

# THE “APBL” IS BORN AT SPECIAL MEETINGS IN NYC

## SEVEN CLUBS ADDED TO THE FIVE MEMBERS OF THE “PENTAGON”; LEAGUE BEGINS PLAY NEXT YEAR

NEW YORK CITY (June 13-15, 1870) – At the beginning of June, an “Extraordinary Meeting” of the National Base Ball Organization Executive Committee was called, with the topic being the final steps in the creation of the first fully professional baseball league ever to exist. The meetings were scheduled for the NBBO’s historic meeting place, the St. Nicholas Hotel, and they would last three days.

These were the days everyone had been waiting for since the five biggest clubs in the sport made their intentions known last autumn, and while even those with scarce knowledge of the sport could probably figure out what most of the roster of twelve clubs would be, there were still some questions to be answered after all of the applications were considered.

As talks wore on and plans were finalized, the roster of baseball’s first twelve professional clubs was sent out early on Wednesday evening via series of announcements, shortly after the completion of that day’s games.

The first announcement: the new league would be known as the American Professional Baseball League – the APBL – and it would consist of a dozen clubs from the ranks of the NBBO.

The second announcement: the five members of the “Pentagon” were introduced as the “Five Founders” of the APBL.

- ST. JOHN’S BC – 12x New England champions; 4x TWC winners; 640-300 (.681) record – The most successful club in the sport: no debate necessary. They’d been the New England champs in every season but one, they won the first two Tucker-Wheaton Cups, and then they won the first two Round Robin TWC’s after other clubs complained they had it too easy in a traditional playoff format. St. John’s also finished 2nd in the Round Robin twice, so with a bit more luck they would be six-time champions in the 48-team NBBO over just thirteen years.

St. Johns’ continuity was the model for every club to follow. They’d had the same President (owner), General Manager, Manager, Scouting Director, & Trainer since the creation of the NBBO in 1857. They employed the famous “Hydra” of

outfielders Jensen, Johnson, & Townsend, who'd started nearly every game together since the beginning of the 1862 season. Their success came via unorthodox tactics that drive opposing teams mad, and above all, they won large amounts of games with incredible consistency.

- **SHAMROCK BC** – 8x Coastal champs; 2x TWC winners; 595-345 (.633) record – Boston's most prominent club dominated what, in theory, should be the most cutthroat region of the six in the NBBO. Instead, Shamrock began their Coastal supremacy in the NBBO's inaugural season and it never stopped, with the team finishing either 1st or 2nd in Coastal every season except 1864, when a 34-36 record saw them finish in 5th place.

Shamrock's 1866 team that went 53-17 and then 9-1 in the cup is regarded as one of the 3-4 best in NBBO history, and the club had always found ways to bring new talent into the fold. Ex: after falling from 1st to 5th in the previous year's TWC over the final three days, they let three prominent players go including the legendary Anthony Mascherino, replaced them with three Greenhorns and a change of position for James Burke, and Shamrock was 22-8 to start 1870.

- **KINGS COUNTY BBC** – 8x Brooklyn Champs, 2x TWC winners, 576-364 (.613) record – K.C. dominated Brooklyn, taking the pennant six times in seven years during a run lasting from 1858 to 1864. They had finished out of the top half of the Brooklyn Championship standings exactly once – 1866 – and they responded to that embarrassment by moving up from last to 2nd place the next season. Their cup-winning 1860 team was one of the most dominant ever.

K.C. was a club always known for its ability to find premier outfield talent, employing the likes of 1x BotY John Francis, 5x All-Star & 3x Golden Glove winner Declan Brice, 2x All-Star Soren Thomsen, 3x All-Star James Hoyt, 2x All-Star Carlton McShane, over the opening weeks of the 1870 season they had a Greenhorn CF named Charles Foster who looked like he just might be made out of All-Star material.

- **KNICKERBOCKER BBC** – 5x New York City champs, 2x TWC winners, 589-351 (.627) record – The oldest member of the Five Founders, Knickerbocker BBC dated back to 1845 and their President, Doc Adams, wrote the rules of the sport that the NBBO's member organizations played its games. It took some time for the much-respected club to find its footing in the NBBO, but once they did the rest of NYC didn't stand a chance. Over the previous five years they'd taken the NYC pennant four times, won the TWC twice, fielded the single-best team in NBBO history, and finished with W-L marks of 57-13, 45-25, 54-16, 42-28, & 50-20 while enjoying a 23-7 record after six weeks in 1870.

