

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

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

7

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

13 **Summary:**

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

21 -----

22 On January 22, 1857, a convention of New York-area baseball clubs was
23 convened “for the purpose of discussing and deciding upon a code of laws which shall
24 hereafter be recognized as authoritative in the game.”² This convention produced a rule
25 set that differs substantially from the Knickerbocker rule set of 1845 and codified
26 fundamental changes to how baseball was played. Rules that help define what modern
27 baseball is, such as nine men per side, nine innings per game and ninety feet between
28 bases, first appeared in the 1857 rule set, as adopted by the convention. However, as with
29 the Knickerbocker rule set, the specific rules in the 1857 rule set are not particularly

30 unique or revolutionary and there is precedent for almost all of the rules the convention
31 adopted.

32 The 1857 rules were, simply, just another step forward in the long evolution of the
33 game. They were based upon traditional rules of American baseball and built upon prior
34 rule sets that had previously codified some of those traditions. It was an attempt at
35 refining the game and “of rendering [it] more scientific and more worthy of being
36 adopted as an American game...”³ It was also an attempt at clarifying issues that had not
37 been addressed in prior rule sets or that had been left ambiguous. In both of these cases,
38 refining the game and clarifying specific rule points, the 1857 convention succeeded and
39 that, rather than any claim to revolutionary originality, is why the rule set they produced
40 remains significant to the history of baseball.

41 While there are major differences between the 1857 rule set and the earlier
42 Knickerbocker rule set, the 1845 rules were the foundation upon which the 1857 rules
43 were built. More specifically, it is the evolution of the Knickerbocker rules, in the
44 intervening twelve years between their formulation and the convention, that produced the
45 1857 rules. Therefore, before looking at the evolutionary antecedents of the 1857 rules, it
46 is necessary to detail the evolution of the rules of baseball between 1845 and 1857.

47 One of the defining characteristics of the American family of baseball games is
48 that these games, in their premodern form, were unregulated and their rules were “simple,
49 unwritten, and based on local customs and traditions...”⁴ The Knickerbocker rule set of
50 1845 did not change this. While it was a step forward towards the creation of the modern
51 game of baseball, defined by “formal, standardized, and written [rules]” that were

52 “rationally and pragmatically worked out and legitimated by organizational means,”⁵ the
53 Knickerbocker rules were provisional and malleable.⁶ The 1845 rule set was as flexible
54 and adaptable as any other premodern baseball rule set⁷ and were not adopted or accepted,
55 in the mid to late 1840s, as the organizing principles of American baseball, even in the
56 greater New York area.

57 While the 1845 rule set moved baseball closer to its modern form, the rules of the
58 game were still evolving and this is illustrated by changes that the Knickerbockers,
59 themselves, made to the rules governing their version of the game. At a meeting of the
60 club, held on April 1, 1848, the 1845 rules were changed. A new rule was adopted
61 whereby “the player running to the first base was out, if the ball was held by an adversary
62 on that base before the runner reached it. The previous rule applied to all the bases.”⁸
63 When the *By-laws and Rules of the Knickerbocker Base Ball Club* was published that
64 year, in what is the earliest known printing of the Knickerbocker rules, it omitted a
65 significant portion of the original rule 15, “deleting the phrase 'it being understood,
66 however, that in no instance is a ball to be thrown at [the base runner].’”⁹ While this may
67 be a printing error or an editing decision to remove something that was commonly
68 understood, the 1845 rule set, as published in 1848, had been changed. The club, itself,
69 had changed the force rule and the published rule set left it open as to whether or not
70 plugging was allowed. Also, historian David Block has implied that there may have been
71 further changes to the rule set in 1848, feeling “that a new rule appeared in the 1848 list
72 that a runner cannot score a run on a force out for the third out.”¹⁰ These changes are
73 evidence that the 1845 Knickerbocker rule set was evolving and, like other versions of
74 American baseball, it was adaptable.

75 While it is unknown what drove this early evolution of the 1845 rule set, later
76 changes appear to have been influenced by outside forces, as other New York-area
77 baseball clubs began to formalize and standardize their versions of American baseball.
78 This outside influence upon the Knickerbocker rule set would, throughout the 1850s,
79 drive the evolution of the game towards the creation of what would become known as the
80 New York game of baseball. Between 1852 and 1856, at least six different constitutions,
81 by-laws or rule sets governing the playing of baseball were published in New York¹¹,
82 creating a period of “apparent flux and chaos over specific playing rules...”¹² Importantly,
83 “there were considerable variations from the Knickerbocker rules,” specifically with
84 regards to how many players made up a side and the conditions for victory, and “the
85 Knickerbockers themselves, to accommodate the different clubs they played, had to
86 deviate from their own rules...”¹³ If, as Harold Seymour, has written, “The
87 Knickerbockers blazed a path others were to follow”¹⁴ and that “Their form of
88 organization was adopted by other clubs, and their playing rules became generally
89 accepted...[and] aped...”¹⁵, there was still enough ambiguity in the 1845 rule set that
90 baseball variants arose even within “the New York game.” In the 1850s, these variations
91 helped drive the evolution of the game and set the stage for the 1857 convention.

92 In 1854, in response to this babel of clubs and rule variations, three New York
93 clubs – the Knickerbockers, Gothams, and Eagles – developed a unified rule set that
94 would govern games played by all three clubs. Interestingly, this unification was not
95 brought about by the leadership of the Knickerbocker Club but, rather, by an inquiry of
96 the Eagle Club, who had published their own rule set in 1852, heavily based upon the
97 revised Knickerbocker rules, and sought clarification about playing baseball under those

98 rules.¹⁶ While the unified rule set of 1854 was based upon the revised Knickerbocker rules
99 and the 1852 Eagle rule set, there were some changes. Specifically, the unified rules
100 formalized the distance between home plate and the pitcher, codified the physical
101 dimensions of a baseball, and made refinements to the force and tag rules, stating that a
102 defensive player must have the ball “fairly in hand” for an out to be recorded and “if the
103 ball drops it is not a hand out.”¹⁷

104 The 1854 unified rule set hardly represents a radical step forward in the
105 development of baseball, even though the *New York Daily Times* saw it as evidence that
106 the game had become “thoroughly systematized...”¹⁸ It is, however, evidence, again, of a
107 slow and subtle evolution of the rules of the game, as baseball took another step towards
108 its modern form. The most significant aspect of the unified rule set is the fact that it
109 involved more than one team. For the first time in baseball history, more than one club
110 had officially agreed upon the rules of the game and on what constituted “baseball.” Not
111 only had the game evolved but the structure of the sport itself was developing a more
112 modern form.

