

PROVIDENCE: CITY OF CHAMPIONS

ST. JOHN'S HAS WON 4 OF 8 TUCKER-WHEATON CUPS; RUNNER-UP TWICE

PROVIDENCE, R.I. (Jan. 1, 1865) – When the National Base Ball Organization was formed in 1857, it was widely assumed that the best teams would be those from the clubs in Brooklyn & New York City. After all, the New York City metropolitan area was where the rules of the sport of base ball itself were formed, it had the oldest clubs, and it had the largest talent pool.

However, it did not take long for assumptions about the state of base ball in the Northeastern United States to be proven false. First, it was a team from upstate, Victory B.B.C of Troy, that was the first New York team to play for the Tucker-Wheaton Cup. Next, enter St. John's Baseball Club from Providence, Rhode Island. St. John's swept Victory to win to become the first team to lift the Tucker-Wheaton Cup, and they were just getting started:

Year	League	W	L	WPct	Finish	GB	Playoffs	Champion
<u>1857</u>	NBBO	41	29	.586	1st	-	X	X
<u>1858</u>	NBBO	51	19	.729	1st	-	X	X
<u>1859</u>	NBBO	54	16	.771	1st	-	X	
<u>1860</u>	NBBO	49	21	.700	1st	-	X	
<u>1861</u>	NBBO	49	21	.700	1st	-	X	
<u>1862</u>	NBBO	44	26	.629	1st	-	X	
<u>1863</u>	NBBO	50	20	.714	1st	-	X	X
<u>1864</u>	NBBO	46	24	.657	1st	-	X	X
Totals		384	176	.686			8	4

St. John's would win the 2nd edition of the Tucker-Wheaton Cup before falling to Shamrock in the N.E.L. playoffs in 1859, but they were back playing for the cup in 1860, where they lost to Kings County of Brooklyn.

After losing to Alleghany in the 1861 playoffs, St. John's has come to dominate the T.W.C. since it moved to a Round Robin format, finishing 2nd in 1862 (7-3) before going an incredible 9-1 in 1863 and hoisting the cup last year after a one-game playoff against familiar foes Kings County, finishing 8-3.

Over eight years of the N.B.B.O, St. John's has been the only team to win the New England Championship, their .686 Winning Percentage is easily the best of any team, and they have taken the cup four times while being runner-up twice.

How has St. John's been able to reel off such long-lasting success? While it is true that they are the only "big" club in New England, Alleghany is in a similar situation in the Inland Championship and they finished in last place in 1864. St. John's has also been consistently great against the best & biggest clubs the N.B.B.O. has to offer in postseason play.

The only way to examine how St. John's has been so great is to look at the setup of their organization, from the top down.

Team president Borland Craig has overseen operations since the formation of the N.B.B.O. The 54-year-old Massachusetts native takes a hands-on approach in club affairs, but many club presidents do. He is notably patient and is willing to put every penny St. John's brings in back into the club instead of squirreling it away for a rainy day, a combination that guards against rash decision making while ensuring the quality of the product over the long term.

Craig's right-hand man is General Manager J. Bennett White, who has been involved in player recruitment & development since the beginning of the N.B.B.O. He is said to be very loyal to St. John's players, treating them well while valuing the opinions of others in the organization. His strategy of acquiring batsmen who reach base by any means possible while ensuring that the defense is always strong has led to St. John's perennially being among the N.B.B.O. leaders in Run Differential, with their best mark being a record +245 R.D. (+3.5 R/G) in 1859 that should stand for quite some time.

The team's scout, Raymond Bauer, is regarded as an excellent judge of amateur and independent talent. This was never more evident than in 1858, when after recommending the trio of Colin Henderson, Anderson MacGyver, and Jerriek Stoner to the G.M. & President the three players combined for nearly 8.0 W.A.R. and St. John's won their second straight N.B.B.O. title.

Perhaps the most important factor in the team's success has been the in-game strategy of Manager Todd Rogers. Rogers, the only man to manage St. John's, has taken the dominant strategy of the 1850s and early 60s – aggressive batting and conservative baserunning – and flipped it on its head. Instead of wanting his batsman to swing at the first decent-looking ball they see, he prefers they wait for an ideal pitch to hit and then hit that as hard as they can. Once on the bases, instead of running station-to-station Rogers wants any player with notable mobility to steal and take extra bases whenever possible.

How this has manifested itself is simple to see. St. John's is the only team to plate 600+ runs in a season three times, and they have led the Northeastern League in runs six times in eight N.B.B.O. seasons. While the average N.B.B.O. outfit has stolen 101 bases per season St. John's has averaged 209, with their record-shattering high of 248 (3.5 SB/G) coming in 1860. In contrast, the single-season record for a N.Y.L. team is 172. St. John's batsmen have also perennially been among the

N.E.L. leaders in Bases on Balls, with the team accounting for three of the five highest single-season totals in N.E.L. history and the N.B.B.O. record of 169 (2.4 BB/G) in 1861.

Continuity has also been a major positive for St. John's. Aside from having one president, general manager, and manager over their eight seasons, they have also only employed one bench coach, hitting coach, first base coach, and third base coach. The only turnover in the entire organization over eight years has been when they changed pitching coaches in 1860, hiring Brian Donovan after Joshua Claycomb retired.

What this philosophy has led to is an ability for St. John's to lose key players, plug in new ones, and keep the winning train running. When Jackson Buss, who would later be an All-Star, left for Kings County, they brought in Colin Henderson. When All-Star Clive Wise left for Sons of the Ocean, the brilliant Konrad Jensen took his place in the outfield. When All-Star center fielder Richard Kenton left the club, young star Nelson Townsend moved into the lineup. When Golden Glove third baseman Jerriek Stoner left for Continental, they had Leopold Pfeiffer waiting and ready. When John McGowan left for Knickerbocker, they went to more of a committee approach to their #2 Pitcher role and found success there. The club lost Anderson MacGyver to Mutual in New York City in December, and there is little doubt that they will find a player who will do well at second base in his considerable absence.

When base ball became an organized sport, the men who freely offer up their opinions on the game crowed that all roads lead to New York. Instead, it has transpired that there is but one road, leading not to New York or Brooklyn or any other large New York town, but to the largest city in Rhode Island. It is there that champions, and history, are made.