



# THE BASICS OF BASEBALL

By George W. Brewster Jr.

Comedian George Carlin famously compared the terms and dynamics of football with those of baseball, noting that baseball begins in spring (the season of new life) while football begins in fall (when everything is dying). And he noted that unlike football — involving the invasion of the other team's territory — the object of baseball is to go home. And so, to round out this series on Bar sports, with spring upon us, let us take this home with a story about baseball's own beginnings, and a local baseball fan.

As we head to first base, some history: It is an error to claim baseball was invented in 1839 in Cooperstown, New York; the game evolved for many years before and after that. A significant development in the advancement of baseball to professional sport status was an 1857 convention of New York City amateur-baseball-focused social organizations, which adopted with full parliamentary formality the "Laws of Base Ball" (the actual title; back then "base ball" was two words, not one), a complete set of codified playing rules. The Laws also introduced three never-before-imagined rules, which have since become utterly fundamental: the number of players (nine per side or else it's not baseball), the length of the game (nine innings), and the distance between bases (90 feet).

## Rounding to Second

In 2016, three original manuscripts from the convention were figuratively unearthed. Two were drafts of the Laws of Base Ball written by key proponents, one of whom was Daniel "Doc" Adams, a medical doctor who was president of the Knickerbocker Base Ball Club. Adams, who had earlier invented the position of shortstop, organized and chaired the Convention. The third manuscript was the Convention scribe's running markup of the Convention's proceedings for the consideration, amendment, and adoption of the proposed Laws. John Thorn, the Official Historian for Major League Baseball, publicly declared the three manuscripts to be the "Magna Carta" of baseball and declared Adams to be "the true father of baseball." The Laws were then sold at auction in April 2016 for over \$3 million. The buyer was not a dealer or even a collector, but merely a lifelong fan who owned no other historical memorabilia. In a July 2018 speech marking the opening of the Library of Congress' "Baseball Americana" exhibit (2018-19), Thorn thanked that fan for his "historical acumen and public spiritedness" for allowing the Laws to be displayed at the exhibit. We'll get back to that super fan shortly.

For those of you interested in a VERY detailed history of the early game, Google John Thorn and his blog, or check out his 2011 book, *Baseball in the Garden of Eden*.

## Onward to Third

One can't help but notice the almost-mystical cadence of 9-9-90 from the Laws' three transformative new rules. (Not to mention that 3 strikes times 3 outs equals 9.) Legendary sports writer Red Smith later said, "Ninety feet between bases is perhaps as close as man has ever come to perfection." The number 9 has some special added significance to baseball in San Diego — it is the retired number of Ted Williams (for his time with the Red Sox; when Williams played for the minor league San Diego Padres, his uniform number was 19, the same number that Tony Gwynn later wore for the major league Padres). The local chapter of the Society for American Baseball Research is named for Ted Williams, and that organization turns 50 this year. Among other things, that chapter oversees the Sullivan Family Baseball Research Center, which is kept at the San Diego Central Library. They claim to have the largest baseball research documentation outside of Cooperstown. To drive the Williams connection home, take State Route 56 to its eastern termination where it becomes the Ted Williams Parkway, which ends in Poway (Gwynn's hometown).

## Heading to Home

The super fan who owns the Laws of Base Ball is none other than SDCBA member Hayden Trubitt. Trubitt, who was President of the SDCBA 25 years ago and is currently a shareholder (partner) specializing in corporate law with Stradling Yocca Carlson & Rauth,

noted that in addition to the Laws of Base Ball's monumental contribution to the play of the game on the field, in his view the 1857 Convention was crucially important because it marked the birthdate of "organized baseball." Trubitt says that before then, the game was played by "social clubs, which were primarily for the purpose of playing intramural pickup games and then otherwise having a good time; they were not for the purpose of fielding varsity teams to play against other clubs' varsity teams, although this was starting to change. But there was no structure which bound the clubs together in any way." The Convention became a permanent organizing framework to consider possible further standard rule changes and to monitor inter-club affairs, with similar conventions held every year thereafter. Today's Major League Baseball is a direct descendant of these annual conventions.

As a lawyer, Trubitt also appreciates the 1857 Convention as an analogue to the United States Constitutional Convention, the Laws as an analogue to statutes, and the 1857 Convention proceedings' editing of the proposed Laws as an analogue to the drafting and negotiation that characterize his own legal work.

So there can be only one conclusion: As Yogi Berra said, "Baseball is 90% mental. The other half is physical." Play ball!

To learn more about joining the SDCBA Softball team, visit the Community Involvement portion of the SDCBA website at: <https://www.sdcba.org/?pg=sports>



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