

FROM THE BALL FIELDS TO BROADWAY: PERFORMATIVE IDENTITIES OF
PROFESSIONAL BASEBALL PLAYERS ON THE NINETEENTH AND TWENTIETH
CENTURY AMERICAN STAGE

BY

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DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the theatrical careers of four professional baseball players who appeared in multi-act plays on the American stage in the decades surrounding the turn of the twentieth century – Adrian “Cap” Anson, Mike “King” Kelly, Christy Mathewson, and Ty Cobb. As a player reached a level of celebrity in the game of baseball, theatrical producers were able to transfer the persona the player had built on the field onto the stage. The formation of each player’s persona is analyzed as well as how the persona was transferred to the stage and interacted with the changing nature of American identity. Anson’s appearance as a fictionalized version of himself in 1895 illustrated how baseball was attempting to appeal to a more respectable audience. Kelly’s performances based on his wealth and success from the game in the 1880s and 1890s transcended his image as solely a baseball player. A play co-authored by Mathewson in 1913 examined the real-life issue of club ownership by a woman in a melodramatic setting that uses Mathewson’s own persona to help model how baseball could deal with such a concern. Cobb’s 1911 performance in the lead role in a popular stage play was complicated by the villainous persona he had acquired through his playing.

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INTRODUCTION

This dissertation investigates the ways professional baseball players performed on the American stage in the decades surrounding the turn of the twentieth century. Using four representative players from baseball's pre-Babe Ruth era as case studies, this study looks at the interaction between the image and persona built by each player on the field and in their theatrical activity. Despite evidence of connection between the theatrical and professional baseball industries during this time, the direct involvement of players in theatrical productions has not been sufficiently examined by historians. Though player involvement in vaudeville performances has been noted in histories of baseball, the more uncommon participation of players in multi-act plays has been overlooked. One of the central questions explored in this study is why these professional ballplayers took to the stage during their off-season. Additionally, why was their created on-field persona appealing as a stage entity? What, if anything, beyond financial gain did they receive from these activities? How did the industry of baseball benefit from these forays into theatre? Why did theatrical producers want to use them, and how did producers market them? Why did players perform in multi-act dramas as opposed to or in addition to vaudeville? What were the expectations and the reactions of audiences and critics? What cultural tropes were at play in these productions? How did these activities interact with the changing nature of American identity during the era in regards of shifting gender, ethnic, racial, class, regional and national roles?

The process of creating a persona as an elite or otherwise notable baseball player gave the athlete the status of celebrity. As that recognition spread, audiences increased at the ball park. In transferring the celebrity they had earned on the field to the stage, the theatres were selling the

image and presence of the baseball player rather than whatever act the player performed. While it is clear that these players were trading on the celebrity they had achieved on the field, their typical stage performance depended on and reinforced their status as professional baseball players and rarely strayed from that idea.

The first fully-acknowledged professional ballclub emerged in 1869 after years of local amateur and semi-professional teams competed with each other under various differing regional rules for “base ball.” The team, called the Cincinnati Red Stockings, travelled throughout the eastern half of the country playing against teams of local players. The emergence of professional baseball did not eliminate the presence of local amateur and semi-professional teams, which remained popular well into the middle of the twentieth century. However, it did create a new model of business for the game in which highly skilled players were able to showcase their abilities by touring from city to city matching themselves up against the “local nine.” At these games, crowds paid to see young men they knew almost always lose to the professionals. By the inception of the National League of Professional Baseball Clubs in 1876 and thus the establishment of the major leagues in professional baseball, the game had been solidified as one of many forms of popular entertainment available to the American public, and the mechanics of participating as a league mirrored the structure of a recent phenomenon in the theatrical world known as combination companies.

During this same post-Civil War era, the American theatre was undergoing changes. A theatrical industry had been present in the country since it was a colony and had adapted to various social and economic conditions. Seen as a drain on the local economy of a community early in the nation’s history, theatre had to also overcome arguments couched in religious and moral terms that had led to legislation prohibiting it in certain cities. The gradual growth of those

cities and the need to provide distraction for both an increasingly immigrant working class as well as the higher classes gave theatre a solid foothold as an American industry by the mid-nineteenth century. This did not necessarily mean widespread social acceptance, however. While certain stars charmed the upper classes, they still remained well below broad social respectability.

