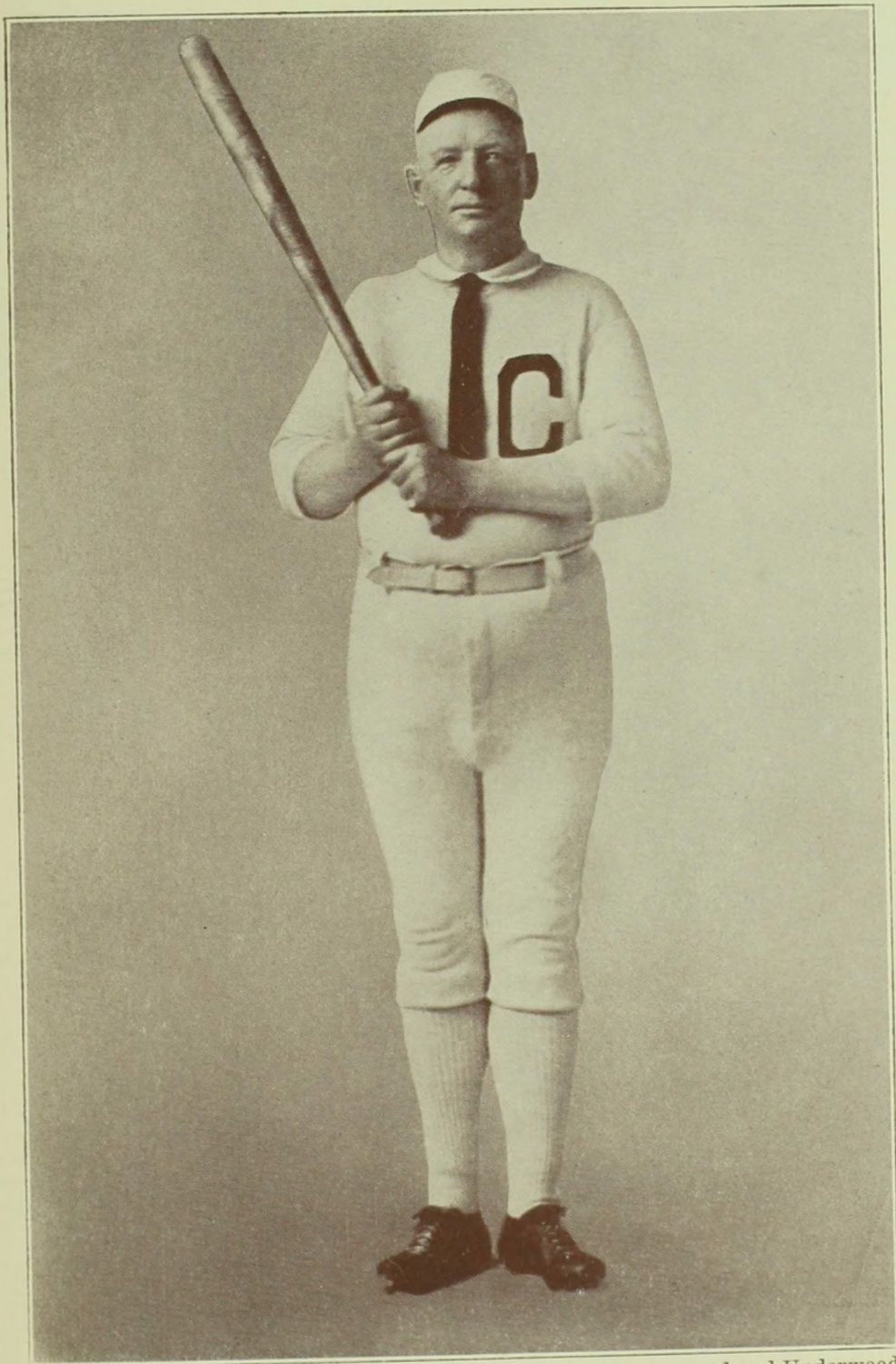


Adrian C. Anson

“An uncompromising advocate of clean sports and athletics”, said K. M. Landis, speaking of Adrian Constantine Anson, the grand old man of baseball, who died on April 14, 1922. For more than twenty years “Pop” Anson, as he was more familiarly called, was captain and manager of the Chicago National League baseball team. Indeed, to him probably more than anyone else, belongs the epithet of “father of the big league”.

