't registered a victory in his past seven starts.

WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
7:10 p.m. Rockies	12:10 p.m. Rockies	7:10 p.m. Phillies	7:10 p.m. Phillies	8:05 p.m. Phillies
SNY	SNY	SNY	WPIX	ESPN

PROJECTED STARTING PITCHERS:

Niese	Santana	Dickey	Takahashi	Pelfrey
Francis	Hammel	Hamels	Halladay	Kendrick

ALSO ON TODAY:

Baseball	CHI Cubs at SF Giants	10 p.m.	WGN
Baseball	Little League World Series	3 p.m., 6 p.m.	ESPN2
Soccer	USA vs. Brazil	8 p.m.	ESPN2
WNBA	IND Fever vs. LA Sparks	10 p.m.	ESPN2

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