In a more practical sense, the theatre of post-Civil War America was an industry that was heavily dependent on touring, which had been made more cost-effective through the vast number of railroad tracks laid in the eastern United States for logistical purposes during the war. American theatre practices began to transition away from a previous reliance on local stock companies that performed production in repertoire either independently or alongside an established touring theatrical star toward combination companies – productions originating typically in New York that were a self-contained unit. Containing a combination of performers and scenery, these productions travelled between towns performing the same program of entertainment until moving to the next location. Productions on the road were not restricted to the standard, multi-act dramas from New York, but included popular forms such as minstrelsy, Uncle Tom shows, and variety entertainments that primarily crisscrossed the eastern half of the United States entertaining crowds in cities and smaller towns alike. By the National League's first year in 1876, nearly one hundred combination companies were travelling many of the same railroad routes as the professional baseball clubs.

With a structural similarity at both a business logistic and a narrative level, theatrically-based entertainments and those which are sporting-based can be examined as part of the same network of entertainment in America. The traditional history of baseball has treated players with

theatrical aspirations as only seeking lucrative off-season work.¹ Similarly, theatrical histories have tended to only list the names of athletes on the stage and, what's more, athletes only figure into works that focus on popular theatre forms like vaudeville.² Containing a variety of performers including singers, comedians, actors and musicians alongside acrobats, animal trainers and oddities, vaudeville provided an opportunity for performers to earn money from their particular talents. Though vaudeville was a very popular theatrical form and could be quite lucrative for popular acts, it was considered at the time to be a less artistic and less legitimate venue for performers than participating in a multi-act, scripted drama. While a clear financial interest by the players participating in either theatrical form cannot be denied, such a categorization limits the possibilities of why these players may have chosen to participate in longer productions than in a typical vaudeville act. As such, there has been no lengthy examination of the theatrical work of people from this era whose primary profession was not theatre. Additionally, investigation of the work done by professional athletes on the so-called "legitimate" stage in any era has been limited.

In a discussion of the off-season activities of professional baseball players, historians Harold Seymour and Dorothy Seymour Mills write in their multi-volume history of the game that the most widely publicized avenue for players to earn money while not on the field in the early twentieth-century was on the stage. Seymour and Mills note the theatrical appearances of nearly twenty players in the first decade and a half of the new century. These players sang and danced,

¹ The prime example being Harold Seymour and Dorothy Seymour Mills, *Baseball: The Golden Age* (New York: Oxford P, 1960), 118.

² Joe Laurie, Jr., *Vaudeville: From the Honky-Tonks to the Palace*, (New York: Holt, 1953), 124-8.; Abel Green and Joe Laurie, Jr., *Show Biz, from Vaude to Video* (New York: Holt, 1951), 47; Trav SD, *No Applause, Just Throw Money, or, The Book that Made Vaudeville Famous: A high-class, refined entertainment* (New York: Faber and Faber, 2005), 129.

performed in humorous skits, recited personal anecdotes or displayed other individual talents.³

Though the primary goal for both the baseball and theatrical professionals involved was financial profit, the appearance of players on the stage speaks more about the location of baseball as part of the wider field of entertainment avenues during this time.

This study utilizes Erving Goffman's theory of self-presentation from his work *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* as a method for understanding how a player's actions on the field create an identity through which the crowd sees him. Goffman argues that in a social situation an audience understands an individual through the expressions made intentionally and unintentionally by said individual. These expressions can be categorized as one of two types: expressions given and expressions given off. While the first concerns relatively straightforward communication and features clearly agreed-upon meaning to the signals or information given, the second involves actions that are performed with meaning beyond just the information conveyed. These actions of the second kind are the primary means of how an individual makes an impression on an audience.⁴ Using the baseball field as the bounds of a social situation, the playing of the game communicates information about the player to the audience. The player, who has control to an extent over his actions and behaviors performed on the field, is able to at least shape how the audience would receive him. A player's persona partly reflects how an audience understands that player. It is this persona that holds meaning for the audience, and it can be transferred away from the ball field for use in other areas. Each chapter of this dissertation analyzes the formation of the particular player's persona as well as how it was transferred to a theatrical medium.