Adrian Anson was the first white child born in Marshalltown, Iowa, and there he began his baseball career. Even as a youth in his teens he was rated as a good player on the grass lots of his home town. In 1869 he matriculated in the State University of Iowa where his chief interest seems to have centered in baseball rather than in grammar, arithmetic, history, and penmanship. He is credited with having been instrumental in establishing the earliest form of organized athletics at the University. At the time he entered college he subscribed to a declaration that it was his “intention to engage in the business of teaching in the schools of Iowa” and that his purpose in resorting to the University was to prepare himself “for the discharge of this important duty.” During the year, however, he seems to have altered his ambitions for his name does not appear again in the University roster.



ADRIAN C. ANSON

Underwood and Underwood

It was in 1871 that Anson began his professional baseball career at Rockford, Illinois. Later he joined a Philadelphia team. In 1874 he was a member of a team which invaded England to play baseball and cricket. While the Americans knew very little about cricket their terrific batting offset their defects and they won every game played, including a remarkable victory over the famous Marylebone All-English eleven. The score in this game was 107 to 105 runs.

It was while Anson was playing with the Philadelphia nine that he formed a close friendship with A. G. Spalding, star pitcher on the Boston team and the best-known patron of American sport. Due in a measure to this friendship "Pop" joined Spalding's Chicago White Stockings club when the National League was formed in 1876. Experts say that there have been few stronger nines in the history of baseball. Spalding was the leader during the first year but Anson took his place as captain and manager in 1877. "Billy" Sunday also played on the team for a number of seasons.

For twenty-one years Captain Anson piloted the Chicago "Colts", as they came to be called. Five times he won the undisputed championship of the National League. He was so much of a fixture in the Chicago club for such a long time that he was dubbed "Pop" in honor of this paternal relation. After he retired in 1897 the club was for some years referred to as "Orphans", an appellation that has since changed to "Cubs".

If there have been players whose performance surpassed that of Anson for a season, certainly few if any have equaled his record over a long period. Of magnificent stature — over six feet in height and weighing nearly two hundred pounds — he kept in good physical condition. Strong and active, clear eyed and of keen perception, he had few equals as a batter. During the twenty-two years he played on the Chicago team his grand batting average was .348 per cent. For three seasons — in 1879, 1881, and 1888 — he led the league in batting, and ranked second or third in other years. He seldom struck at the first ball. “I always liked to see how they were coming,” he said, “so I braced to make it appear I was going to swing without any intention of striking. I would pass the first one and sometimes the second. Then I would make ready for a blow. It is always worth a called strike or two to know how the balls are coming, and then, you know, it takes only one to line it out.”

As a fielder and base runner he merited the respect of the best of them. His regular position was at first base. In that capacity he stood at the head of the list in the National League, with a fielding average that ranged from .974 to .988 per cent.

Among those responsible for the development of the great American game, the name of Adrian Anson stands out preëminently. His professional playing began when baseball had just emerged from the old game of “rounders”. In technique the sport

owes much to his playing, but it is in morale that his greatest service was rendered. Assuming a dignity unknown among professional players of an earlier day, Captain Anson and his team repudiated the tactics of ruffians. Anson insisted that his players ride to the ball park in carriages instead of in hacks; they stayed at the best hotels; and they wore dress suits in the evening. Because of his great ability as a player, but more particularly on account of his wholesome influence "Pop" Anson is one of the most conspicuous figures in the history of baseball. He played for the love of good sport: he flourished at a time when a base hit meant more than a week's pay.

Genteel, courteous, and frank, full of appreciation for good playing, and always willing to give the opposing team a square deal, Anson earned the confidence of the members of his own team and was also held in high esteem by his opponents. He never wrangled with the umpire. Instead, he submitted his arguments in a statesmanlike manner and did not hesitate to yield a point if the decision went against him. There are instances of contesting teams withdrawing a protest, upon being assured by the venerable captain that a fair decision had been rendered. Though a strict disciplinarian, he never fretted or scolded. His clean sportsmanship, whether he received fair treatment or not, made him a favorite everywhere.

On the seventieth anniversary of his birthday, "Pop" Anson was buried in Oakland Cemetery, near

the park made famous by his playing. He used to say that he wanted the epitaph, "Here lies a man that batted .300", inscribed on his tombstone, but the world has accorded him a finer tribute. He will be known to posterity as a baseball celebrity — a man who fostered, protected, and developed the greatest of all American sports — but he will be honored most for his character and sportsmanship.

J. A. SWISHER