Note: Once reviewed and amended, a version of this analysis will reside on the Protoball website, where it will continue to evolve as new information dictates.

--------

A Rule-by-Rule History Analysis of the Rules Adopted by the 1857 Convention of Base Ball Clubs

Drafted by Jeffrey Kittel	July 2013

(Note: This draft comprises Part Two of a two-part examination of the main rules of base ball as of about 1860. It covers the reformulation of the rules in 1857 and Part One examined the Knickerbocker Rules of 1845—see http://protoball.org/1845_Knickerbocker_Rules. We invite comments, critiques, and relevant new data; we intend to post successive versions on Protoball over time.)

Summary:

The 1857 rules of baseball, as adopted by a convention of New York area baseball clubs, represented an attempt to clarify and refine the rules of the game as they had evolved since 1845, as well as an opportunity to close some of the loopholes created by those evolved rules. They also represent the evolution of baseball from a premodern pastime to a modern sport. Yet, as historically significant as they are, there is little that is unique or revolutionary within the rules, as most are based on the baseball traditions that had evolved in the New York area over the course of half a century.

On January 22, 1857, a convention of New York-area baseball clubs was convened “for the purpose of discussing and deciding upon a code of laws which shall hereafter be recognized as authoritative in the game.” This convention produced a rule set that differs substantially from the Knickerbocker rule set of 1845 and codified fundamental changes to how baseball was played. Rules that help define what modern baseball is, such as nine men per side, nine innings per game and ninety feet between bases, first appeared in the 1857 rule set, as adopted by the convention. However, as with the Knickerbocker rule set, the specific rules in the 1857 rule set are not particularly
unique or revolutionary and there is precedent for almost all of the rules the convention adopted.

The 1857 rules were, simply, just another step forward in the long evolution of the game. They were based upon traditional rules of American baseball and built upon prior rule sets that had previously codified some of those traditions. It was an attempt at refining the game and “of rendering [it] more scientific and more worthy of being adopted as an American game…” It was also an attempt at clarifying issues that had not been addressed in prior rule sets or that had been left ambiguous. In both of these cases, refining the game and clarifying specific rule points, the 1857 convention succeeded and that, rather than any claim to revolutionary originality, is why the rule set they produced remains significant to the history of baseball.

While there are major differences between the 1857 rule set and the earlier Knickerbocker rule set, the 1845 rules were the foundation upon which the 1857 rules were built. More specifically, it is the evolution of the Knickerbocker rules, in the intervening twelve years between their formulation and the convention, that produced the 1857 rules. Therefore, before looking at the evolutionary antecedents of the 1857 rules, it is necessary to detail the evolution of the rules of baseball between 1845 and 1857.

One of the defining characteristics of the American family of baseball games is that these games, in their premodern form, were unregulated and their rules were “simple, unwritten, and based on local customs and traditions…” The Knickerbocker rule set of 1845 did not change this. While it was a step forward towards the creation of the modern game of baseball, defined by “formal, standardized, and written [rules]” that were
rationally and pragmatically worked out and legitimated by organizational means,” the Knickerbocker rules were provisional and malleable. The 1845 rule set was as flexible and adaptable as any other premodern baseball rule set: and were not adopted or accepted, in the mid to late 1840s, as the organizing principles of American baseball, even in the greater New York area.

While the 1845 rule set moved baseball closer to its modern form, the rules of the game were still evolving and this is illustrated by changes that the Knickerbockers, themselves, made to the rules governing their version of the game. At a meeting of the club, held on April 1, 1848, the 1845 rules were changed. A new rule was adopted whereby “the player running to the first base was out, if the ball was held by an adversary on that base before the runner reached it. The previous rule applied to all the bases.”

When the *By-laws and Rules of the Knickerbocker Base Ball Club* was published that year, in what is the earliest known printing of the Knickerbocker rules, it omitted a significant portion of the original rule 15, “deleting the phrase ’it being understood, however, that in no instance is a ball to be thrown at [the base runner].’” While this may be a printing error or an editing decision to remove something that was commonly understood, the 1845 rule set, as published in 1848, had been changed. The club, itself, had changed the force rule and the published rule set left it open as to whether or not plugging was allowed. Also, historian David Block has implied that there may have been further changes to the rule set in 1848, feeling “that a new rule appeared in the 1848 list that a runner cannot score a run on a force out for the third out.” These changes are evidence that the 1845 Knickerbocker rule set was evolving and, like other versions of American baseball, it was adaptable.
While it is unknown what drove this early evolution of the 1845 rule set, later changes appear to have been influenced by outside forces, as other New York-area baseball clubs began to formalize and standardize their versions of American baseball. This outside influence upon the Knickerbocker rule set would, throughout the 1850s, drive the evolution of the game towards the creation of what would become known as the New York game of baseball. Between 1852 and 1856, at least six different constitutions, by-laws or rule sets governing the playing of baseball were published in New York, creating a period of “apparent flux and chaos over specific playing rules...” Importantly, “there were considerable variations from the Knickerbocker rules,” specifically with regards to how many players made up a side and the conditions for victory, and “the Knickerbockers themselves, to accommodate the different clubs they played, had to deviate from their own rules...” If, as Harold Seymour, has written, “The Knickerbockers blazed a path others were to follow” and that “Their form of organization was adopted by other clubs, and their playing rules became generally accepted...[and] aped...”, there was still enough ambiguity in the 1845 rule set that baseball variants arose even within “the New York game.” In the 1850s, these variations helped drive the evolution of the game and set the stage for the 1857 convention.

In 1854, in response to this babel of clubs and rule variations, three New York clubs – the Knickerbockers, Gothams, and Eagles – developed a unified rule set that would govern games played by all three clubs. Interestingly, this unification was not brought about by the leadership of the Knickerbocker Club but, rather, by an inquiry of the Eagle Club, who had published their own rule set in 1852, heavily based upon the revised Knickerbocker rules, and sought clarification about playing baseball under those
While the unified rule set of 1854 was based upon the revised Knickerbocker rules and the 1852 Eagle rule set, there were some changes. Specifically, the unified rules formalized the distance between home plate and the pitcher, codified the physical dimensions of a baseball, and made refinements to the force and tag rules, stating that a defensive player must have the ball “fairly in hand” for an out to be recorded and “if the ball drops it is not a hand out.”

The 1854 unified rule set hardly represents a radical step forward in the development of baseball, even though the New York Daily Times saw it as evidence that the game had become “thoroughly systematized...” It is, however, evidence, again, of a slow and subtle evolution of the rules of the game, as baseball took another step towards its modern form. The most significant aspect of the unified rule set is the fact that it involved more than one team. For the first time in baseball history, more than one club had officially agreed upon the rules of the game and on what constituted “baseball.” Not only had the game evolved but the structure of the sport itself was developing a more modern form.

The unified rule set, along with a diagram noting the layout of the field, was published in various newspapers in 1855 and Melvin Adelman has noted that this was in “response to the increasing number of baseball clubs in the metropolitan [New York] area...” This availability of public information about the game and how it was played was another step towards the modernization of baseball and likely had an impact on the growing popularity of the game and the increase in the number of clubs and players in the New York area. As the game became more popular there was an increased demand for
information about how the game was to be played and a “rapid increase in the number of clubs and contests created the need to clarify and codify the various rules of the game. At the end of the 1855 season the *Herald* reported that a preliminary meeting was held as the first step toward creating a central governing body for baseball...” With the rules of baseball evolving and the sport moving towards a more modern form, the game experienced a tremendous growth in popularity that furthered its evolution and modernization.