113 The unified rule set, along with a diagram noting the layout of the field, was
114 published in various newspapers in 1855¹⁹ and Melvin Adelman has noted that this was in
115 “response to the increasing number of baseball clubs in the metropolitan [New York]
116 area...”²⁰ This availability of public information about the game and how it was played
117 was another step towards the modernization of baseball and likely had an impact on the
118 growing popularity of the game and the increase in the number of clubs and players in the
119 New York area. As the game became more popular there was an increased demand for

120 information about how the game was to be played and a “rapid increase in the number of
121 clubs and contests created the need to clarify and codify the various rules of the game. At
122 the end of the 1855 season the *Herald* reported that a preliminary meeting was held as the
123 first step toward creating a central governing body for baseball...”²¹ With the rules of
124 baseball evolving and the sport moving towards a more modern form, the game
125 experienced a tremendous growth in popularity that furthered its evolution and
126 modernization.

127 The “preliminary meeting” that Adelman mentioned was also noted in the *New*
128 *York Daily Tribune*, which wrote that a “Convention of representatives from a number of
129 Base-Ball Clubs met at 'The Gotham' public house in the Bowery...There are fourteen or
130 fifteen of those organizations in New York and Brooklyn, beside three in Jersey City and
131 four in Newark; of which eight were represented on Friday evening by committees and
132 several others by letters. T.C. Van Cott of 'The Gotham' presided, and Mr. Cornell of the
133 Baltic Club was Secretary. The object of the Convention is to make arrangements for a
134 banquet and ball, and to establish general rules for the various Clubs. Without taking
135 definite action on these matters the Convention adjourned..., to give opportunity for a
136 more general representation of the various clubs.”²² The clubs represented at the 1855
137 meeting were the “Gotham, Baltic, Empire, Eckford, Harmony of New York, the Atlantic,
138 of Brooklyn and the Senior of Newark.”²³ While this meeting did not come to much, as far
139 as the establishment of general rules was concerned, it is significant in what it says about
140 the evolutionary state of baseball in mid-1850s New York.

141 A decade after the establishment of the Knickerbocker rule set and a year prior to
142 the convention that would adopt the 1857 rules, baseball had progressed beyond a simple
143 pastime and was moving quickly towards becoming a modern sport. The rules, while in
144 flux, had evolved to the point where several clubs could agree upon a single rule set, as is
145 evidenced by the 1854 unified rules. That rule set, with the evolved Knickerbocker rules
146 at their heart, appears to have been commonly accepted and used by many New York-
147 area baseball clubs in the mid 1850s, besides the Knickerbockers, Gothams and Eagles.²⁴
148 The increase in the number of clubs saw an increase in competition, as the number of
149 inter-club matches increased throughout the decade. The amount of information about the
150 game and the happenings of various clubs was also on the increase, with various clubs
151 publishing their by-laws and constitutions and the local sporting press beginning to pay
152 attention to the game. We also begin to see the beginnings of the establishment of a
153 formal organization or governing body for the game. The unified rules were a significant
154 first step in this direction and the 1855 meeting shows that there was demand for more.
155 Baseball, by the time of the 1857 convention, was showing all of the signs of a modern
156 sport and the adoption of the 1857 rules would be another important step in that direction.

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

163 the New York area, some “declined to comply with some of the playing rules” as set
164 down in the 1854 unified rule set.²⁵

165 On the brink of the 1857 convention, there were a lot of people with a lot ideas
166 about what constituted a baseball game. The Knickerbockers wrote down their ideas in
167 1845. They modified them in 1848. They joined with the Gothams and Eagles in 1854 to
168 refine their definition of the game. Other clubs, throughout the 1850s, published booklets
169 laying out their vision of the game. The evolutionary process that lead to the 1857 rules
170 was heavily influenced by the Knickerbockers but, by 1856, there were new clubs and
171 new players with ideas, both new and old, about what baseball was supposed to be and
172 while there was a great deal of agreement on what constituted a baseball game, as
173 evidenced by the popularity of the 1854 unified rules, there was much that was in need of
174 refinement and clarification. While the game was moving towards its modern state, it had
175 not reached it by 1856 and its probably a mistake to speak of a monolithic “New York
176 game” prior to the 1857 convention.

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

184 was absent from the 1855 meeting was the Knickerbockers and its entirely possible that
185 their lack of interest in reforming the rules of the game lead to its failure.

186 However, after the 1856 season, whatever objections the Knickerbockers had to
187 the idea of a convention evaporated. “It will be seen, by reference to our advertising
188 columns, that a Convention of all the Base Ball Clubs of New York, Brooklyn, and the
189 'vicinage,' will be shortly held in the city. The time, January 22d...The Knickerbocker
190 Club will take the lead in this affair, which we deem to be highly necessary, as the rules
191 and laws for the more perfect conducting of this truly American game are not well
192 understood by the public at large...”²⁶ It has been often stated, both in the contemporary
193 press, as seen above, and by baseball historians, that the Knickerbocker Club took the
194 lead in calling for the 1857 convention but there are other sources that claims “the
195 Empire baseball club asked the Knickerbockers to convene the meeting, while Porters
196 later gave credit to the four old-line clubs as a whole for initiating the meeting, an
197 indication the Knickerbockers' influence upon baseball, even at this early stage in its
198 history, was on the wane.”²⁷

199 With both the Gotham and Empire clubs involved in the 1855 meeting, there is
200 probably a great deal of truth to the idea that they played a role in influencing the
201 Knickerbockers change of heart in 1856 and that for political reasons the Knickerbockers
202 were allowed to be the first to publicly call for a baseball convention. But regardless of
203 how it came about, the “first movement towards calling a Convention of Base Ball
204 Players was made at a meeting of the Knickerbocker Club, held at Smith's, 462 Broome
205 Street, New York, December 6th, 1856, on which Dr. Adams, the President of the club,

206 called the attention of the members to the importance of calling a Convention of Base
207 Ball Players, for the Purpose of revising the existing code of rules of the game, and also
208 with a view of organizing a National Association of Base Ball Players.”²⁸

209 The 1857 Convention of Base Ball Players met for the first time on January 22 at
210 Smith's Hotel, the headquarters of the Knickerbocker Club, with the following clubs
211 represented: Knickerbocker, Gotham, Eagle, Empire, Putnam, Baltic, Excelsior, Atlantic,
212 Harmony, Harlem, Eckford, Bedford, Narrau, and Continental. The clubs elected Daniel
213 Adams of the Knickerbockers as president of the convention and then appointed a rules
214 committee, made up of one member of each represented club. The members of this
215 “Committee to Draft a Code of Laws on the Game of Base Ball, to be Submitted to the
216 Convention” were “Messrs. L.F. Wadsworth, W.H. Van Cott, W.W. Armfield, Thos.
217 Leavy, Thos. F. Jackson, Dr. Chas. W. Cooper, P.R. Chadwick, T. Tassie, F.D. Carr, E.H.
218 Brown, Francis Pidgeon, John Constant, Wm. P. Howell and Nathaniel B. Law. This
219 committee will meet next Wednesday.”²⁹

