

## The World's Series of 1891

The baseball season of 1891 was hectic and desultory. Attendance was poor. Baseball finance was close upon the rocks of bankruptcy. As the summer waned many disputes threatened to disrupt the world of organized baseball, and the future of the game seemed problematic.

In the Western Association — predecessor of the Western League — only two clubs managed to fight down internal dissension and resist the poignancy of an empty pocketbook. With grim determination, Kansas City and Sioux City struggled to finish the season. Before September the clubs representing Milwaukee, Lincoln, Duluth, and Minneapolis withdrew from the race, and soon afterward the Omaha club forfeited the remainder of its schedule to Denver and disbanded.

The final clash for the championship lay between Kansas City with a percentage of .517 and Sioux City with .542. It was agreed that the two teams should play a series of five games. To win four of these games would give the coveted pennant to Kansas City, while only two were required to cinch the trophy for Sioux City. Kansas City made a good start by winning the first game, but the second went to Sioux City, whereupon R. E. Mulcahy, secretary of the Sioux City club, informed his supporters

that "we are going to have the pennant just as sure as the sun shines and they needn't worry about the matter." He proved to be a good prophet for on September 18th the Western Association officially declared Sioux City champion. The remainder of the series was played as exhibition games.

Interest in the East centered upon the championship of the National League — the oldest and most respected organization of its kind. As the end of the season drew near it seemed certain that Chicago would win the pennant. During the last days, however, Boston won five postponed games from New York and with them first place in the league. The official percentage was Boston .630 and Chicago .607. Since this good fortune could hardly be attributed to necromancy, the partisans of Chicago were prone to charge that there had been a conspiracy to "throw" games to Boston. President James A. Hart of the Chicago club thought that New York must have shown either "downright dishonesty" or "gross incompetency" and declared his intention of leaving no stone unturned to discover the facts. An investigation was made by the directors of the National League, but nothing unsavory was found and the New York club was officially vindicated.

In the American Association — precursor of the American League — another Boston club had won the undisputed championship. Hitherto it had been customary for the leading teams of the National League and the American Association to play a post-

season series of games to decide the championship of the world. Since both of the winning teams in these leagues represented Boston in 1891, the question of superiority between the major leagues was not decided that year.

Meanwhile, however, Chicago baseball fans, undaunted by the official success of Boston, claimed championship for the Chicago Colts in the National League, and demanded an opportunity to demonstrate their prowess. The Sioux City Huskers, champions of the Western Association, were also casting about for new worlds to conquer. When baseball seemed to have come to a standstill the sport world of the West was suddenly rejuvenated on September 22nd by a telegram from President Hart stating that Chicago was willing to play "the world's series" with Sioux City. Definite terms were quickly agreed upon, and it was not long before the notion that the approaching contest was "for the world's championship" had been generally accepted. A series of six games was arranged to be played at Evans Park in Sioux City on the five days beginning with Tuesday, October 5th. The Western Association, previously overlooked in contests for the championship of the world, was at last to come into its own, and the battle was actually to be fought in the West. The fans were agog with delight.

The Huskers to play in the world's series! It was unbelievable — an unparalleled event. When it became known that the details had been arranged

Sioux City began at once to prepare for the historic contest. The whole Northwest seemed aflame with eager excitement. "Aberdeen will close the town and see the games" was the keynote of a letter from that South Dakota town, some two hundred miles away. It was expected that a special train would be required for the Chicago fans. People in Huron, Kansas City, Mason City, Cedar Rapids, Clinton, Lincoln, Omaha, Denver, and many other places wrote anxiously for particulars. W. E. Peak, passenger agent for the Chicago, Milwaukee, and St. Paul Railroad on the Iowa and Dakota division, declared that "all you can hear is baseball." The people along the railroad, he said, "want us to run special trains from every crossroad."

Marshalltown in particular was interested, for the leader of the Chicago team was Adrian Anson, who had begun his career in that city. "Old Anson" was literally worshipped by the home town fans. One enthusiastic citizen gave vent to his feelings in a letter. "Marshalltown", he wrote, "will attend the world's championship games in a body. This is the home of Anson, the only 'Anse', and we will pull for our old boy, but we like the Huskers. They belong to Iowa."

In view of the intensity of interest throughout the West, it was confidently anticipated that an unprecedented number of spectators would descend upon Sioux City for the games. Besides the world's series the corn palace festival would be at its height.

The coincidence of two such events seemed certain to attract enormous crowds. New bleachers capable of seating ten thousand people were hastily erected at the park. By eight o'clock on Saturday evening, October 3rd, two days before the initial contest, a thousand tickets had been sold.

In the meantime there was much speculation as to which team was destined to be victorious. In as much as the Huskers and Colts had neither played against the same teams nor against each other, there was no basis for comparison, but that circumstance probably only added certainty to personal opinions. Lack of definite information was no hindrance to argument. Fans of all ages, colors, and temperaments, from far and near, talked or wrote or telegraphed about the games.

With enthusiasm at such heat, it must have been a remorseless weather god indeed who greeted Sioux City on the morning of October 5th with a chilly dawn. Cold weather and baseball are incompatible. Undaunted, however, the fans received the Chicago Colts with considerable pomp. Three brass bands and sixteen hack loads of citizens formed a parade and escorted them to the park, where the procession was greeted by "a couple of thousand people" who sat shivering on the hard seats. Humor was at a discount. A Chicago player attempted to "break the ice" by capturing a donkey that was browsing at the upper end of the race course; but it was a sorry farce and barren of laughter.

It was a tense moment at 3:30 when Umpire Tim Hurst called "Batter up!" and the first game began. Would the Colts gallop roughshod over the Huskers, or would the West vanquish the East?