The “preliminary meeting” that Adelman mentioned was also noted in the *New York Daily Tribune*, which wrote that a “Convention of representatives from a number of Base-Ball Clubs met at 'The Gotham' public house in the Bowery...There are fourteen or fifteen of those organizations in New York and Brooklyn, beside three in Jersey City and four in Newark; of which eight were represented on Friday evening by committees and several others by letters. T.C. Van Cott of 'The Gotham' presided, and Mr. Cornell of the Baltic Club was Secretary. The object of the Convention is to make arrangements for a banquet and ball, and to establish general rules for the various Clubs. Without taking definite action on these matters the Convention adjourned..., to give opportunity for a more general representation of the various clubs.” The clubs represented at the 1855 meeting were the “Gotham, Baltic, Empire, Eckford, Harmony of New York, the Atlantic, of Brooklyn and the Senior of Newark.” While this meeting did not come to much, as far as the establishment of general rules was concerned, it is significant in what it says about the evolutionary state of baseball in mid-1850s New York.
A decade after the establishment of the Knickerbocker rule set and a year prior to the convention that would adopt the 1857 rules, baseball had progressed beyond a simple pastime and was moving quickly towards becoming a modern sport. The rules, while in flux, had evolved to the point where several clubs could agree upon a single rule set, as is evidenced by the 1854 unified rules. That rule set, with the evolved Knickerbocker rules at their heart, appears to have been commonly accepted and used by many New York-area baseball clubs in the mid 1850s, besides the Knickerbockers, Gothams and Eagles. The increase in the number of clubs saw an increase in competition, as the number of inter-club matches increased throughout the decade. The amount of information about the game and the happenings of various clubs was also on the increase, with various clubs publishing their by-laws and constitutions and the local sporting press beginning to pay attention to the game. We also begin to see the beginnings of the establishment of a formal organization or governing body for the game. The unified rules were a significant first step in this direction and the 1855 meeting shows that there was demand for more. Baseball, by the time of the 1857 convention, was showing all of the signs of a modern sport and the adoption of the 1857 rules would be another important step in that direction.

However, while baseball was striding towards modernity, it still retained some of its premodern qualities. While the 1854 unified rules had proved popular and seem to have been adopted by many of the clubs in the New York area, not every baseball club played according to this rule set. There were still local, traditional baseball variants being played and it is entirely likely that unorganized youth games tended towards the “old fashioned” variants that had been played for decades. Even among the organized clubs of
the New York area, some “declined to comply with some of the playing rules” as set
down in the 1854 unified rule set.iii

On the brink of the 1857 convention, there were a lot of people with a lot ideas
about what constituted a baseball game. The Knickerbockers wrote down their ideas in
1845. They modified them in 1848. They joined with the Gothams and Eagles in 1854 to
refine their definition of the game. Other clubs, throughout the 1850s, published booklets
laying out their vision of the game. The evolutionary process that lead to the 1857 rules
was heavily influenced by the Knickerbockers but, by 1856, there were new clubs and
new players with ideas, both new and old, about what baseball was supposed to be and
while there was a great deal of agreement on what constituted a baseball game, as
evidenced by the popularity of the 1854 unified rules, there was much that was in need of
refinement and clarification. While the game was moving towards its modern state, it had
not reached it by 1856 and its probably a mistake to speak of a monolithic “New York
game” prior to the 1857 convention.

So with no true standardized rule set and no formal over-arching organization
governing the game, baseball, even with all of the strides that it had taken in the previous
decade, was still in the process of shrugging off its premodern past. The 1855 meeting
was an important step towards that, although it proved futile. But all of the reasons that
the New York-area clubs believed that an 1855 convention was necessary – the need to
refine and clarify the rules of the game and the need to produce an agreeable rule set to
govern inter-club games – still existed after the 1856 season. Interestingly, one club that
was absent from the 1855 meeting was the Knickerbockers and its entirely possible that their lack of interest in reforming the rules of the game lead to its failure.

However, after the 1856 season, whatever objections the Knickerbockers had to the idea of a convention evaporated. “It will be seen, by reference to our advertising columns, that a Convention of all the Base Ball Clubs of New York, Brooklyn, and the 'vicinage,' will be shortly held in the city. The time, January 22d...The Knickerbocker Club will take the lead in this affair, which we deem to be highly necessary, as the rules and laws for the more perfect conducting of this truly American game are not well understood by the public at large...” It has been often stated, both in the contemporary press, as seen above, and by baseball historians, that the Knickerbocker Club took the lead in calling for the 1857 convention but there are other sources that claims “the Empire baseball club asked the Knickerbockers to convene the meeting, while Porters later gave credit to the four old-line clubs as a whole for initiating the meeting, an indication the Knickerbockers' influence upon baseball, even at this early stage in its history, was on the wane.”

With both the Gotham and Empire clubs involved in the 1855 meeting, there is probably a great deal of truth to the idea that they played a role in influencing the Knickerbockers change of heart in 1856 and that for political reasons the Knickerbockers were allowed to be the first to publicly call for a baseball convention. But regardless of how it came about, the “first movement towards calling a Convention of Base Ball Players was made at a meeting of the Knickerbocker Club, held at Smith's, 462 Broome Street, New York, December 6th, 1856, on which Dr. Adams, the President of the club,
The 1857 Convention of Base Ball Players met for the first time on January 22 at Smith's Hotel, the headquarters of the Knickerbocker Club, with the following clubs represented: Knickerbocker, Gotham, Eagle, Empire, Putnam, Baltic, Excelsior, Atlantic, Harmony, Harlem, Eckford, Bedford, Narrau, and Continental. The clubs elected Daniel Adams of the Knickerbockers as president of the convention and then appointed a rules committee, made up of one member of each represented club. The members of this “Committee to Draft a Code of Laws on the Game of Base Ball, to be Submitted to the Convention” were “Messrs. L.F. Wadsworth, W.H. Van Cott, W.W. Armfield, Thos. Leavy, Thos. F. Jackson, Dr. Chas. W. Cooper, P.R. Chadwick, T. Tassie, F.D. Carr, E.H. Brown, Francis Pidgeon, John Constant, Wm. P. Howell and Nathaniel B. Law. This committee will meet next Wednesday.”

The rules committee met several times and by the end of February, they had submitted a “report...with new rules and regulations for the government of the game...” The new rules were adopted at the final meeting of the convention on February 25, 1857:

Rules and Regulations as Adopted By The 1857 Convention Of Base Ball Clubs

Section 1.

The ball must weigh not less than 6 nor more than 6 1/4 ounces avoirdupois; it must measure not less than 10, nor more than 10 1/4 inches in circumference;
must be composed of india-rubber and yarn, and covered with leather. It shall be furnished by the challenging Club, and become the property of the winning Club, as a trophy of victory.

Section 2.
The bat must be round, and must not exceed 2 1/2 inches in diameter in the thickest part; it must be made of wood, and may be of any length, to suit the striker.

Section 3.
The bases must be four in number, placed at equal distances from each other, and securely fastened upon the four corners of a square whose sides are respectively thirty yards. They must be so constructed as to be distinctly seen by the umpires and referee, and must cover a space equal to one square foot of surface; the first, second and third bases shall be canvas bags, painted white, and filled with sand or saw-dust; the home base and pitcher’s point to be each marked by a flat circular iron plate, painted or enamelled white.