³ Seymour and Mills, *Golden Age*, 117-8.

⁴ Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (New York: Doubleday Anchor, 1959), 2-4.

For players to have had a chance to make money on the stage, whether it was by performing in multi-act plays or by performing in vaudeville, they would first have had to achieve some recognition within the baseball world by creating a baseball persona. Players established a baseball persona through a combination of their on-field achievements and their own idiosyncratic style of play. Individual accomplishments, such as being the top hitter or pitcher in the league, had more influence on a player's image than those achievements that were team-based, such as being a member of a pennant winning or world championship club. These kinds of achievements were quantifiable and clear. Players' statistics provided measurable difference between poor, middling, and superior players. The numbers also standardized comparisons between players by providing context between the player and the rest of the league thus giving a larger scale view to the fan. Statistics such as batting averages and runs scored, as well as pitching wins and strikeouts were widely reported in newspapers for individual players. As such, public knowledge of these players' feats did not depend on proximity to the player.

This was not true, however, for an understanding of a player's particular playing style. It was often the immediate and viewable game-to-game performance that held the most meaning and won a player fans. Newspapers provided descriptions of how a player ran, batted or threw, and certainly, the subjective nature of those reports did influence public perception of a player. By attending the games, local fans were able to discern for themselves, however, the ways the player played the game as well as how the player compared physically with the other players on the field. A player's style was based partially on his noticeable physical attributes, such as his height and weight or the speed with which he ran or threw. The attitude he possessed while playing and the general demeanor he reflected often in verbal exclamations or witticisms also composed the player's style. Similar to how statistics were contextualized in comparison to other

players' numbers, the style of a particular player could be contextualized by seeing him play on the field and comparing it to his teammates and opponents. Such immediate understanding of the playing style of a player was limited to those who were able to see games in person and see the players competing for either the home or visiting team. Due to the number of times a fan could see the players for the local team, a player's style was obviously much more recognized and accepted in the city for which he played than in the cities his team visited throughout the season.

The appeal for the fan was not from reading accounts of the player's feats, but from seeing the player in person. Built from both previous accomplishments as well as the player's style, the baseball persona of a player was imbued with what Cormac Power termed "auratic presence" in his book *Presence in Play*. Power develops the term by using "aura" to refer to the possession of a presence that is extraordinary beyond just physically being present. He suggests that one way the auratic presence can exist is through the fame or reputation of the present object itself in combination with the knowledge and expectations that an audience possesses at the time of the experience.⁵ In the case of the baseball persona created by these players, their reported accomplishments worked to give their on-field style a meaning beyond what was just visible on the field, while at the same time their physical presence on the field helped to create audience awareness of the extraordinary abilities of the player.

Having such an aura made particular players an attraction as they travelled the league circuit, and it helped make those players celebrities within baseball. As the nature of celebrity is not universal, three different categories of celebrities are described by Chris Rojek's classification system featured in his book *Celebrity*. The first is "ascribed celebrity" in which a person is a celebrity primarily due to their heredity. Traditionally, this has been most evident in celebrities of royal lineage; however, the offspring or relatives of celebrities established by other

⁵ Cormac Power, *Presence in Play: A Critique of Presence in the Theatre* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2008), 47.

means may indeed qualify. One of these other means may be the public acknowledgement by cultural intermediaries that the person is somehow noteworthy. Rojek calls this category “attributed celebrity” and notes that it is primarily a result of mass media’s use of sensationalism. The remaining category, “achieved celebrity,” is of most importance for the purpose of this study. Achieved celebrities have gained their recognition through open competition where success and failure was apparent to the audience. Neither a lineage of previous celebrity nor verification by a social mediator is needed to be an achieved celebrity.⁶ Professional baseball players who had visible success on the field through all their on-field endeavors, both their accomplishments and their style, had achieved their celebrity status under these terms.