220 The rules committee met several times and by the end of February, they had
221 submitted a “report...with new rules and regulations for the government of the game...”³⁰

222 The new rules were adopted at the final meeting of the convention on February 25, 1857:

223

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

225

226 Section 1.

227 The ball must weigh not less than 6 nor more than 6 1/4 ounces avoirdupois; it
228 must measure not less than 10, nor more than 10 1/4 inches in circumference;; it

229 must be composed of india-rubber and yarn, and covered with leather. It shall be
230 furnished by the challenging Club, and become the property of the winning Club,
231 as a trophy of victory.
232

233 Section 2.

234 The bat must be round, and must not exceed 2 1/2 inches in diameter in the
235 thickest part; it must be made of wood, and may be of any length, to suit the
236 striker.
237

238 Section 3.

239 The bases must be four in number, placed at equal distances from each other, and
240 securely fastened upon the four corners of a square whose sides are respectively
241 thirty yards. They must be so constructed as to be distinctly seen by the umpires
242 and referee, and must cover a space equal to one square foot of surface; the first,
243 second and third bases shall be canvas bags, painted white, and filled with sand or
244 saw-dust; the home base and pitcher's point to be each marked by a flat circular
245 iron plate, painted or enamelled white.
246

247 Section 4.

248 The base from which the ball is struck shall be designated the home base, and
249 must be directly opposite to the second base; the first base must always be that
250 upon the right hand, and the third base that upon the left hand side of the striker,
251 when occupying his position at the home base.
252

253 Section 5.

254 The pitcher's position shall be designated by a line four yards in length, drawn at
255 right angles to a line from home to the second base, having its centre upon that
256 line, at a fixed iron plate placed at a point fifteen yards distant from the home base.
257

258 Section 6.

259 The ball must be pitched, not jerked or thrown to the bat, and whenever the
260 pitcher draws back his hand, with the apparent purpose or pretension to deliver
261 the ball, he shall so deliver it. The pitcher must deliver the ball as near as possible,
262 over the centre of the home base, and must have neither foot in advance of the
263 line at the time of delivering the ball, and if he fails in either of these particulars,
264 then it shall be declared a baulk.
265

266 Section 7.

267 When a baulk is made by the pitcher, every player running the bases is entitled to
268 one base without being put out.
269

270 Section 8.

271 If the ball from a stroke of the bat is caught behind the range of home and the first
272 base, or home and the third base, without having touched the ground, or first
273 touches the ground behind those bases, it shall be termed foul, and must be so
274 declared by the umpires, unasked. If the ball first touches the ground, or is caught

275 without having touched the ground, either upon or in front of the range of those
276 bases, it shall be considered fair.

277

278 Section 9.

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

280

281 Section 10.

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

285

286 Section 11.

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

289

290 Section 12.

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

293

294 Section 13.

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

297

298 Section 14.

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

301

302 Section 15.

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

305

306 Section 16.

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

312

313 Section 17.

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

319

320 Section 18.

321 Players must make their bases in the order of striking; and when a fair ball is
322 struck, and not caught flying, nor on the first bound, the first base must be vacated,
323 as also the second and third bases, if they are occupied at the same time. Players
324 may be put out upon any base, under these circumstances, in the same manner as
325 the striker when running to the first base.
326

327 Section 19.

328 Players running the bases must, so far as possible, keep upon the direct line
329 between the bases; and, should any player run three feet out of this line, for the
330 purpose of avoiding the ball in the hands of an adversary, he shall be declared out.
331

332 Section 20.

333 Any player, who shall, intentionally, prevent an adversary from catching or
334 fielding the ball, shall be declared out.
335

336 Section 21.

337 If a player is prevented from making a base, by the intentional obstruction of an
338 adversary, he shall be entitled to that base, and not be put out.
339

340 Section 22.

341 If any adversary stops the ball with his hat or cap, or takes it from the hands of a
342 party not engaged in the game, no player can be put out, unless the ball shall first
343 have been settled in the hands of the pitcher.
344

345 Section 23.

346 If a ball, from the stroke of the bat, is held under any other circumstances than as
347 enumerated in section 22, and without having touched the ground more than once,
348 the striker is out.
349

350 Section 24.

351 If two hands are already out, no player, running home at the time a ball is struck,
352 can make an ace, if the striker is put out.
353

354 Section 25.

355 An innings must be concluded at the time the third hand is put out.
356

357 Section 26.

358 The game shall consist of nine innings to each side, when, should the number of
359 runs be equal, the innings shall be continued until a majority of runs, upon an
360 equal number of innings, shall be declared, which shall conclude the game.
361

362 Section 27.

363 In playing all matches, nine players from each club shall constitute a full field,
364 and they must have been regular members of the club which they represent, for
365 thirty days prior to the match. No change or substitution shall be made after the
366 game has been commenced, unless for reason of illness or injury. Positions of

367 players shall be determined by captains, previously appointed for that purpose by
368 the respective clubs.

369

370 Section 28.

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

373

374 Section 29.

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

381

382 Section 30.

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

388

389 Section 31.

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

394

395 Section 32.

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

401

402 Section 33.

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

406

407 Section 34.

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

410

411 Section 35.

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

415
416
417

418 While the adoption of the 1857 rules is rightly seen as a pivotal moment in
419 the history of baseball, the contemporary press was not that impressed. The *New*
420 *York Herald* stated that the new rules did not differ “very materially from the old
421 rules,” that they did not come “up to the expectation of many old players, who
422 had given their valuable advice...,” and described the changes as “meagre,”
423 although they allowed that they were “at least a step in advance.”²¹ Another group
424 who must have been disappointed with the new rules were the Knickerbockers.
425 The club's representatives to the convention had pushed for several changes, such
426 as seven inning games, seven players per side, flat bats and the fly game, that
427 were all rejected. While the rule set that the club created in 1845 and helped
428 evolve over the course of more than a decade was at the heart of the 1857 rules
429 and the fly game would, of course, be adopted after a multi-year debate, the
430 influence of the Knickerbockers on the evolution of the rules of baseball came to
431 an end at the 1857 convention.

432

433 Regardless of the fact that the new rules may not have lived up to the expectations
434 of all parties, they were an extraordinary, historic achievement and, with the
435 creation of the National Association the following year, helped usher baseball into
436 the modern era. With the 1857 rules, baseball left behind its premodern,
437 unregulated past and became, for the first time, a truly modern sport. Steve

438 Gietschier wrote, rightly, that “Although the rules have been modified many times
439 since, these 1857 rules remain the basis for the modern game of baseball.”³² The
440 evolution of the rules continued and continue to this day but the 1857 rules
441 created baseball as we know it.