Section 4.
The base from which the ball is struck shall be designated the home base, and must be directly opposite to the second base; the first base must always be that upon the right hand, and the third base that upon the left hand side of the striker, when occupying his position at the home base.

Section 5.
The pitcher’s position shall be designated by a line four yards in length, drawn at right angles to a line from home to the second base, having its centre upon that line, at a fixed iron plate placed at a point fifteen yards distant from the home base.

Section 6.
The ball must be pitched, not jerked or thrown to the bat, and whenever the pitcher draws back his hand, with the apparent purpose or pretension to deliver the ball, he shall so deliver it. The pitcher must deliver the ball as near as possible, over the centre of the home base, and must have neither foot in advance of the line at the time of delivering the ball, and if he fails in either of these particulars, then it shall be declared a baulk.

Section 7.
When a baulk is made by the pitcher, every player running the bases is entitled to one base without being put out.

Section 8.
If the ball from a stroke of the bat is caught behind the range of home and the first base, or home and the third base, without having touched the ground, or first touches the ground behind those bases, it shall be termed foul, and must be so declared by the umpires, unasked. If the ball first touches the ground, or is caught
without having touched the ground, either upon or in front of the range of those bases, it shall be considered fair.

Section 9.
A player making the home base, shall be entitled to score one run.

Section 10.
If three balls are struck at and missed, and the last one is not caught, either flying or upon the first bound, it shall be considered fair, and the striker must attempt to make his run.

Section 11.
The striker is out if a foul ball is caught, either before touching the ground or upon the first bound.

Section 12.
Or, if three balls are struck at and missed; and the last is caught either before touching the ground or upon the first bound.

Section 13.
Or, if a fair ball is struck, and the ball is caught either without having touched the ground or upon the first bound.

Section 14.
Or, if a fair ball is struck, and the ball is held by an adversary on on the first base, before the striker touches that base.

Section 15.
Or, if at any time hi is touched by the ball while in play in the hands of an adversary, without some part of his person being on a base.

Section 16.
No ace or base can be made upon a foul ball, nor when a fair ball has been caught without having touched the ground; and the ball shall, in both instances, be considered dead and not in play, until it shall first have been settled in the hands of the pitcher. When a fair ball has been caught without having touched the ground, the players running the bases shall have the privilege of returning to them.

Section 17.
Players must stand on a line drawn through the centre of the home base not exceeding in length three feet from either side thereof, and such line shall be parallel with the line occupied by the pitcher. They shall strike in regular rotation; and after the first innings is played, the turn commences with the player who stands on the list next to the one who lost the third hand.

Section 18.
Players must make their bases in the order of striking; and when a fair ball is struck, and not caught flying, nor on the first bound, the first base must be vacated, as also the second and third bases, if they are occupied at the same time. Players may be put out upon any base, under these circumstances, in the same manner as the striker when running to the first base.

Section 19.
Players running the bases must, so far as possible, keep upon the direct line between the bases; and, should any player run three feet out of this line, for the purpose of avoiding the ball in the hands of an adversary, he shall be declared out.

Section 20.
Any player, who shall, intentionally, prevent an adversary from catching or fielding the ball, shall be declared out.

Section 21.
If a player is prevented from making a base, by the intentional obstruction of an adversary, he shall be entitled to that base, and not be put out.

Section 22.
If any adversary stops the ball with his hat or cap, or takes it from the hands of a party not engaged in the game, no player can be put out, unless the ball shall first have been settled in the hands of the pitcher.

Section 23.
If a ball, from the stroke of the bat, is held under any other circumstances than as enumerated in section 22, and without having touched the ground more than once, the striker is out.

Section 24.
If two hands are already out, no player, running home at the time a ball is struck, can make an ace, if the striker is put out.

Section 25.
An innings must be concluded at the time the third hand is put out.

Section 26.
The game shall consist of nine innings to each side, when, should the number of runs be equal, the innings shall be continued until a majority of runs, upon an equal number of innings, shall be declared, which shall conclude the game.

Section 27.
In playing all matches, nine players from each club shall constitute a full field, and they must have been regular members of the club which they represent, for thirty days prior to the match. No change or substitution shall be made after the game has been commenced, unless for reason of illness or injury. Positions of
players shall be determined by captains, previously appointed for that purpose by
the respective clubs.

Section 28.
Any player holding membership in more than one club, at the same time, shall not
be permitted to play in the matches of either club.

Section 29.
The umpires in all matches shall take care that the regulations respecting the ball,
bats, bases, and the pitcher’s position, are strictly observed; they shall be the
judges of fair and unfair play, and shall determine all differences which may
occur during the game; they shall take especial care to declare all foul balls and
baulks immediately on their occurrence. They shall together select a referee, from
whose decision—in case of a disagreement between them—there shall be no appeal.

Section 30.
No person engaged in a match, either as umpire, referee, or player, shall be either
directly or indirectly interested in any bet upon the game. Neither umpire, referee
nor player shall be changed during a match, unless with the consent of both
parties, except for a violation of this law, and except as provided in section 27,
and then the referee may dismiss any transgressor.

Section 31.
The umpires and referee in any match, shall determine when play shall be
suspended; and if the game cannot be concluded, it shall be decided by the last
even innings, provided five innings have been played; and the party having the
greatest number of runs shall be declared the winner.

Section 32.
Clubs may adopt, such rules respecting balls knocked beyond or outside of the
bounds of the field, as the circumstances of the ground may demand, and these
rules shall govern all matches played upon the ground, provided that they are
distinctly made known to every player and umpire, and the referee, previous to
the commencement of the game.

Section 33.
No person shall be permitted to approach or to speak with the referee, umpires, or
players, or in any manner to interrupt or interfere during the progress of the game,
unless by the special request of the umpires or referee.

Section 34.
No person shall be permitted to act as umpire or referee in a match, unless he
shall be a member of a Base Ball Club, governed by these rules.
Whenever a match shall have been determined upon between two clubs, play shall be called at the exact hour appointed; and should either party fail to produce their players within fifteen minutes thereafter, the party so failing shall admit a defeat.

While the adoption of the 1857 rules is rightly seen as a pivotal moment in the history of baseball, the contemporary press was not that impressed. The *New York Herald* stated that the new rules did not differ “very materially from the old rules,” that they did not come “up to the expectation of many old players, who had given their valuable advice...,” and described the changes as “meagre,” although they allowed that they were “at least a step in advance.” Another group who must have been disappointed with the new rules were the Knickerbockers. The club’s representatives to the convention had pushed for several changes, such as seven inning games, seven players per side, flat bats and the fly game, that were all rejected. While the rule set that the club created in 1845 and helped evolve over the course of more than a decade was at the heart of the 1857 rules and the fly game would, of course, be adopted after a multi-year debate, the influence of the Knickerbockers on the evolution of the rules of baseball came to an end at the 1857 convention.

Regardless of the fact that the new rules may not have lived up to the expectations of all parties, they were an extraordinary, historic achievement and, with the creation of the National Association the following year, helped usher baseball into the modern era. With the 1857 rules, baseball left behind its premodern, unregulated past and became, for the first time, a truly modern sport. Steve
Gietschier wrote, rightly, that “Although the rules have been modified many times since, these 1857 rules remain the basis for the modern game of baseball.” The evolution of the rules continued and continue to this day but the 1857 rules created baseball as we know it.