Players’ celebrity opened up opportunities to use their ready-made, established recognition in other performative arenas that also depended on presence. However, by attempting to transfer their celebrity to another medium, theatre producers were attributing celebrity to the players by acting as the cultural mediators in deeming the players worthy of being put on stage for a paying audience by proclaiming them to be exceptional in their field. The transfer supposes that a person whose celebrity has been achieved in one field can be attributed celebrity due to their auratic presence even when put onto display in a medium where the skills that led to the achievement are not applicable. For such a move to work, however, the players-turned-performers must not be too far removed from the idea of celebrity they have already achieved, or else their associated aura as extraordinary is lost. The context that built the celebrity is rendered irrelevant other than the fact that a context does exist that makes this player distinguishable. The achieved celebrity of the baseball world was based on their accomplishments and style; the celebrity status that became attributed to them in the larger public sphere depended essentially on the basis that the player played baseball. Once a player reached the level of celebrity to become

⁶ Chris Rojek, *Celebrity* (London: Reaktion, 2001), 17-20.

an attraction within the baseball world, his primary appeal to producers was that he was associated with baseball more than anything that was specific to him as a person. While the player's individual persona still played a role in how he was presented, the most important aspect of his persona was that he was a baseball player. All of his other markers of identity were subsumed to his identification and presence as a baseball player.

The status of a ballplayer as celebrity allowed for other types of identification to occur as well including identification as a hero. In *Heroes, Villains and Fools*, sociologist Orrin E. Klapp identifies the characteristics of those particular social types in America.⁷ Following up Klapp's study, Roger R. Rollin posits that the status of being a hero presupposes the condition of being a celebrity since acts that have not been perceived by others cannot be deemed to be heroic.⁸ Both Rollin and Klapp see the hero as a creation that helps to engender a sense of community. They serve a function for the community in that they are praised and followed. Established as better than the norms of the community, they are used as models of behavior.⁹ Beyond just their function within the structure of the game, baseball players as celebrities had the opportunity to fulfill a societal function as either a hero or a villain, whose status was also that of a celebrity. The identification with these types could also inform the players' theatrical participation.

In regards to a player's theatrical performance, the ballplayer had three areas around which his performance could be centered. These included his physical prowess and athletic ability; baseball as a general topic including popular appellations of slang; and the player's individual identity which could be built through personal stories and anecdotes or other displays

⁷ Orrin E. Klapp, *Heroes, Villains, and Fools: The Changing American Character* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1962).

⁸ Roger R. Rollin, "The Lone Ranger and Lenny Skutnik: The Hero as Popular Culture," *The Hero in Transition*, ed. Ray B. Browne and Marshall W. Fishwick, (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green Popular P, 1983), 14.

⁹ Rollin, "Hero as Popular Culture," 25. Klapp, *Heroes, Villains and Fools*, 13, 17.

of the particular idiosyncrasies of the player. Players had achieved their celebrity primarily through physical means, so one of the easiest ways to trade on their public persona as a baseball player was to highlight their physicality. With physicality as the connection to the source of their celebrity, the players' roles were not required be closely tied to baseball itself. Players would often sing and dance, such as pitcher Rube Marquard did in 1912 as he performed a dance called "the Marquard Glide" with his wife, vaudeville performer Blossom Seeley. While dancing showed the player's athleticism, players could also use the opportunity to display their athletic talents in sports other than baseball. Catcher Johnny Kling did so in performing a billiards exhibition on stage. Even when eschewing baseball as a topic, players understood the necessity of being identified in relation to the sport. Though basing the act on their singing, a group of players billed themselves as the "Boston Red Sox Quartette" in 1912 as they did a brief vaudeville tour after having won the American League pennant.¹⁰