When the first inning ended and the score stood Sioux City 2, Chicago 0, the fans could scarcely believe their senses. It seemed incredible. But perhaps the Colts were only toying with their opponents. Still, inning after inning was chalked up without a score for Chicago. The Huskers meanwhile ran in a tally in the fourth inning, another in the fifth, and three in the sixth. Not until the seventh inning were the shivering Colts able to make a score and when the game ended the Huskers had won by a score of eight to one. Captain Anson frankly admitted that his men had been outplayed. No team on earth, he declared, could stand out against such errorless playing. But perhaps this was only a pleasantry.

The weather on the second day continued cold. It was reported that the voice of the umpire congealed before it had traveled a bat-length. "Poor Timmie! his legs cracked like pine limbs in a winter wind as he meandered back and forth between the plate and the box, and large globules of water rolled over his eyelashes". During the intervals the spectators gathered what amusement they could from the antics of a drunken policeman.

The Chicago players, however, seemed to have found an antidote for the cold which had hindered

their play in the first game. In the fifth inning, the Huskers indulged in a succession of fumbles. A newspaper reporter, frankly disappointed with the performance, wrote that "the Huskers got to throwing the ball around just as the dear children toss about the autumn leaves, and came just as near hitting each other." After the first inning fortune went steadily against the Huskers, and before they could discover the Colts' secret of keeping their hands warm the game was over. Chicago's play had stiffened. Probably Anson had been joking about the merits of the Sioux City team.

Although the games were good, the attendance was not. That bogey of baseball had already ruined several clubs in the Western Association, and now threatened the world's series. In the hope of supplying with enthusiasm the warmth which the sun had denied, considerable space in the newspapers was devoted to advertising the series. Great black letters announced that the "World's Championship Games" were being played and spectators were advised to come early in order to avoid the rush. For only fifty cents, ladies being admitted free to the grand stand, "one of the greatest [games] ever witnessed on a diamond" could be seen; and "Anson, the great and only Anson" would take part.

Captain Anson, perhaps for the gratification of his father who was present at the third game, quit his regular position at first base and put on the catcher's mit. Neither team was confident and both

were now playing with the most genuine earnestness. Chicago, determined to win, played furiously. At first the game was closely fought on both sides, but in the fourth inning a Husker failed to catch a long fly at a cost of three runs. In the seventh, the Sioux City pitcher, Meakin, made an unfortunate throw which allowed two more runs and the jig was up. The game ended with a score of nine to six for Chicago. Without doubt Captain Anson had been sarcastic in his comment.

The Huskers, however, entered the fourth game determined to "be all or nothing." The raw north wind blew with equal unpleasantness on both teams — there was that consolation. It was a battle royal. If the game should go to Chicago, Sioux City could not win more than half the series, and Anson would not consider the possibility of a seventh game. The last inning came and the struggle was not decided. It was then that Billy Earle, with "his little black bat" drove the ball quite out of sight and brought victory to the Huskers by a score of four to three. Again the games were even — two and two. It was for the future to determine whether Anson was joking or not.

In order to conciliate the goddess of fortune who had begun to smile on the Huskers, an ardent fan brought to the fifth game an Indian mascot brilliantly adorned with war paint. The Colts were intent upon retaining their laurels, and the Huskers were equally determined to add to theirs.



For five innings, while the Chicago team gained two runs, the Huskers battled on without a score. Once in the third inning with two out Sioux City got a man on the bases and tried desperately to send him home, but their efforts were of no avail. During the same inning a Chicago batter drove the ball to the right of the Husker first baseman who leaped into the air "and when he came down he held the white sphere in his upraised palm like a modern restoration of the Rhodian colossus". Later in the game "Pop" Anson crashed a hot liner that seemed to be going for a safe hit into left field, but Van Dyke made a wonderful catch. In astonishment, scarcely believing his eyes, the umpire turned to Anson. "Cap, you're out", he said, and Anson declared it was the most brilliant catch he had ever witnessed.

Thus by virtue of spectacular playing the fifth game went to Sioux City; and the series stood Chicago two, Sioux City three. It was mathematically impossible now for the Huskers to lose the series, but the final game would determine whether they would win the championship or only tie. Could it be true that "Old Anse" had meant what he said?

It was indeed a splendid exhibition of baseball that the enthusiastic crowd of four thousand people witnessed on the following day. Never was a game more hotly contested and seldom was one more replete with critical moments. From the very beginning every player exerted himself to the utmost. Strategy and alertness were at a premium. In the

initial inning a Husker reached third base, and when the batter hit safely he dashed for the home plate. There stood Anson, his hands outstretched for the ball. Summoning all his speed, the runner slid across the plate in a cloud of dust just as the ball thumped into the catcher's mit above. Down went Anson's arm like a flash as he put the ball on the prostrate Husker whose impetus had carried him beyond the base. "You're out!" yelled the umpire, who had failed to see the runner touch the plate.

Thus the contest continued. Though Sioux City took the lead, neither team could secure a permanent advantage. In the seventh inning the score was tied. Then came the crucial eighth. Again a Husker reached third base, but in an overzealous effort to score he was caught between two Colts. Just when it seemed that the game would be won, hopes were blighted. The grand stand was in an uproar. Back toward third base raced the Sioux City player, with "Pop" Anson in full pursuit. Suddenly the Husker turned, ran straight into the arms of the burly captain, and when all seemed lost he dodged past and trotted across the plate. The game was saved.

A few minutes later the world's series of 1891 came to an end. The Sioux City Huskers had "beaten the earth" by winning four of the six games played. "Pop" had not been jesting after all. Apparently no team could withstand such playing as that of the Huskers.

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