Review of the 1857 Rules

Note: The following rule sets will be referenced in this analysis of the antecedents of the 1857 rules by the notation in parentheses:

- The 1845 Knickerbocker rules (1845)
- The 1848 revised Knickerbocker rules (1848)
- The 1852 By-laws and Rules of the Eagle Club (1852)
- The 1854 unified rule set of the Knickerbocker, Eagle and Gotham Clubs (1854)
- The 1856 Rules and By-laws of the Putnam Base Ball Club (1856)

Section 1.

The ball must weigh not less than 6 nor more than 6 1/4 ounces avoirdupois; it must measure not less than 10, nor more than 10 1/4 inches in circumference; it must be composed of india-rubber and yarn, and covered with leather. It shall be furnished by the challenging Club, and become the property of the winning Club, as a trophy of victory.

This rule does not appear in 1845, 1848 or 1852. 1854 has rule 17 which states that “The ball shall weigh from 5 ½ to 6 ounces, and be from 2 ¾ to 3 ¼ inches in diameter.” 1856 has rule 3 which states that “the ball varies from 5 1/2 to 6 ounces in weight, and from 2 3/4 to 3 1/4 inches in diameter.”

As the ball is at the center of a baseball game and the size, weight and make-up of the ball effects so many aspects of how a game is played, it seems self-
evident that a baseball rule set would seek to define what a baseball is. However, it does not appear that this took place until 1854 and the reason for this was that early baseballs were all “hand made by players and local merchants” with “no standard size or weight.” It would be difficult to enforce standardization when all of the balls were homemade, although general guidelines were put in place in the second half of the 1850s.

Section 2.

The bat must be round, and must not exceed 2 1/2 inches in diameter in the thickest part; it must be made of wood, and may be of any length, to suit the striker.

This rule does not appear in 1845, 1848, 1852 or 1854. 1856 has rule 2 which states that “The bat or club is of hickory or ash, about 3 feet long, tapering, and about 1 ½ to 3 inches in diameter at the lower end, and round.

As with rules regulating baseball size, it would seem self-evident at first glance that there would be a rule governing the size of bats, one of the more important pieces of baseball equipment. However, no such rule was seen prior to the 1856 Putnam Club rule set. While Peter Morris, in Game of Inches, has noted that there was great variety in the type of wood used to make bats during the early years of the game, as well as their length, weight and dimension, any rule regulating bats was always a matter of physical practicality as much as a restriction upon the batter.¹

The most interesting thing about 1857 section 2 is that it confirmed that baseball was to be a game played with a round bat. In this it agreed with the 1856
Putnam rule set and resisted efforts, most notably those of the Knickerbocker club, to have the game played with a flat bat.

Section 3.

The bases must be four in number, placed at equal distances from each other, and securely fastened upon the four corners of a square whose sides are respectively thirty yards. They must be so constructed as to be distinctly seen by the umpires and referee, and must cover a space equal to one square foot of surface; the first, second and third bases shall be canvas bags, painted white, and filled with sand or saw-dust; the home base and pitcher’s point to be each marked by a flat circular iron plate, painted or enamelled white.

The most significant part of 1857 section 3 is obviously the stipulation that bases were to be placed ninety feet apart. Ninety feet between bases is one of the defining characteristics of modern baseball and the rule stands to this day. This rule is considered one of the great achievements of the 1857 convention and baseball writers never tire of waxing poetic about the beauty of the ninety foot base path.

No prior rule set specifically mentioned the distance between bases and, certainly, none went into so much detail about the physical makeup of the base. However almost all other rule sets did state that the distance between home plate and second base, as well as between first and third, was to be 42 paces. A baseball field laid out to those dimensions would produce base paths of approximately 30 paces. Given the ambiguity surrounding the definition of a pace, it is difficult to determine exactly how significant a change 1857 section 3 truly is.
Eric Miklich summarized the problem succinctly when he wrote “Only if we knew how clubs actually defined a pace, would we know whether the 1857 rule was a significant change. A three-foot pace would have dictated a baseline of nearly modern length. However, a pace was formally defined as 30 inches in those days, not 36 inches, and if that pace was used, the distance between bases was about 75 feet, and the 1857 rule would extend the distance by 20 percent, and affect rates of scoring.” Miklich is absolutely correct in his assessment that the 19th century pace was defined at 2 ½ feet and there is substantial literature from the period to support this. Given this supporting evidence, it appears that 1857 section 3 a unique and innovative change to the generally accepted rules of baseball and is significant as the baseball poets like to tell us.

While general interest in this rule centers around 90 feet between bases, 1857 section 3 may have been the first time that a rule set specified a standard playing field. While the 19th century pace, as far as weights and measures were concerned, was 2 ½ feet, there was also another common definition of a pace as a simple human step, a definition that is still in use today. The measurement of the pace by a human step would have resulted in varying distances between bases, given differences in height and gait of persons walking off the paces. Daniel Adams appears to have admitted this when he declared that, prior to the 1857 rule set, the set distance between bases “was rather vague.” This vagueness may have been a feature of the rule as it would have produced what Fred Ivor-Campbell has referred to as scalable dimensions, where adult players would produce a field with
75 foot base-paths and younger players would produce small infields. A vagueness in the rules that produced different forms of the game would have been keeping in the tradition of pre-modern, unregulated baseball and its elimination from the game would have been a step towards producing its modern version.

Regardless of any debate over the definition of what constituted a pace, it is evident that 1857 section 3 is a unique addition to the rules of baseball and helped create a more modern form of the game.

Section 4.
The base from which the ball is struck shall be designated the home base, and must be directly opposite to the second base; the first base must always be that upon the right hand, and the third base that upon the left hand side of the striker, when occupying his position at the home base.

This rule does not appear in any previous rule set and fills in details about the specific way the game was to be played. The most interesting part of the rule is that it notes that the bases were to run in a counterclockwise manner, something which, today, is taken for granted but which, in some forms of early American baseball, was not the standard.

Section 5.
The pitcher’s position shall be designated by a line four yards in length, drawn at right angles to a line from home to the second base, having its centre upon that line, at a fixed iron plate placed at a point fifteen yards distant from the home base.

This rule is not in 1845, 1848 or 1852. 1854 has rule 1 which states that “The bases shall be from 'Home' to second base 42 paces; and from first to third
base 42 paces, equi-distant; and from 'Home' to pitcher not less that [sic] 15 paces; i.e. 21 paces from the centre of the field to each base.” 1856 has rule 4 which states “home to pitcher not less than 15 paces...” However, the pitcher being in the center of the infield certainly predates the 1845 Knickerbocker rule set.

If we accept the definition of the pace as 2 ½ feet, the previous pitcher's position was approximately 37 feet from home and 1857 section 5 moved the pitcher's position back seven or eight feet. Given that 1857 section 3 increased the length between bases and increased the size of the infield, it was necessary to move the pitcher's position further from home. Again, as with 1857 section 3, we can debate the proper definition of the pace but 1857 section 5 is more specific about the placement of the pitcher's position and, therefore, more in line with an attempt to define a modern sport.