442

443 **Review of the 1857 Rules**

444 Note: The following rule sets will be referenced in this analysis of the antecedents
445 of the 1857 rules by the notation in parentheses³³:

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

451

452 **Section 1.**

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

457

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

462

463 As the ball is at the center of a baseball game and the size, weight and
464 make-up of the ball effects so many aspects of how a game is played, it seems self-

465 evident that a baseball rule set would seek to define what a baseball is. However,
466 it does not appear that this took place until 1854 and the reason for this was that
467 early baseballs were all “hand made by players and local merchants” with “no
468 standard size or weight.”³⁴ It would be difficult to enforce standardization when
469 all of the balls were homemade, although general guidelines were put in place in
470 the second half of the 1850s.

471

472 **Section 2.**

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

475

476

477

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

481

482 As with rules regulating baseball size, it would seem self-evident at first
483 glance that there would be a rule governing the size of bats, one of the more
484 important pieces of baseball equipment. However, no such rule was seen prior to
485 the 1856 Putnam Club rule set. While Peter Morris, in *Game of Inches*, has noted
486 that there was great variety in the type of wood used to make bats during the early
487 years of the game, as well as their length, weight and dimension, any rule
488 regulating bats was always a matter of physical practicality as much as a
489 restriction upon the batter.³⁵

490

491 The most interesting thing about 1857 section 2 is that it confirmed that
492 baseball was to be a game played with a round bat. In this it agreed with the 1856

492 Putnam rule set and resisted efforts, most notably those of the Knickerbocker club,
493 to have the game played with a flat bat.

494

495 **Section 3.**

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

502

503

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

510

511 No prior rule set specifically mentioned the distance between bases and,
512 certainly, none went into so much detail about the physical makeup of the base.
513 However almost all other rule sets did state that the distance between home plate
514 and second base, as well as between first and third, was to be 42 paces. A baseball
515 field laid out to those dimensions would produce base paths of approximately 30
516 paces. Given the ambiguity surrounding the definition of a pace, it is difficult to
517 determine exactly how significant a change 1857 section 3 truly is.

518

519 Eric Miklich summarized the problem succinctly when he wrote “Only if we
520 knew how clubs actually defined a pace, would we know whether the 1857 rule
521 was a significant change. A three-foot pace would have dictated a baseline of
522 nearly modern length. However, a pace was formally defined as 30 inches in
523 those days, not 36 inches, and if that pace was used, the distance between bases
524 was about 75 feet, and the 1857 rule would extend the distance by 20 percent, and
525 affect rates of scoring.”³⁶ Miklich is absolutely correct in his assessment that the
526 19th century pace was defined at 2 ½ feet and there is substantial literature from
527 the period to support this.³⁷ Given this supporting evidence, it appears that 1857
528 section 3 a unique and innovative change to the generally accepted rules of
529 baseball and is significant as the baseball poets like to tell us.

530

531 While general interest in this rule centers around 90 feet between bases,
532 1857 section 3 may have been the first time that a rule set specified a standard
533 playing field. While the 19th century pace, as far as weights and measures were
534 concerned, was 2 ½ feet, there was also another common definition of a pace as a
535 simple human step, a definition that is still in use today. The measurement of the
536 pace by a human step would have resulted in varying distances between bases,
537 given differences in height and gait of persons walking off the paces. Daniel
538 Adams appears to have admitted this when he declared that, prior to the 1857 rule
539 set, the set distance between bases “was rather vague.”³⁸ This vagueness may have
540 been a feature of the rule as it would have produced what Fred Ivor-Campbell has
541 referred to as scalable dimensions, where adult players would produce a field with

542 75 foot base-paths and younger players would produce small infields.³⁹ A
543 vagueness in the rules that produced different forms of the game would have been
544 keeping in the tradition of pre-modern, unregulated baseball and its elimination
545 from the game would have been a step towards producing its modern version.

546

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

550

551 **Section 4.**

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

555

556

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

562

563 **Section 5.**

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

567

568

569 This rule is not in 1845, 1848 or 1852. 1854 has rule 1 which states that
570 “The bases shall be from 'Home' to second base 42 paces; and from first to third

571 base 42 paces, equi-distant; and from 'Home' to pitcher not less that [sic] 15 paces;
572 i.e. 21 paces from the centre of the field to each base.” 1856 has rule 4 which
573 states “home to pitcher not less than 15 paces...” However, the pitcher being in the
574 center of the infield certainly predates the 1845 Knickerbocker rule set.

575

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

584

585 Peter Morris raises an interesting point in *Game of Inches* about the
586 evolution of swift-pitching and the role of the pitcher in putting batters out. He
587 has written that this evolution “occurred no later than the first great spurt of
588 competitive play between 1855 and 1857” and gives sources illustrating that it
589 was taking place in 1856.⁴⁰ If 1857 section 5 moved the pitcher's position back by
590 seven or eight feet, it may have been a reaction to this evolution of swift-pitching
591 and an attempt to reduce the ability of pitchers to dampen the run-scoring ability
592 of an offense.

593

594 **Section 6.**

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

600
601

602 All previous rule sets stated that the ball was to be pitched, not thrown,
603 and all included a balk rule, which originated with the 1845 rule set. Certainly,
604 1857 section 6 is an attempt to further define what a balk was and to clarify
605 previous rule sets. However, as with the modern balk rule, there was still a great
606 deal left open to interpretation and the *New York Herald* wrote that the rule “is
607 rather indefinable in endeavoring to define a baulk, in saying that whenever the
608 hand is drawn back with the apparent purpose of delivering a ball, it shall be
609 declared a baulk; if he should do so for the purpose of throwing to a base it would
610 be deemed a baulk. This is conflicting.”⁴ So, while 1857 section 6 was an attempt
611 at specificity that was lacking in previous rule sets, it may not have been
612 successful in properly defining the balk rule.

613

614 **Section 7.**

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

617
618

619 This rule appears in all previous rule sets.

620

621

622

623 **Section 8.**

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

629

630

631

632 The idea of foul territory appears in various forms in all previous rule sets,
633 although this rule is more detailed than previous ones. The fact that foul balls
634 were to be “declared by the umpire, unasked” implies that this was a non-appeal
635 play and is the first of its kind to appear in any baseball rule set.

636

637 **Section 9.**

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

639

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

643

644 One thing to note about this rule is the change in terminology from “ace”
645 to “run.” A search of the etymological origins of the word shows that its usage in
646 baseball dates from 1856, although this is far from conclusive.⁴²

647

648 **Section 10.**

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

651

652

653 This rule appears in all previous rule sets.

654

655

656 **Section 11.**

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

658

659

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

668
669 Also of interest is the change in terminology from “hands lost” or “hands
670 out” to “outs.” While it is difficult to trace this use of the word “out” in baseball
671 prior to this, it was used in cricket as early as 1746.⁴³

672

673

674 **Section 12.**

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

677

678 This rule appears in all previous rule sets.

679

680 **Section 13.**

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

683

684 This rule appears in all previous rule sets.

685

686

687 **Section 14.**

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

690

691

692 The force out at first base is specifically mentioned in 1848, 1852, 1854
693 and 1856, while the general force out is mentioned in 1845. This rule refines the
694 language somewhat to specify that the ball must be “held” for the force out to be
695 completed.