Ultimately, however, baseball was the topic of most players' theatrical performances. These acts usually depended on the talents of the ballplayer and another performer, usually one more theatrically seasoned. Some were fully developed as sketches such as Marquard and Seeley's "the Suffragette Pitcher" which put Marquard in a dress as the star of Seeley's all-female team. Mike Donlin and Mabel Hite, another ballplayer-actress husband and wife team, performed another fully developed sketch called "Stealing Home."¹¹ Other acts were "singing and talking acts" which typically played with baseball vocabulary as the sketches and songs were usually peppered with popular slang that served as relatively innocent double entendre. The humor was intended to come from the collision of the baseball world and its specialized language, represented by the player, and the non-fan, who was ignorant of baseball, played by

¹⁰ Seymour and Mills, *Golden Age*, 118. Laurie, *Vaudeville*, 125.

¹¹ Laurie, *Vaudeville*, 124-5.

the partner. Though aspects of the specific player's baseball persona may certainly be included in such material, the audience, in taking their cue from the player's partner, saw the player again primarily as a representative of baseball in general.

The remaining style of act was much more biographical in nature and featured tales from the players' lives or perspectives on their careers or even current baseball events. New York Giants manager John McGraw toured with a monologue detailing the "inside game" featuring stories about his players and important games they had played.¹² Other players whose seasons had ended made special appearances on stages during the World Series to explain the games that had just happened and to provide their personal perspectives or to project which team would prevail. These solo acts often helped to spotlight elements of the player's baseball persona, and, though the player was recognized as a baseball player primarily, provided a personality for the player to distinguish him from others. The personal anecdotes not only gave insight to the game and its players, but also highlighted events that happened to them because they were baseball players.

Though these areas were most visible through players on the vaudeville stage, they remain applicable when players performed in multi-act dramas as well. Fittingly, each of these areas held little to no subtext beyond the player's status as a professional baseball player. Every round of applause given, cheer expressed, or raspberry blown was done by an audience clear in the context that this was a baseball player before them. The player's validity and appeal on stage was that he was a player. With the physical presence of a player on stage the primary selling point, the player's individual aura took a secondary role. Certainly a player on stage had already achieved enough success for a producer to want to use his celebrity, but the aura of star players was greater than non-stars and champions held more stature than those who were not. Time and

¹² Laurie, *Vaudeville*, 125.

location also played significant roles in perception of stardom. Players may have appeal and recognition in certain cities more than others, and time passed from a championship – either personal, like in batting or base running, or team-based – diminished the luster of the player.

The risk for theatrical producers seeking to benefit from the popularity of baseball was lessened because the audience was not being asked to see the players, who were known entertainment quantities, differently from how they normally viewed them. Using the players as celebrities gave the producers the opportunity to expand their audience. Many times certain performances would draw the players from the other teams in the league as audience members. When the producers had advanced knowledge of a group of players planning to attend a performance, these baseball-saturated audiences could be promoted as their own special attractions to increase attendance in the theatre that night.

The benefit offered by the nature of the celebrity held by the players who appeared on stage was somewhat limited by geography, however. The player's value to the producer was greatest in the player's home cities – both his birthplace/residence and the home city for which he played. While there would likely have been some attraction in cities in the league where the player visited, it would not have been as great. The player may actually have had more value in locations where there was no league team. Lacking consistent opportunity to see the games in person, the physical presence of a professional baseball player in these non-league cities would have its greatest appeal. In these cases, the audience was more reliant on the producer as cultural mediator to promote the baseball player as celebrity. The player's presence was still auratic as audiences were likely aware of the player's baseball persona from national and local newspaper reports.

After the turn of the century, most players earned around two thousand dollars a year in salary for their few months on the field. Though it was significantly more than the average American worker made during the whole year, many players pursued other business interests in the off-season. Those who had the opportunity to do stage work found it to be relatively lucrative; top-drawing players had the ability to earn hundreds of dollars a week. Being on stage in the off-season also kept the ballplayer in the public eye, and since baseball contracts generally required yearly negotiation, having a means to display his celebrity with the public gave the player more leverage in negotiating his salary for the next year. Further, producers usually required very little training of the player since he was being asked to essentially play himself and fit the image of a baseball player doing whatever things the act called for. The player did not necessarily have to be good at what he was doing; he just had to be there. A portion of the appeal for audiences was certainly the fish-out-of-water novelty of professionals from one area becoming noticeably amateur in another.