Peter Morris raises an interesting point in *Game of Inches* about the evolution of swift-pitching and the role of the pitcher in putting batters out. He has written that this evolution “occurred no later than the first great spurt of competitive play between 1855 and 1857” and gives sources illustrating that it was taking place in 1856. If 1857 section 5 moved the pitcher's position back by seven or eight feet, it may have been a reaction to this evolution of swift-pitching and an attempt to reduce the ability of pitchers to dampen the run-scoring ability of an offense.

Section 6.
The ball must be pitched, not jerked or thrown to the bat, and whenever the pitcher draws back his hand, with the apparent purpose or pretension to deliver the ball, he shall so deliver it. The pitcher must deliver the ball as near as possible, over the centre of the home base, and must have neither foot in advance of the line at the time of delivering the ball, and if he fails in either of these particulars, then it shall be declared a balk.

All previous rule sets stated that the ball was to be pitched, not thrown, and all included a balk rule, which originated with the 1845 rule set. Certainly, 1857 section 6 is an attempt to further define what a balk was and to clarify previous rule sets. However, as with the modern balk rule, there was still a great deal left open to interpretation and the New York Herald wrote that the rule “is rather indefinable in endeavoring to define a baulk, in saying that whenever the hand is drawn back with the apparent purpose of delivering a ball, it shall be declared a baulk; if he should do so for the purpose of throwing to a base it would be deemed a baulk. This is conflicting.” So, while 1857 section 6 was an attempt at specificity that was lacking in previous rule sets, it may not have been successful in properly defining the balk rule.

Section 7.
When a baulk is made by the pitcher, every player running the bases is entitled to one base without being put out.

This rule appears in all previous rule sets.

Section 8.
If the ball from a stroke of the bat is caught behind the range of home and the first base, or home and the third base, without having touched the ground, or first touches the ground behind those bases, it shall be termed foul, and must be so declared by the umpires, unasked. If the ball first touches the ground, or is caught without having touched the ground, either upon or in front of the range of those bases, it shall be considered fair.
The idea of foul territory appears in various forms in all previous rule sets, although this rule is more detailed than previous ones. The fact that foul balls were to be “declared by the umpire, unasked” implies that this was a non-appeal play and is the first of its kind to appear in any baseball rule set.

Section 9.
A player making the home base, shall be entitled to score one run.

Previous rule sets did not define how a run was scored so this rule is unique in that regard, although the idea of the run scored predates the 1845 rule set.

One thing to note about this rule is the change in terminology from “ace” to “run.” A search of the etymological origins of the word shows that its usage in baseball dates from 1856, although this is far from conclusive.

Section 10.
If three balls are struck at and missed, and the last one is not caught, either flying or upon the first bound, it shall be considered fair, and the striker must attempt to make his run.

This rule appears in all previous rule sets.

Section 11.
The striker is out if a foul ball is caught, either before touching the ground or upon the first bound.
There are no mentions of foul outs in previous rule sets. 1854 has rule 5 which states that “Three balls being struck at and missed, and the last one caught, is a hand out; if not caught, is considered fair, and the striker bound to run. Tips and foul balls do not count.” On possible interpretation of 1854 rule 5 is that a batter could not be put out on a foul ball. However, foul outs were not a new idea and date back to at least 18th century trap ball. Therefore, this is most likely either a clarification of previous rule sets or an official codification of an accepted and unwritten rule.

Also of interest is the change in terminology from “hands lost” or “hands out” to “outs.” While it is difficult to trace this use of the word “out” in baseball prior to this, it was used in cricket as early as 1746.

Section 12. Or, if three balls are struck at and missed; and the last is caught either before touching the ground or upon the first bound.

This rule appears in all previous rule sets.

Section 13. Or, if a fair ball is struck, and the ball is caught either without having touched the ground or upon the first bound.

This rule appears in all previous rule sets.

Section 14. Or, if a fair ball is struck, and the ball is held by an adversary on on the first base, before the striker touches that base.
The force out at first base is specifically mentioned in 1848, 1852, 1854 and 1856, while the general force out is mentioned in 1845. This rule refines the language somewhat to specify that the ball must be “held” for the force out to be completed.

Section 15.

Or, if at any time he is touched by the ball while in play in the hands of an adversary, without some part of his person being on a base.

Tag outs are in all previous rule sets.

Section 16.

No ace or base can be made upon a foul ball, nor when a fair ball has been caught without having touched the ground; and the ball shall, in both instances, be considered dead and not in play, until it shall first have been settled in the hands of the pitcher. When a fair ball has been caught without having touched the ground, the players running the bases shall have the privilege of returning to them.

No advancement on foul balls is a rule that appears, in various forms, in all previous rule sets. The rest of the rule appears to be unique and a clarification or refinement of base-running rules. Specifically, the prohibition on advancement on fly outs is a new addition to the rules of the game. As Larry McCray has written, “[A] provision was fashioned as a new inducement for fielders to make fly catches whenever they could: Although baserunners could still, as before, scamper ahead on all hit balls put in flight, for bound catches, runners could keep the bases they had gained on play. If those balls were caught on the fly, however, the runners now were returned, with safe passage, to their original bases...”
The *New York Herald* noted that 1857 section 16 “is a great improvement upon the old rule by rewarding good fielding, it compels all who are running from making an ace or base if the ball is caught before it touches the ground and compels every player to return to the place of starting; yet the reward of the fielder for superior play is partially nullified by protecting the runners from being put out whilst returning to their bases, instead of allowing the ball to be immediately in play on being returned to the hands of the pitcher.”

**Section 17.**

Players must stand on a line drawn through the centre of the home base not exceeding in length three feet from either side thereof, and such line shall be parallel with the line occupied by the pitcher. They shall strike in regular rotation; and after the first innings is played, the turn commences with the player who stands on the list next to the one who lost the third hand.

The specific designation of the batter’s area does not appear in the other rule sets but there is some evidence that the idea predates 1845. The rule on batting order appears in all of the previous rule sets and the specifics in 1857 section 17 are similar to the wording in 1852 and 1854.

**Section 18.**

Players must make their bases in the order of striking; and when a fair ball is struck, and not caught flying, nor on the first bound, the first base must be vacated, as also the second and third bases, if they are occupied at the same time. Players may be put out upon any base, under these circumstances, in the same manner as the striker when running to the first base.

This rule supplies more detail on the force out and base-running not given in 1845, 1848, 1852 or 1854, although the language is very similar to 1856 and appears to have been adopted from that rule set.
Section 19.
Players running the bases must, so far as possible, keep upon the direct line between the bases; and, should any player run three feet out of this line, for the purpose of avoiding the ball in the hands of an adversary, he shall be declared out.

The three foot base-path is unique to 1857 and likely was designed to close a base running loophole in previous rule sets.

Section 20.
Any player, who shall, intentionally, prevent an adversary from catching or fielding the ball, shall be declared out.

The interference rule was in all previous rule sets.

Section 21.
If a player is prevented from making a base, by the intentional obstruction of an adversary, he shall be entitled to that base, and not be put out.

A rule against defensive interference appears in 1856.

Section 22.
If any adversary stops the ball with his hat or cap, or takes it from the hands of a party not engaged in the game, no player can be put out, unless the ball shall first have been settled in the hands of the pitcher.

This rule is unique to 1857 and appears to have been designed to close a loophole in previous rule sets.

Section 23.
If a ball, from the stroke of the bat, is held under any other circumstances than as enumerated in section 22, and without having touched the ground more than once, the striker is out.