696

697

698 **Section 15.**

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

701

702

703 Tag outs are in all previous rule sets.

704

705

706

707

Section 16.

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

713

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723

724

 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...”⁴⁴

725 The *New York Herald* noted that 1857 section 16 “is a great improvement
726 upon the old rule by rewarding good fielding, it compels all who are running from
727 making an ace or base if the ball is caught before it touches the ground and
728 compels every player to return to the place of starting; yet the reward of the
729 fielder for superior play is partially nullified by protecting the runners from being
730 put out whilst returning to their bases, instead of allowing the ball to be
731 immediately in play on being returned to the hands of the pitcher.”⁴⁵

732

733

734

Section 17.

735

736

737

738

739

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.

740

741

742

743

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 1845.⁴⁶ 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.

744

745

746

Section 18.

747

748

749

750

751

752

753

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.

754

755

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.

756

757

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

762
763
764 The three foot base-path is unique to 1857 and likely was designed to
765 close a base running loophole in previous rule sets.

766
767
768 **Section 20.**
769 Any player, who shall, intentionally, prevent an adversary from catching or fielding the ball, shall
770 be declared out.

771
772
773 The interference rule was in all previous rule sets.

774
775
776 **Section 21.**
777 If a player is prevented from making a base, by the intentional obstruction of an adversary, he
778 shall be entitled to that base, and not be put out.

779
780
781 A rule against defensive interference appears in 1856.

782
783
784 **Section 22.**
785 If any adversary stops the ball with his hat or cap, or takes it from the hands of a party not engaged
786 in the game, no player can be put out, unless the ball shall first have been settled in the hands of
787 the pitcher.

788
789
790 This rule is unique to 1857 and appears to have been designed to close a
791 loophole in previous rule sets.

792
793
794 **Section 23.**
795 If a ball, from the stroke of the bat, is held under any other circumstances than as enumerated in
796 section 22, and without having touched the ground more than once, the striker is out.

797
798
799 This rule appears in all previous rule sets.

800
801
802 **Section 24.**

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

805
806
807 As stated previously, this rule was added by the Knickerbockers in 1848
808 and it appears in all rule sets after that. It is a clarification upon what defined a run
809 scored, necessitated by the vagueness of the 1845 rule set.

810

811

812 **Section 25.**

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

814

815

816 The three out inning appears in all previous rule sets.

817

818

819

820 **Section 26.**

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

824

825

826 The nine inning game is one of the significant contributions of the 1857

827 rule set to the game of baseball and gave the game one of its defining

828 characteristics. It was, as the *New York Herald* noted, “certainly a great reform.”⁴²

829

830 However, there does appear to be precedent for a baseball game to be

831 played to a set number of innings rather than to a set number of runs scored. As an

832 example of this, there was a 1855 match between the “Pioneer and Excelsior Base

833 Ball Clubs, of Jersey City...Eleven innings were played...eleven members of each

834 club playing...”⁴³ The Excelsiors won what appears to have been an eleven

835 man/eleven inning game by a score of 49-25. Interestingly, the Pioneer Club did

836 play matches under the rules of the nascent New York game that season and,

837 therefore, were aware of the rules stipulating that a game should be played to 21
838 runs. The implication is that there were obviously other baseball traditions,
839 besides the evolving Knickerbocker/unified style, being played in the New York
840 area and, more importantly, that some of these traditions had the game played to a
841 set number of innings rather than a set number of runs scored.

842

843 Why specifically the 1857 convention decided to change to a nine inning
844 game is not known but the *Herald* suggested that the rule was adopted “to prevent
845 a game from being played out in one or two hours...as was too frequently the case
846 in making twenty-one runs.”⁴⁹ If one looks through the Game Tabulation for
847 greater New York City at Protoball, one begins to see, beginning in 1856,
848 numerous games that ended in two or three innings.⁵⁰ This certainly lends
849 evidence to the *Herald's* suggestion that the nine inning game was adopted in
850 order to create a game that lasted longer and, as Eric Miklich has noted, the
851 average game in 1856 “lasted only about 6 innings, and thus the 1857 convention
852 was defining a game that was to be 50 percent longer.”⁵¹

853

854 Interestingly, as some were advocating for a longer-lasting game, there
855 had been an increase, in 1856, in the number of games that ended in a draw, many
856 as a result of suspended play due to darkness. Why would the clubs have been
857 advocating for a longer-lasting game if the odds of completing a game under the
858 21 run rule were decreasing? If they could not get the games in as it was, why
859 push for longer games? If we believe that the draws due to darkness were a

860 natural phenomenon than the introduction of the nine inning game does not make
861 much sense. However, it is possible that the increase in the number of suspended
862 games was not entirely natural and there may have been some skullduggery going
863 on, as teams may have been playing a waiting game, hoping for darkness to earn
864 them a draw or save them from a loss. The *Herald* implies this when it wrote that
865 the new nine inning “rule will prevent...playing against time and making a drawn
866 game...”²²

867

868 There are other possible reasons why the nine inning rule was adopted.
869 There is an idea that there was a baseball tradition whereby if a game was played
870 to a set number of innings then the number of players per side should correspond
871 with the number of innings. “Thus the adoption of the nine-player game meant
872 that nine would also become the number of innings.”²³ However, this doesn't really
873 tell us why the decision was made to change from a 21 run game to a game
874 decided in a set number of innings but only, rather, why nine innings, specifically,
875 was chosen. We do know that the rules committee originally had decided to have
876 the game decided in seven innings but this “was changed by the convention, on
877 the motion of Mr. Wadsworth, to nine innings...”²⁴ Therefore, the idea of having
878 the game decided by a set number of innings appears to have been made
879 independently of any decisions regarding the number of players per side.

880

881 There has also been an argument put forward that a game decided on the
882 number of innings played was more fun than a game played to 21 runs. The nine

883 inning rule “made it possible for clubs of differing talent levels to mutually enjoy
884 playing each other. Mismatched teams were guaranteed at least nine innings of
885 continuous participation, a marked improvement over the old Knickerbocker 21-
886 run rule, where a game could be over in as little as two or three innings...[and]
887 evenly matched teams were guaranteed a result in no more than nine innings,
888 another improvement over Knickerbocker rules, in which some games had to be
889 extended to as many as sixteen innings to reach the requisite 21 runs.”⁸⁵ 1857
890 section 26 guaranteed a club nine innings of baseball regardless of how easy or
891 difficult they were to score against or how easy or difficult it was for them to
892 score.