Knickerbocker was most famous for its home venue: The Elysian Fields, the most revered grounds in the sport, and a place where some of the first informal contests were played well over a generation prior. However, they were also known for their organizational consistency and scouting work. Knickerbocker was on year number seven with the same coaching & front office staff, and scout Bryan Stevenson had been able to discover talent like current NYL Batsman of the Month Louis Dyke when the rest of the NBBO wasn't aware of him at all.

- **ALLEGHANY BC** – 8x Inland Champs, 1x TWC winners, 557-384 (.592) record – Alleghany's dominance of Inland had never been in question. Aside from a terrible two-year stretch in which the team finished in Inland's bottom two (1863-64) before righting the ship, Alleghany was 1st or 2nd in the Inland standings every other season. It took much longer for the team to find Tucker-Wheaton Cup glory, but it finally arrived when they clinched the TWC on the final day of competition last year.

Since the club's two-year low in the early 60's Alleghany had been focused on pummeling teams into submission with offense. They had enjoyed the services of all-time Hits leader Arthur Waltrip, single-season Batting Average record holder & 2x BotY Royal Altman, 11x All-Star 3B Samuel Kessler, 4x All-Star & 1869 MVP Collin Henderson, & 2x All-Star infielder Arran Duffy. That philosophy saw the team win at least two-thirds of their games in four of the past five seasons.

---

The third announcement was the most important of all: the one detailing the seven clubs that would join the Five Founders, as well as the one that missed out.

- **THE CHAMPION:** Orange BBC – 3x NYC champs; 2x cup champs; 528-412 (.562) record – It was presumed that Orange was content as a club fielding highly competitive teams while celebrating its Dutch roots. After all, their two cup wins came in just three playoff appearances while every other NBBO champion had at least five. Their team had finished 5th or 6th in New York City just as often as they'd finished 1st, and they were the only NBBO champs who didn't express any interest in turning the "Pentagon" into a "Hexagon" the previous autumn.

However, Orange's actions during the winter of 1869-70 changed everybody's thinking about the club, and when they

opened the season as Writers' Pool favorites to take home the cup for the third time the Five Founders realized that this was a far more serious club than they'd taken them for. Indeed, Orange was a professional-grade organization.

- **THE DRAW:** Excelsior BBC – 4x Brooklyn champs; 502-438 (.534) record – Aside from Nassau Co. back in the inaugural season Excelsior was the only club to take the Brooklyn pennant other than Kings Co. More importantly, Excelsior employed the sport's brightest star: Jim Creighton, a man who had increased attendance wherever his team went and done things that no other baseball player could even dream of.

Creighton's talent drew a sharp line in Excelsior's history. Before Creighton turned 20 Excelsior's finishes in Brooklyn were 6th, 8th, 8th, & 8th. After that, Excelsior placed top-three in Brooklyn each of the previous nine seasons while sporting a 405-255 record (.614), a mark better than Brooklyn rivals Kings Co. over the same period of time.

- **THE OLD HAND:** Gotham BBC – 2x NYC champs; 518-422 (.551) record – Gotham was the oldest club in the sport, with its founding occurring in 1837. Like Knickerbocker it took some time for Gotham to find its way in formally organized baseball, but they won NYC twice in the first half of the 60's and finished in the top half of a very tough New York City Championship in each of the past ten seasons.

Gotham's Red House facilities and their venue at the St. George Cricket Ground were unquestionably first class, and adding that to team's history meant the decision to invite them to the pro ranks was as much out of respect as it was their results on the ball field.

- **THE UPSTATE UPSTART:** Flour City BBC – 3x Upstate champs; 520-420 (.553) record – Upstate NY was infamously tough, with six of the eight teams having taken the pennant at one time or another. Flour City had won it three times, but for them the most important thing going in their favor was that they were 55-15 the previous season, the second-best record in NBBO history, and had started 1870 with a 21-9 record in such a tough region.

F.C.'s record of 76-24 over the previous hundred games meant the Five Founders had to extend them an offer. They had the sport's best pitcher outside of Jim Creighton in the crafty James Goodman, a budding superstar in Reginald Roper, and a five-star Greenhorn roaming the outfield in Fred Bartholomew.