This rule appears in all previous rule sets.

Section 24.
If two hands are already out, no player, running home at the time a ball is struck, can make an ace, if the striker is put out.

As stated previously, this rule was added by the Knickerbockers in 1848 and it appears in all rule sets after that. It is a clarification upon what defined a run scored, necessitated by the vagueness of the 1845 rule set.

Section 25.
An innings must be concluded at the time the third hand is put out.

The three out inning appears in all previous rule sets.

Section 26.
The game shall consist of nine innings to each side, when, should the number of runs be equal, the innings shall be continued until a majority of runs, upon an equal number of innings, shall be declared, which shall conclude the game.

The nine inning game is one of the significant contributions of the 1857 rule set to the game of baseball and gave the game one of its defining characteristics. It was, as the New York Herald noted, “certainly a great reform.”

However, there does appear to be precedent for a baseball game to be played to a set number of innings rather than to a set number of runs scored. As an example of this, there was a 1855 match between the “Pioneer and Excelsior Base Ball Clubs, of Jersey City...Eleven innings were played...eleven members of each club playing...” The Excelsiors won what appears to have been an eleven man/eleven inning game by a score of 49-25. Interestingly, the Pioneer Club did play matches under the rules of the nascent New York game that season and,
therefore, were aware of the rules stipulating that a game should be played to 21 runs. The implication is that there were obviously other baseball traditions, besides the evolving Knickerbocker/unified style, being played in the New York area and, more importantly, that some of these traditions had the game played to a set number of innings rather than a set number of runs scored.

Why specifically the 1857 convention decided to change to a nine inning game is not known but the *Herald* suggested that the rule was adopted “to prevent a game from being played out in one or two hours...as was too frequently the case in making twenty-one runs.” If one looks through the Game Tabulation for greater New York City at Protoball, one begins to see, beginning in 1856, numerous games that ended in two or three innings. This certainly lends evidence to the *Herald*’s suggestion that the nine inning game was adopted in order to create a game that lasted longer and, as Eric Miklich has noted, the average game in 1856 “lasted only about 6 innings, and thus the 1857 convention was defining a game that was to be 50 percent longer.”

Interestingly, as some were advocating for a longer-lasting game, there had been an increase, in 1856, in the number of games that ended in a draw, many as a result of suspended play due to darkness. Why would the clubs have been advocating for a longer-lasting game if the odds of completing a game under the 21 run rule were decreasing? If they could not get the games in as it was, why push for longer games? If we believe that the draws due to darkness were a
natural phenomenon than the introduction of the nine inning game does not make much sense. However, it is possible that the increase in the number of suspended games was not entirely natural and there may have been some skullduggery going on, as teams may have been playing a waiting game, hoping for darkness to earn them a draw or save them from a loss. The *Herald* implies this when it wrote that the new nine inning “rule will prevent...playing against time and making a drawn game...”\(^2\)

There are other possible reasons why the nine inning rule was adopted.

There is an idea that there was a baseball tradition whereby if a game was played to a set number of innings then the number of players per side should correspond with the number of innings. “Thus the adoption of the nine-player game meant that nine would also become the number of innings.”\(^2\) However, this doesn't really tell us why the decision was made to change from a 21 run game to a game decided in a set number of innings but only, rather, why nine innings, specifically, was chosen. We do know that the rules committee originally had decided to have the game decided in seven innings but this “was changed by the convention, on the motion of Mr. Wadsworth, to nine innings...”\(^2\) Therefore, the idea of having the game decided by a set number of innings appears to have been made independently of any decisions regarding the number of players per side.

There has also been an argument put forward that a game decided on the number of innings played was more fun than a game played to 21 runs. The nine
inning rule “made it possible for clubs of differing talent levels to mutually enjoy playing each other. Mismatched teams were guaranteed at least nine innings of continuous participation, a marked improvement over the old Knickerbocker 21-run rule, where a game could be over in as little as two or thee innings...[and] evenly matched teams were guaranteed a result in no more than nine innings, another improvement over Knickerbocker rules, in which some games had to be extended to as many as sixteen innings to reach the requisite 21 runs.” 1857 section 26 guaranteed a club nine innings of baseball regardless of how easy or difficult they were to score against or how easy or difficult it was for them to score.

Regardless of whether the nine inning rule was adopted in order to increase the length of games, to stop clubs from playing for a draw or a suspended game, as a balance to the number of players per side or because it allowed for a more enjoyable competition, it is one of the lasting legacies of the 1857 convention and the rule set they produced. Baseball, as a result of 1857 section 26, is a game played to 27 outs and that fact has had a profound impact on how we view, measure and think about the game.

Section 27.
In playing all matches, nine players from each club shall constitute a full field, and they must have been regular members of the club which they represent, for thirty days prior to the match. No change or substitution shall be made after the game has been commenced, unless for reason of illness or injury. Positions of players shall be determined by captains, previously appointed for that purpose by the respective clubs.
The codification of nine players per side is, like 1857 section 26, one of the significant and lasting contributions of the 1857 convention to the game of baseball and is unique to the 1857 rule set. The regulation of players in 1857 section 27 is also unique, as all previous rule sets mentioned that non-members could be used to fill out a side. The substitution rule is implied in 1845, 1848 and 1852 while the positioning of players by captains is mentioned in 1848, 1852 and 1856.

While all of the rules governing the regulation and management of players in 1857 section 27 are important, it is obviously the codification of nine players per side that makes this rule historically memorable. However, the 1857 convention did not invent the idea of using nine men per side. There is evidence of games played as early as 1845, under the Knickerbocker rules, with nine men per side and Eric Miklich has written that “it is generally believed that a custom had already evolved that match games required nine-player teams. If so, this new rule was simply conforming to de facto standards.” The *New York Clipper*, supporting this idea of a de facto standard of nine men per side, noted that “Base Ball can be played by any number from five upwards: nine, however, being the usual number on each side.”

The Knickerbockers, even though they occasionally used nine men per side, did not specify, in the 1845 rules, the number of players per side and no other rule set, until 1857, mentioned the number of players needed to play a
baseball game. This was likely because, in early American baseball, the number of players per side was not central to how the game was played. The game was malleable to the point where a game could be played with as few as three people or as many as you could fit in the field. The number of players per side was simply not an important factor in putting together a baseball game and if you look at the earliest games in Protoball's Game Tabulation, you find that the Knickerbockers, between 1845 and 1853, used anywhere between six and thirteen men per side. In forty-three matches recorded in the Game Tabulation, they used six men three times, seven men eight times, eight men eleven times (all before 1849), nine men five times, ten men eight times, eleven men four times and thirteen men once, with several entries not specifying the number of players used. While baseball was flexible enough that it could be played with almost any number of players per side, it appears that the Knickerbockers settled on somewhere between seven and ten men per side to be optimal, with an eight man side used most often.

But, if almost any number of players could be used per side and the Knickerbockers had settled on seven to ten per side, how did nine become the standard by 1856, especially if eight per side appears to have been the standard prior to 1849? While there is no conclusive answer to this, John Thorn has suggested that it has something to do with how players were positioned in the field. “Play was conducted,” he wrote, “in accord with Cartwright's model of only three basemen, and on occasions when nine or more fielding positions were
created by a surfeit of players, the 'extras' were put into the outfield or held in
reserve.” With eight men per side, there would be a pitcher, catcher, three
infielders and three outfielders. If there were more than eight, the extra player or
players would be positioned in the outfield and an extra outfielder was rather
useful during an era with a relatively light ball, as he could help relay the ball
back to the infield after long hits. Thorn implies that the shortstop position
evolved, around 1849, out of this surfeit of outfielders and an eight man game
became a nine man game with the acceptance of the short fielder.