The lack of training for the stage that marked these players as amateur actors was put into sharp focus by the increase in training professional actors had begun to receive in the late nineteenth century. Daniel J. Watermeier notes that the decline in resident stock companies created a need for new training methods in his essay “Actors and Acting” in the second volume of *The Cambridge History of American Theatre*.¹³ Actors could be trained in techniques that emphasized instinct and feeling instead of the declamatory styles that had been in vogue since before the Civil War. Increasingly an emphasis on “believable verisimilitude in gesture, vocal delivery and emotional expression” became commonplace on the American Stage.¹⁴ However,

¹³ Daniel J. Watermeier, “Actors and Acting,” in *The Cambridge History of American Theatre: Volume II 1870-1945*, edited by Don B. Wilmeth and Christopher Bigsby (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001), 448.

¹⁴ Watermeier, “Actors and Acting,” 452.

these displays of “natural behaviors” were just as dependant on conventions as previous styles. The more actors trained in these techniques, the more audiences accepted them as appropriate to real life. As a result, performers who were not trained in these conventions were not seen in an aesthetically pleasing manner, and they could easily be identified as amateurs.

As industries, both baseball and theatre benefited as well by having players representing the game on stage. The players were promoted as celebrities, which could help increase attendance at the ballpark as they served as an advertisement for the local team. Their presence on the stage could bring fans to the theatre when baseball was not in season. Further, the industries were also contextualized among other amusements of the day where a set price offered an afternoon of entertainment. This positioning helped baseball garner a level of respectability that opened up possibilities for attracting a new audience. The players could promote the wholesomeness of the game, the respectability of its players, and the virtues of sport and competition to an audience that would have been largely repelled by the drinking and gambling which was popularly associated with the game and the predominately male spectators in attendance. The courting of new fans would have been particularly desired in cities that became battleground sites with teams from separate leagues competing for roughly the same audience.

The dissertation’s focus on professional baseball players explores a heretofore forgotten segment of performers in theatre history that drew crowds to the theatres and was popular in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. At times, players were simply inserted into pre-existing productions or were featured in a production while another actor took the primary notice. Certain other players were at times popular enough that entire productions were written specifically for them or the player was placed as the focal point for the production which was then built around them. Rather than treating these performers as amateurs, dilettantes or

mercenaries, professional baseball players can be understood as performers in their own right whose stardom was being transferred from one performative arena to another – from the ball fields to Broadway. This dissertation argues that in these cases theatre provided an opportunity to advance the interests not only of the players who actually participated in the theatre, but baseball as a whole as well.

Traditional examinations of baseball have tended to contextualize it in terms of other sports while theatre is traditionally analyzed relative to other arts. Performative entertainments, such as the theatrical and baseball industries, have historically competed for the attention and money of the public; yet, both offered a suitable distraction from the standard urban lifestyle of the late nineteenth-century American audience. In his book, *City People*, exploring the modern city culture of late nineteenth-century America, Gunther Barth includes chapters on both the ball park and the vaudeville house as sites where these new urbanites could forge their identities in communion with other residents because of the locations' egalitarian natures.¹⁵ Baseball's audience was, as Seymour and Mills state, "a very good cross section of the American public."¹⁶ Access to the park was not restricted on gender or racial lines, and though differences in seat pricing and location may have limited potential mingling of social classes, the ball park was often filled with a variety of enthusiastic rooters for the home team. Seymour and Mills do speculate that weekday audiences were primarily middle-class and professional people while working class fans filled parks on weekends.¹⁷ A similarly mixed clientele was described in theatres of the time by Richard Butsch in *The Making of American Audiences*. Theatre

¹⁵ Gunther Barth, *City People: The Rise of Modern City Culture in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford UP, 1980).

¹⁶ Seymour and Mills, *Early Years*, 326.