893

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

901

902

903 **Section 27.**

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

909

910

911 The codification of nine players per side is, like 1857 section 26, one of
912 the significant and lasting contributions of the 1857 convention to the game of
913 baseball and is unique to the 1857 rule set. The regulation of players in 1857
914 section 27 is also unique, as all previous rule sets mentioned that non-members
915 could be used to fill out a side. The substitution rule is implied in 1845, 1848 and
916 1852 while the positioning of players by captains is mentioned in 1848, 1852 and
917 1856.

918

919 While all of the rules governing the regulation and management of players
920 in 1857 section 27 are important, it is obviously the codification of nine players
921 per side that makes this rule historically memorable. However, the 1857
922 convention did not invent the idea of using nine men per side. There is evidence
923 of games played as early as 1845, under the Knickerbocker rules, with nine men
924 per side⁵⁶ and Eric Miklich has written that “it is generally believed that a custom
925 had already evolved that match games required nine-player teams. If so, this new
926 rule was simply conforming to de facto standards.”⁵⁷ The *New York Clipper*,
927 supporting this idea of a de facto standard of nine men per side, noted that “Base
928 Ball can be played by any number from five upwards: nine, however, being the
929 usual number on each side.”⁵⁸

930

931 The Knickerbockers, even though they occasionally used nine men per
932 side, did not specify, in the 1845 rules, the number of players per side and no
933 other rule set, until 1857, mentioned the number of players needed to play a

934 baseball game. This was likely because, in early American baseball, the number
935 of players per side was not central to how the game was played. The game was
936 malleable to the point where a game could be played with as few as three people
937 or as many as you could fit in the field. The number of players per side was
938 simply not an important factor in putting together a baseball game and if you look
939 at the earliest games in Protoball's Game Tabulation, you find that the
940 Knickerbockers, between 1845 and 1853, used anywhere between six and thirteen
941 men per side. In forty-three matches recorded in the Game Tabulation, they used
942 six men three times, seven men eight times, eight men eleven times (all before
943 1849), nine men five times, ten men eight times, eleven men four times and
944 thirteen men once, with several entries not specifying the number of players
945 used.⁵⁹ While baseball was flexible enough that it could be played with almost any
946 number of players per side, it appears that the Knickerbockers settled on
947 somewhere between seven and ten men per side to be optimal, with an eight man
948 side used most often.

949
950 But, if almost any number of players could be used per side and the
951 Knickerbockers had settled on seven to ten per side, how did nine become the
952 standard by 1856, especially if eight per side appears to have been the standard
953 prior to 1849? While there is no conclusive answer to this, John Thorn has
954 suggested that it has something to do with how players were positioned in the
955 field. "Play was conducted," he wrote, "in accord with Cartwright's model of only
956 three basemen, and on occasions when nine or more fielding positions were

957 created by a surfeit of players, the 'extras' were put into the outfield or held in
958 reserve.”⁶⁰ With eight men per side, there would be a pitcher, catcher, three
959 infielders and three outfielders. If there were more than eight, the extra player or
960 players would be positioned in the outfield and an extra outfielder was rather
961 useful during an era with a relatively light ball, as he could help relay the ball
962 back to the infield after long hits. Thorn implies that the shortstop position
963 evolved, around 1849, out of this surfeit of outfielders and an eight man game
964 became a nine man game with the acceptance of the short fielder.

965

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

972

973

974

Section 28.

975

976

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.

977

978

979

980

981

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.

982

983

Section 29.

984 The umpires in all matches shall take care that the regulations respecting the ball, bats, bases, and
985 the pitcher's position, are strictly observed; they shall be the judges of fair and unfair play, and
986 shall determine all differences which may occur during the game; they shall take especial care to
987 declare all foul balls and baulks immediately on their occurrence. They shall together select a
988 referee, from whose decision-in case of a disagreement between them-there shall be no appeal.
989
990

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

995

996

997 **Section 30.**

998 No person engaged in a match, either as umpire, referee, or player, shall be either directly or
999 indirectly interested in any bet upon the game. Neither umpire, referee nor player shall be changed
1000 during a match, unless with the consent of both parties, except for a violation of this law, and
1001 except as provided in section 27, and then the referee may dismiss any transgressor.

1002

1003

1004 This rule is unique to the 1857 rule set and must be a reaction to
1005 conditions within the baseball world in the late 1850s.

1006

1007

1008 **Section 31.**

1009 The umpires and referee in any match, shall determine when play shall be suspended; and if the
1010 game cannot be concluded, it shall be decided by the last even innings, provided five innings have
1011 been played; and the party having the greatest number of runs shall be declared the winner.

1012

1013

1014 This rule is unique to the 1857 rule set. The five inning rule is still in
1015 effect today.

1016

1017

1018 **Section 32.**

1019 Clubs may adopt, such rules respecting balls knocked beyond or outside of the bounds of the field,
1020 as the circumstances of the ground may demand, and these rules shall govern all matches played
1021 upon the ground, provided that they are distinctly made known to every player and umpire, and
1022 the referee, previous to the commencement of the game.

1023
1024

1025 This rule is unique to the 1857 rule set. However, 1845 rule 20 can be seen
1026 as a precedent to the establishment of ground rules.

1027
1028

1029 **Section 33.**
1030 No person shall be permitted to approach or to speak with the referee, umpires, or players, or in
1031 any manner to interrupt or interfere during the progress of the game, unless by the special request
1032 of the umpires or referee.

1033
1034

1035 This rule is unique to the 1857 rule set.

1036
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1038 **Section 34.**
1039 No person shall be permitted to act as umpire or referee in a match, unless he shall be a member of
1040 a Base Ball Club, governed by these rules.

1041
1042

1043 This rule is unique to the 1857 rule set but there are precedents about the
1044 selection of umpires/referees in 1845, 1848 and 1852.

1045
1046

1047 **Section 35.**
1048 Whenever a match shall have been determined upon between two clubs, play shall be called at the
1049 exact hour appointed; and should either party fail to produce their players within fifteen minutes
1050 thereafter, the party so failing shall admit a defeat.

1051
1052

1053 This rule is unique to the 1857 rule set and was most likely an attempt to
1054 close a loophole in previous rule sets.

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1058

1059 While the 1857 rule set is rightly seen as an important step in baseball's
1060 evolution, there is really very little in it that is significantly unique. Most of the
1061 new rule changes are a refinement or clarification of previous rule sets. Even the
1062 introduction of nine inning games and sides of nine players, which are seen as
1063 major, historically-important rule changes, are codifications of previous traditions.

1064

1065 Probably the most unique rule change introduced by the convention was
1066 section 3, which stipulated ninety feet between bases. The really was no precedent
1067 for a baseball infield that large and it had a significant impact on how the game
1068 was played. Section 8, which stated that umpires were to call foul balls unasked,
1069 created the first of many non-appeal plays and, therefore, is significantly unique.
1070 Also, section 16, which stated that runners must return to their base after a ball
1071 was caught on the fly, appears to have been without precedent. While there are
1072 other rules in the 1857 rule set, such as the creation of a three foot base path,
1073 which had not appeared in previous rule sets, the three rules mentioned above are
1074 the ones that are both unprecedented and have had a major, lasting impact on how
1075 the game was played.