By the mid-1850s, with the integration of the shortstop position into the
game, nine men per side appears to have become standard in the New York area
and the 1857 convention simply codified what had been common practice. While,
previously, baseball had never been defined by the number of players per side,
with 1857 section 27, the game became identified with nine men in the field and
this was one of the convention's lasting legacies.

Section 28.

Any player holding membership in more than one club, at the same time, shall not be permitted to
play in the matches of either club.

This rule is unique to the 1857 rule set and, along with elements of 1857
section 27, appears to be a reaction to the growing competitiveness of baseball in
the New York area in the second half of the 1850s.

Section 29.
The umpires in all matches shall take care that the regulations respecting the ball, bats, bases, and the pitcher’s position, are strictly observed; they shall be the judges of fair and unfair play, and shall determine all differences which may occur during the game; they shall take especial care to declare all foul balls and baulks immediately on their occurrence. They shall together select a referee, from whose decision-in case of a disagreement between them—there shall be no appeal.

Umpires are noted in 1845, 1848, 1852 and 1856 and the referee is mentioned in 1856. While this rule certainly gives more detail about the duties of the umpire/referee, the idea that the umpire/referee enforced the rules and that there was no appeal from his decision was not new.

Section 30.

No person engaged in a match, either as umpire, referee, or player, shall be either directly or indirectly interested in any bet upon the game. Neither umpire, referee nor player shall be changed during a match, unless with the consent of both parties, except for a violation of this law, and except as provided in section 27, and then the referee may dismiss any transgressor.

This rule is unique to the 1857 rule set and must be a reaction to conditions within the baseball world in the late 1850s.

Section 31.

The umpires and referee in any match, shall determine when play shall be suspended; and if the game cannot be concluded, it shall be decided by the last even innings, provided five innings have been played; and the party having the greatest number of runs shall be declared the winner.

This rule is unique to the 1857 rule set. The five inning rule is still in effect today.

Section 32.
Clubs may adopt, such rules respecting balls knocked beyond or outside of the bounds of the field, as the circumstances of the ground may demand, and these rules shall govern all matches played upon the ground, provided that they are distinctly made known to every player and umpire, and the referee, previous to the commencement of the game.

This rule is unique to the 1857 rule set. However, 1845 rule 20 can be seen as a precedent to the establishment of ground rules.

Section 33.

No person shall be permitted to approach or to speak with the referee, umpires, or players, or in any manner to interrupt or interfere during the progress of the game, unless by the special request of the umpires or referee.

This rule is unique to the 1857 rule set.

Section 34.

No person shall be permitted to act as umpire or referee in a match, unless he shall be a member of a Base Ball Club, governed by these rules.

This rule is unique to the 1857 rule set but there are precedents about the selection of umpires/referees in 1845, 1848 and 1852.

Section 35.

Whenever a match shall have been determined upon between two clubs, play shall be called at the exact hour appointed; and should either party fail to produce their players within fifteen minutes thereafter, the party so failing shall admit a defeat.

This rule is unique to the 1857 rule set and was most likely an attempt to close a loophole in previous rule sets.
While the 1857 rule set is rightly seen as an important step in baseball's evolution, there is really very little in it that is significantly unique. Most of the new rule changes are a refinement or clarification of previous rule sets. Even the introduction of nine inning games and sides of nine players, which are seen as major, historically-important rule changes, are codifications of previous traditions.

Probably the most unique rule change introduced by the convention was section 3, which stipulated ninety feet between bases. The really was no precedent for a baseball infield that large and it had a significant impact on how the game was played. Section 8, which stated that umpires were to call foul balls unasked, created the first of many non-appeal plays and, therefore, is significantly unique. Also, section 16, which stated that runners must return to their base after a ball was caught on the fly, appears to have been without precedent. While there are other rules in the 1857 rule set, such as the creation of a three foot base path, which had not appeared in previous rule sets, the three rules mentioned above are the ones that are both unprecedented and have had a major, lasting impact on how the game was played.

Regardless of their lack of striking originality, the 1857 rule set captured and codified the baseball traditions of the mid 1850s, as they had evolved in the previous decade since the creation of the 1845 Knickerbocker rules. The delegates at the 1857 convention, representing the baseball clubs of the New York area, took an opportunity to refine the game they loved, to clarify some of the rules of
that game and to close off loopholes that were found in previous rule sets. In doing so, they helped to create a modern sport.

Appendix

The 1852 By-laws and Rules of the Eagle Club
[based on notes supplied by Richard Hershberger]

First.- Members must strictly observe the time agreed upon for exercise and be punctual in their attendance.

Second.-When assembled for exercise, the President, and in his absence the presiding officer, shall designate two members as Captains, who shall retire and make the match to be played, observing at the same time, that the players put opposite to each other should be as nearly equal as possible; the choice of sides to be then tossed for, and the first in hand to be decided in like manner.

Third.- The Captains shall have absolute direction of the game, and shall designate the position each player shall occupy in the field which position cannot be changed without their consent.

Fourth.- Each member shall act as Umpire, in regular rotation, according to the alphabetical list.

Fifth.- It shall be the duty of the Umpire to keep the game in a book prepared for that purpose, and note all violations of the by Laws and Rules during the time of exercise; he shall decide all disputes and differences relative to the game, from which decision there is no appeal.

Sixth.- The bases shall be, from “Home” to second base, 42 paces; from first to third base, 42 paces, equi-distant. [Note: hyphen occurs on a line break in the original.]

Seventh.- If there should not be a sufficient number of Members of the Club present at the time agreed upon to commence exercise, gentlemen, not members, may be chosen in to make up the match, which shall not be broken up to take in members that may afterward appear, but in all cases, members shall have the preference when present at the making of a match.

Eighth.- If members appear after the game is commenced, they may be chosen in, if mutually agreed upon.
Ninth.- A ball must be pitched, not thrown for the bat.

Tenth.- A ball knocked inside [sic] the range of first or third base, is foul.

Eleventh.- Three balls being struck at and missed and the last one caught, is a hand out; if not caught is considered fair, and the striker bound to run.

Twelfth.- A ball being struck, or tipped, and caught either flying, or on the first bound, is a hand out.

Thirteenth.- A player must make his first base after striking a ball. [This rule is not in the 1845 or 1848 rule sets]

Fourteenth.- A player running the bases, shall be out if the ball is in the hands of an adversary on the first base before the runner reaches that base; or if, at any time when off a base, he shall be touched by the ball.

Fifteenth.- A player running who shall prevent an adversary from catching or getting the ball before making his base, is a hand out.

Sixteenth.- If two hands are already out, a player running home at the time a ball is struck, cannot make an ace if the striker is caught out. [Not in the 1845 rules but in the 1848 rules]

Seventeenth.- Three hands out, all out.

Eighteenth.- Players must make their strike in regular turn, and after the first hand is played the turn commences at the player who stands on the list next to the one who lost the hand previously.

Nineteenth.- No ace or base can be made on a foul strike.

