

In A Few Words – **What We Know about the “Massachusetts Game”**

It is generally assumed that the Massachusetts Game evolved from earlier New England baserunning games recorded under the names of “round ball, bat and ball, and several other variant names.

Two of the earliest Mass-style clubs, the Olympics and the Green Mountains, played several interclub matches on Boston Common starting in 1856, playing best-of-three matches to 25 runs. Formal rules for the Massachusetts Game evidently emerged in only 1857, twelve years after the Knickerbocker Rules were written in New York. In 1858, 15-10 local clubs met in Dedham MA to agree on common rules of play. Some key differences from the rather gentler New York rules include:

- The plugging of baserunners between bases put them out
- The infield was a 60-foot square, with first base 30 feet from the batting zone
- There was no foul territory
- Balls delivered to batters could be thrown overhand, not “pitched”
- Balls were smaller and lighter than specified in the New York rules
- A one-out-side out governed the length of half-innings
- The team with 100 runs after a full inning was the game-winner
- A fly rule, not the first-bounce rule, for catches

Under these rules, the number of interclub games began to grow, and well-attended state championship games were held. When the Civil War began, scores of teams were reported to be playing in New England by the Dedham Rules.

It appears that the Mass Game quickly faded during the Civil War years, and writers generally ascribe this to the War’s disruptions. The Mass Game was seen, however, in several war camps manned by New England regiments during the war.

Current data and open questions about the Massachusetts Game

Some sources of additional information.