1076

1077 Regardless of their lack of striking originality, the 1857 rule set captured
1078 and codified the baseball traditions of the mid 1850s, as they had evolved in the
1079 previous decade since the creation of the 1845 Knickerbocker rules. The delegates
1080 at the 1857 convention, representing the baseball clubs of the New York area,
1081 took an opportunity to refine the game they loved, to clarify some of the rules of

1082 that game and to close off loopholes that were found in previous rule sets. In
1083 doing so, they helped to create a modern sport.

1084

1085

1086 **Appendix**

1087 **The 1852 By-laws and Rules of the Eagle Club**

1088 [based on notes supplied by Richard Hershberger]

1089

1090 First.- Members must strictly observe the time agreed upon for exercise and be punctual
1091 in their attendance.

1092 Second.-When assembled for exercise, the President, and in his absence the presiding
1093 officer, shall designate two members as Captains, who shall retire and make the match to
1094 be played, observing at the same time, that the players put opposite to each other should
1095 be as nearly equal as possible; the choice of sides to be then tossed for, and the *first in*
1096 *hand* to be decided in like manner.

1097 Third.- The Captains shall have absolute direction of the game, and shall designate the
1098 position each player shall occupy in the field which position cannot be changed without
1099 their consent.

1100 Fourth.-Each member shall act as Umpire, in regular rotation, according to the
1101 alphabetical list.

1102 Fifth.- It shall be the duty of the Umpire to keep the game in a book prepared for that
1103 purpose, and note all violations of the by Laws and Rules during the time of exercise; he
1104 shall decide all disputes and differences relative to the game, from which decision there is
1105 no appeal.

1106 Sixth.- The bases shall be, from “Home” to second base, 42 paces; from first to third base,
1107 42 paces, equi-distant. [Note: hypen occurs on a line break in the original.]

1108 Seventh.-If there should not be a sufficient number of Members of the Club present at the
1109 time agreed upon to commence exercise, gentlemen, not members, may be chosen in to
1110 make up the match, which *shall not be broken up* to take in members that may afterward
1111 appear, but in all cases, members shall have the preference when present at the making of
1112 a match.

1113 Eighth.-If members appear after the game is commenced, they may be chosen in, if
1114 mutually agreed upon.

- 1115 Ninth.- A ball must be pitched, not thrown for the bat.
- 1116 Tenth.- A ball knocked inside [sic] the range of first or third base, is foul.
- 1117 Eleventh.-Three balls being struck at and missed and the last one caught, is a hand out; if
1118 not caught is considered fair, and the striker bound to run.
- 1119 Twelfth.-A ball being struck, or tipped, and caught either flying, or on the first bound, is
1120 a hand out.
- 1121 Thirteenth.-A player must make his first base after striking a ball. [This rule is not in the
1122 1845 or 1848 rule sets]
- 1123 Fourteenth.-A player running the bases, shall be out if the ball is in the hands of an
1124 adversary on the first base before the runner reaches that base; or if, at any time when off
1125 a base, he shall be touched by the ball.
- 1126 Fifteenth.-A player running who shall prevent an adversary from catching or getting the
1127 ball before making his base, is a hand out.
- 1128 Sixteenth.-If two hands are already out, a player running home at the time a ball is struck,
1129 cannot make an ace if the striker is caught out. [Not in the 1845 rules but in the 1848
1130 rules]
- 1131 Seventeenth.-Three hands out, all out.
- 1132 Eighteenth.-Players must make their strike in regular turn, and after the first hand is
1133 played the turn commences at the player who stands on the list next to the one who lost
1134 the hand previously.
- 1135 Nineteenth.-No ace or base can be made on a foul strike.
- 1136 Twentieth.-A runner cannot be put out in making one base, when a balk is made by the
1137 pitcher.
1138
- 1139 Twenty-first.-But one base allowed when the ball bounds out of the fields, when struck.
1140
1141
- 1142 **The 1856 Rules and By-laws of the Putnam Base Ball Club**
- 1143 published in Porter's Spirit of the Times, Dec 6, 1856

1144 posted at 19cbb, August 27, 2003, by Chip Atkison

1145 [rule numbering is mine]

1146

1147 For the rules of the game, we have drawn largely on a pretty little edition
1148 of the By-laws, Rules, &c., of the "PUTNAM CLUB," published by BAKER &
1149 GODWIN, over the Tribune building, which, with reference to the diagrams,
1150 will give a good idea of the game, as it is played at present. We have
1151 suggested, and shall continue to suggest some innovations on the old rules,
1152 which we think may add to the interest of the game-always subject, however,
1153 to the decision of a convention of the Base Ball Clubs, which we hope will
1154 convene before long to regulate the details of this popular game.

1155

1156 1. The captains, umpires, and referee having been chosen, the captains shall
1157 have absolute direction of the games, and shall designate the position each
1158 player shall occupy in the field.

1159 2. It shall be the duty of the umpires to see that the game is properly kept:
1160 they shall decide all disputes and differences relative to the game, from
1161 which decision there shall be no appeal, except to the referee.

1162 3. The bat or club is of hickory or ash, about 3 feet long, tapering, and
1163 about 1 1/2 to 3 inches in diameter at the lower end, and round; the ball
1164 varies from 5 1/2 to 6 ounces in weight, and from 2 3/4 to 3 1/4 inches in
1165 diameter.

1166 4. The bases shall be, from home to 2d base, 42 paces; from 1st to 3d base, 42
1167 paces, equi-distant; and from home to pitcher not less than 15 paces (see
1168 diagram see appendix I)

1169 5. The game to consist of 21 counts or aces; but, at the conclusion, an equal
1170 number of hands must be played-that is, the last to go in at the
1171 commencement of the game shall have the last innings, the total score to
1172 decide the game.

1173 6. The ball must be pitched, not thrown or jerked, for the bat.