Twentieth.- A runner cannot be put out in making one base, when a balk is made by the pitcher.

Twenty-first.- But one base allowed when the ball bounds out of the fields, when struck.

The 1856 Rules and By-laws of the Putnam Base Ball Club

published in Porter's Spirit of the Times, Dec 6, 1856
For the rules of the game, we have drawn largely on a pretty little edition
of the By-laws, Rules, &c., of the “PUTNAM CLUB,” published by BAKER &
GODWIN, over the Tribune building, which, with reference to the diagrams,
will give a good idea of the game, as it is played at present. We have
suggested, and shall continue to suggest some innovations on the old rules,
which we think may add to the interest of the game—always subject, however,
to the decision of a convention of the Base Ball Clubs, which we hope will
convene before long to regulate the details of this popular game.

1. The captains, umpires, and referee having been chosen, the captains shall
have absolute direction of the games, and shall designate the position each
player shall occupy in the field.

2. It shall be the duty of the umpires to see that the game is properly kept:
they shall decide all disputes and differences relative to the game, from
which decision there shall be no appeal, except to the referee.

3. The bat or club is of hickory or ash, about 3 feet long, tapering, and
about 1 1/2 to 3 inches in diameter at the lower end, and round; the ball
varies from 5 1/2 to 6 ounces in weight, and from 2 3/4 to 3 1/4 inches in
diameter.

4. The bases shall be, from home to 2d base, 42 paces; from 1st to 3d base, 42
paces, equi-distant; and from home to pitcher not less than 15 paces (see
diagram see appendix I )

5. The game to consist of 21 counts or aces; but, at the conclusion, an equal
number of hands must be played—that is, the last to go in at the
commencement of the game shall have the last innings, the total score to
decide the game.

6. The ball must be pitched, not thrown or jerked, for the bat.
7. A ball knocked outside and behind the range of the first or third bases shall be considered foul, and shall not count the striker an ace.

8. Three balls being struck at and missed, and the last one caught, is a hand out; if not caught, it is considered fair, and the striker bound to run to the 1st base.

9. A ball being struck at and tipped, and caught, either flying or on the first bound, is a hand out.

10. A player must make his first base after striking a fair ball; but should the ball be in the hands of an adversary on the first base before the striker reaches that base, it is a hand out.

11. A player shall be put out, if at any time when off a base he be touched by a ball in the hands of an adversary.

12. A player cannot be put out in making one base, when a baulk is made by the pitcher.

13. Players must make the bases in the order of striking; and when a fair ball is struck, and the striker not put out, the first base must be vacated, as well as the next base or bases, if similarly occupied. Players, while running to 2d and 3d base, or home, may be put out under these circumstances in the same manner as when running to the first base.

14. A ball knocked out of the field, or limit, but one base shall be made thereon by the striker.

15. A player who shall intentionally prevent an adversary from catching or getting a ball, is a hand out.

16. A player must be allowed every opportunity to make his bases, and in case of his being prevented by their occupation by an adversary, he shall be entitled to the base.

17. If two hands are out, a player running home at the time a ball is struck, cannot make an ace if the striker is caught out.
18. A player coming home from 3d base, is entitled to the mark, if home before another run is out.

19. Three hands out, all out.

20. Players must take their strikes in regular rotation; and after the first inning is played, the turn commences at the player who stands next to the one on the list who lost the third hand.

Notes:

1 Thanks to Larry McCray for helping design the “Roots of the Rules” Project and reviewing earlier drafts of this research report.


3 New York Herald, March 2, 1857.

4 Adelman, Melvin; A Sporting Time; p 6.

5 Ibid.

6 Morris, Peter; A Game of Inches: The Game on the Field; p 21.

7 Ryczek, William; Baseball's First Inning; p 48.

8 Peverelly, Charles A.; The Book of American Pastimes; p 343.

9 Protoball Chronology entry 1848.1 (http://protoball.org/1848.1).

10 Ibid.

11 Block, David; Baseball Before We Knew It; pp 223-224.

12 Melville, Tom; Early Baseball and the Rise of the National League; p 12.

13 Ibid.

14 Seymour, Harold; Baseball: The Early Years; p 16.

15 Seymour, p 20.

16 Thorn, John; posted at 19CBB; December 5, 2008.
The 1845 rule set is readily available online; modifications that created 1848 appears in Peaverlly; 1852 is based on author's copy; 1854 was published in the contemporary press; and 1856 is based on author's copy. 1852 and 1856 will be found in an appendix at the end of this piece.

Mears Baseball Collection, Volume 4.158; p 2.

New York Daily Times; December 19, 1854.

New York Sunday Mercury; April 29, 1855. Spirit of the Times; May 12, 1855. Syracuse Standard; May 16, 1855. Also, Mears Baseball Collection, Volume 4.158, p 2.

Adelman; p 126.

Adelmann; p 127.

New York Daily Tribune; December 10, 1855.

Miklich, Eric; posted at 19CBB, November 16, 2011.

Hershberger, Richard; posted at 19CBB, November 17, 2011.

Waff, Craig B. and Larry McRay; 1856.4 The New York Game in 1856; Base Ball, Volume 5, Number 1; p 115.

Mears Baseball Collection, Volume 4.158; p 3.

Melville; p 12.

Mears Baseball Collection, Volume 4.158; p 3.


New York Clipper; February 28, 1857.

New York Herald; March 2, 1857.

Gietschier, Steven; The Rules of Baseball; The Cambridge Companion to Baseball; p 11.

The 1845 rule set is readily available online; modifications that created 1848 appears in Peaverlly; 1852 is based on author's copy; 1854 was published in the contemporary press; and 1856 is based on author's copy. 1852 and 1856 will be found in an appendix at the end of this piece.


Morris; pp 408-411.

Miklich, Eric; 1857.1 Nine Innings, Nine Players, Ninety Feet, and Other Changes; Base Ball, Volume 5, Issue 1.

See John Quincy Adams' 1821 Report upon Weights and Measures; Noah Webster's 1828 An American Dictionary of the English Language; John Henry Alexander's 1857 An Inquiry Into The English System of Weights and Measures; and the 1862 House of Commons Report from the Select Committee on Weights and Measures.
38 Morris; p 38.
39 Ibid.
40 Morris; p 25.
41 New York Herald; March 2, 1857.
44 McCray, Larry; 1845.1 The Knickerbocker Rules – and the Long History of the One-Bounce Fielding Rule; Base Ball, Volume 5, Number 1.
45 New York Herald; March 2, 1857.
47 New York Herald; March 2, 1857.
49 New York Herald; March 2, 1857.
50 Game Tab: Greater New York City (http://protoball.org/Games_Tab:Greater_New_York_City).
51 Miklich; 1857.1 Nine Innings; p 119.
52 New York Herald; March 2, 1857.
53 Morris; p 23, quoting an idea of John Thorn.
54 New York Herald; March 2, 1857.
56 Protoball Games Tabulation: Greater New York City (http://protoball.org/Games_Tab:Greater_New_York_City).
57 Miklich; 1857.1 Nine Innings, Nine Players, Ninety Feet, and Other Changes; p 119.
58 New York Clipper; December 13, 1856.
59 Protoball Games Tabulation: Greater New York City (http://protoball.org/Games_Tab:Greater_New_York_City).
60 Thorn, John; "Doc Adams"; SABR BioProject (http://sabr.org/bioproj/person/14ec7492).