- **THE RIVAL:** Massachusetts Bay BC – 4x Coastal runners-up; 525-415 (.559) record – Massachusetts Bay had never won the Coastal Championship, but that wasn't due to lack of trying. They had finished 2nd no less than four times, and M.B. had ended a season within five games of 1st in eight seasons. Everyone knew this was a well-run club.

However, what punched M.B.'s ticket into the pro ranks was the fact main rivals Shamrock insisted that they receive an invitation to join the new league so the rivalry could continue. Not surprisingly, what the second-most successful club in NBBO history says goes, and with Boston's second club starting 1870 with a 22-8 record they were going pro.

- **THE BIG FISH:** Niagara BBC – 2x Upstate champs; 509-431 (.541) record – Niagara, the NBBO team representing Upstate New York's biggest city of Buffalo, had taken the Upstate pennant twice, but other big clubs found their results puzzling. Niagara's finishes in the 60's: 4th, 3rd, 2nd, 1st, 3rd, 4th, 3rd, 5th, 1st, & 5th. There was little consistency, but to be fair to Niagara they did finish 5th with a 35-35 record in 1869.

What earned Niagara an invitation to the professional ranks were the facts that they were based in Buffalo, clearly had first-class facilities at the Greater New York Sporting Grounds, and were comfortably over .500 through 13+ years in a region that was notoriously tough.

- **THE TOP END TALENT:** American BC – 1x Coastal champs; 480-460 (.511) record – For much of American's history in the NBBO they struggled, finishing below .500 in five of their first eight seasons and last in 1858. However, the club started to figure it all out in the middle of the decade, going from 3rd in 1865 to 2nd in '66, and after another 2nd-place finish in '67 they went 48-22 and knocked Shamrock off their perch in 1868.

American didn't have the cumulative record or postseason pedigree of any other club invited to the professional ranks, but they did have one thing in abundance: talent. Their senior roster could boast of having top-five players at five different positions: C Howard LeBoeuf (#3/48), 1B William Busby (#5), 2B Peter Boyce (#2), 3B Werner Verstegen (#3), and 2x NEL Batsman of the Year & 2x MVP CF Willie Davis (#2). A team with that level of talent at the top of its roster could be a competitive professional outfit, so long as the other places were filled out logically.

- **THE ODD TEAM OUT:** Quaker State BC – 1x Coastal runners-up; 460-480 (.489) record – Quaker St. was a club slowly on the rise. After consecutive 7th-place finishes from 1863-65 came three 4th-place finishes from 66-68, and then a 3rd-place finish in 1869. They had started 1870 with a 19-11 record and an outstanding offense featuring two of

the sport's best players: 1B Cormack Alexander & 3B William Dickerson.

Unfortunately, Quaker St. remained a club that had punched below its weight throughout its NBBO history, still with zero postseason appearances to their name and a slightly under .500 cumulative record in spite of their hot start to the season. The team's venue, the Philadelphia Cricket Grounds, certainly held enough people to host a pro team, but the Five Founders wanted to see more. The worry was that Quaker St. had the potential to become a last-place punching bag given their history, but perhaps with another five years of solid results they could turn professional.

---

The final announcement, at least the final announcement at this time, was one concerning how the American Professional Baseball League would be organized. The Five Founders wanted a 90-game schedule, so putting every team in a single group would have meant the teams would play each other an unequal number of times.

What the above meant was that the teams needed to be split into two groups. Here's what the NBBO Executive Committee and the Five Founders settled on:

- **COLONIAL CONFERENCE:** Alleghany, Flour City, Mass. Bay, Niagara, Shamrock, & St. John's
- **METROPOLITAN CONFERENCE:** American, Excelsior, Gotham, Kings Co., Knickerbocker, & Orange

There were seven teams from the state of New York and five from elsewhere, so simply splitting the teams into "New York" & "Northeastern" like in the NBBO wouldn't work. However, with five based in New York's metropolitan area and one based in Philadelphia, a split between those in the two largest metro areas in the USA and those based elsewhere made sense.

While one might think that splitting the teams up in such a manner would make the conference with the teams based in America's two biggest cities far stronger than the other, as a reminder the NBBO's two most successful clubs and three of the Five Founders will be in the Colonial Conference.

And with that, the American Professional Baseball League was officially organized. Not every detail about the new competition had been hammered out – finer details would likely be announced during the Autumn Meetings – but the most important aspects of the foundation of the league had been agreed upon.

Professional baseball was one giant step closer.