- 1174 7. A ball knocked outside and behind the range of the first or third bases
1175 shall be considered foul, and shall not count the striker an ace.
- 1176 8. Three balls being struck at and missed, and the last one caught, is a hand
1177 out; if not caught, it is considered fair, and the striker bound to run to
1178 the 1st base.
- 1179 9. A ball being struck at and tipped, and caught, either flying or on the
1180 first bound, is a hand out.
- 1181 10. A player must make his first base after striking a fair ball; but should
1182 the ball be in the hands of an adversary on the first base before the
1183 striker reaches that base, it is a hand out.
- 1184 11. A player shall be put out, if at any time when off a base he be touched by
1185 a ball in the hands of an adversary.
- 1186 12. A player cannot be put out in making one base, when a baulk is made by the
1187 pitcher.
- 1188 13. Players must make the bases in the order of striking; and when a fair ball
1189 is struck, and the striker not put out, the first base must be vacated, as
1190 well as the next base or bases, if similarly occupied. Players, while
1191 running to 2d and 3d base, or home, may be put out under these circumstances
1192 in the same manner as when running to the first base.
- 1193 14. A ball knocked out of the field, or limit, but one base shall be made
1194 thereon by the striker.
- 1195 15. A player who shall intentionally prevent an adversary from catching or
1196 getting a ball, is a hand out.
- 1197 16. A player must be allowed every opportunity to make his bases, and in case
1198 of his being prevented by their occupation by an adversary, he shall be
1199 entitled to the base.
- 1200 17. If two hands are out, a player running home at the time a ball is struck,
1201 cannot make an ace if the striker is caught out.

1202 18. A player coming home from 3d base, is entitled to the mark, if home before
1203 another run is out.

1204 19. Three hands out, all out.

1205 20. Players must take their strikes in regular rotation; and after the first
1206 inning is played, the turn commences at the player who stands next to the
1207 one on the list who lost the third hand.

1208

1209

1210 **Notes:**

1211 1 Thanks to Larry McCray for helping design the “Roots of the Rules” Project and reviewing earlier drafts
1212 of this research report.

1213 2 New York Herald, January 23, 1857.

1214 3 New York Herald, March 2, 1857.

1215 4Adelman, Melvin; A Sporting Time; p 6.

1216 5Ibid.

1217 6Morris, Peter; A Game of Inches: The Game on the Field; p 21.

1218 7Ryczek, William; Baseball's First Inning; p 48.

1219 8Peeverly, Charles A.; The Book of American Pastimes; p 343.

1220 9Protoball Chronology entry 1848.1 (<http://protoball.org/1848.1>).

1221 10Ibid.

1222 11Block, David; Baseball Before We Knew It; pp 223-224.

1223 12Melville, Tom; Early Baseball and the Rise of the National League; p 12.

1224 13Ibid.

1225 14Seymour, Harold; Baseball: The Early Years; p 16.

1226 15Seymour, p 20.

1227 16Thorn, John; posted at 19CBB; December 5, 2008.

- 1228 [17](#)Mears Baseball Collection, Volume 4.158, p 2.
- 1229 [18](#)New York Daily Times; December 19, 1854.
- 1230 [19](#)New York Sunday Mercury; April 29, 1855. Spirit of the Times; May 12, 1855. Syracuse Standard; May
1231 16, 1855. Also, Mears Baseball Collection, Volume 4.158, p 2.
- 1232 [20](#)Adelman; p 126.
- 1233 [21](#)Adelmam; p 127.
- 1234 [22](#)New York Daily Tribune; December 10, 1855.
- 1235 [23](#)Miklick, Eric; posted at 19CBB, November 16, 2011.
- 1236 [24](#)Hershberger, Richard; posted at 19CBB, November 17, 2011.
- 1237 [25](#)Waff, Craig B. and Larry McRay; 1856.4 The New York Game in 1856; Base Ball, Volume 5, Number 1;
1238 p 115.
- 1239 [26](#)Mears Baseball Collection, Volume 4.158; p 3.
- 1240 [27](#)Melville; p 12.
- 1241 [28](#)Mears Baseball Collection, Volume 4.158; p 3.
- 1242 [29](#)New York Herald; January 23, 1857.
- 1243 [30](#)New York Clipper; February 28, 1857.
- 1244 [31](#)New York Herald; March 2, 1857.
- 1245 [32](#)Gietschier, Steven; The Rules of Baseball; The Cambridge Companion to Baseball; p 11.
- 1246 [33](#)The 1845 rule set is readily available online; modifications that created 1848 appears in Peaverlly; 1852
1247 is based on author's copy; 1854 was published in the contemporary press; and 1856 is based on author's
1248 copy. 1852 and 1856 will be found in an appendix at the end of this piece.
- 1249 [34](#)Miklich, Eric; The Baseball; 19cbaseball.com ([http://www.19cbaseball.com/equipment-3.html#the-](http://www.19cbaseball.com/equipment-3.html#the-baseball)
1250 [baseball](#)).
- 1251 [35](#)Morris; pp 408-411.
- 1252 [36](#)Miklich, Eric; 1857.1 Nine Innings, Nine Players, Ninety Feet, and Other Changes; Base Ball, Volume 5,
1253 Issue 1.
- 1254 [37](#)See John Quincy Adams' 1821 Report upon Weights and Measures; Noah Webster's 1828 An American
1255 Dictionary of the English Language; John Henry Alexander's 1857 An Inquiry Into the English System
1256 of Weights and Measures; and the 1862 House of Commons Report from the Select Committee on
1257 Weights and Measures

- 1258 [38](#)Morris; p 38.
- 1259 [39](#)Ibid.
- 1260 [40](#)Morris; p 25.
- 1261 [41](#)New York Herald; March 2, 1857.
- 1262 [42](#)Online Etymology Dictionary (<http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=run>).
- 1263 [43](#)Online Etymology Dictionary;
1264 (http://www.etymonline.com/index.phpallowed_in_frame=0&search=out&searchmode=none).
- 1265 [44](#)McCray, Larry; 1845.1 The Knickerbocker Rules – and the Long History of the One-Bounce Fielding
1266 Rule; Base Ball, Volume 5, Number 1.
- 1267 [45](#)New York Herald; March 2, 1857.
- 1268 [46](#)See Robin Carver's The Book of Sports and William Clarke's The Boy's Own Book.
- 1269 [47](#)New York Herald; March 2, 1857.
- 1270 [48](#)New York Times; Aug 22, 1855.
- 1271 [49](#)New York Herald; March 2, 1857.
- 1272 [50](#)Game Tab: Greater New York City (http://protoball.org/Games_Tab:Greater_New_York_City).
- 1273 [51](#)Miklich; 1857.1 Nine Innings; p 119.
- 1274 [52](#)New York Herald; March 2, 1857.
- 1275 [53](#)Morris; p 23, quoting an idea of John Thorn.
- 1276 [54](#)New York Herald; March 2, 1857.
- 1277 [55](#)Melville; pp 12-13.
- 1278 [56](#)Protoball Games Tabulation: Greater New York City
1279 (http://protoball.org/Games_Tab:Greater_New_York_City).
- 1280 [57](#)Miklich; 1857.1 Nine Innings, Nine Players, Ninety Feet, and Other Changes; p 119.
- 1281 [58](#)New York Clipper; December 13, 1856.
- 1282 [59](#)Protoball Games Tabulation: Greater New York City
1283 (http://protoball.org/Games_Tab:Greater_New_York_City).
- 1284 [60](#)Thorn, John; “Doc Adams”; SABR BioProject (<http://sabr.org/bioproj/person/14ec7492>).
1285