¹⁷ Seymour and Mills, *Early Years*, 327.

performances in the ten-twenty-thirty houses that specialized in melodrama drew primarily working class audiences while farces in the more legitimate theatres drew a slightly higher number of middle-class patrons, though both classes were visible at either location.¹⁸

These industries can be examined more fruitfully through their interactions rather than through their direct competitions. Understanding baseball's reciprocal nature with non-sporting entertainments helps provide context to the early years of the game particularly as the National League struggled to remain solvent. Theatre was the dominant performative entertainment of the time and could attract new audiences by incorporating baseball's popularity into their shows. Further, theatre could offer a more respectable venue in which to see baseball players. In essence, baseball borrowed from the respectability associated with the theatre – a rarity in the history of American commercial theatre. Individual players had complex relationships with the stage beyond commercial incentives, and examination of their performances provides additional insight into the lives of these players.

To provide a balance of interpretive analysis and documentary history, as Thomas Postlewait has suggested should be the goal of cultural histories in theatre, this study makes use of several types of evidence.¹⁹ The recovery of extensive biographical information on players has been one of the hallmarks of modern baseball research, and the biographies used in this study offer valuable factual information regarding the players' lives. In addition, contemporary newspaper accounts of a player's on- and off-field activities also contribute to the understanding of how a player was presented to the audience in their own time. Dramatic texts are analyzed in

¹⁸ Richard Butsch, *The Making of American Audiences: From Stage to Television, 1750-1990* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000), 121-38.

¹⁹ Thomas Postlewait, *The Cambridge Introduction to Theatre Historiography* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009), 85.

conjunction to the accounts of the stage performances by the players to provide a more complete picture of what was occurring on the stage during the performances themselves.

The temporal perimeters of the dissertation begin with the initiation of professional baseball in 1869. During the early part of the professional era as leagues began to form throughout the 1870s, teams became filled with the best players available rather than players who had roots in their team's locale as had been the practice during the pre-professional era. These new professional players were generally unknown on a personal level by the local fans but were still recognizable since the fans still rooted for the players that made up the local team. Because of this absence of knowledge through personal connections by the fans, the identities the players acquired were done so primarily through their ball playing.

The end of the study's timeframe is marked by the ascendancy of Babe Ruth in both baseball and American culture just after the conclusion of the first World War in 1918. A new style of play was reflected in the powerful hitting prowess displayed by Ruth.²⁰ This new "live ball" era is recognized as a break from the game's previous preference for placement over power. The ending of this time period in baseball roughly corresponds to the end of theatre's cultural dominance as a dramatic medium with the widespread popularity of motion pictures. The previously unparalleled popularity attained by Ruth was enhanced by a combination of appearances on stage and in film. For the first time, even though other players had appeared in the medium before him, it was film that played the primary role in promoting Ruth's baseball persona as a celebrity. This dissertation only considers players who achieved stardom before Ruth because of the change in the way baseball celebrity culture could be disseminated.²¹ These

²⁰ John E. Dreifort introducing Leverett T. Smith, Jr., "The Changing Style of Play: Cobb vs. Ruth" in *Baseball History from Outside the Lines: A Reader* (Lincoln: U Nebraska P, 2001) 123-4

temporal perimeters give the dissertation a center on the time period in the history of baseball when the stage was the primary medium for narrative performance.

Though athletes from other sports appeared on stage during the pre-Ruth era, this study focuses on baseball because of the fact it was a popular, professional, team-oriented sport. Baseball was the first professional team sport in America. As a professional sport, newspapers across the nation would report on games that did not necessarily involve their local team. In this way, a professional player was able to be identified nationally in a way that was not available to amateur players. Unlike a boxer who as a solo performer is always representative of his home locale, professional baseball players were, as described above, often strangers to the local fans, and such status allowed an identity to be constructed that was not based on personal acquaintanceship or local associations. Further, baseball's team-oriented nature required players to construct an identity to distinguish themselves from their teammates in order to become an attraction to the crowd, and thereby increasing their value in the eyes of the team owner. Other lasting team sports, football and basketball, were still played primarily by amateurs at the collegiate level during baseball's pre-Ruth era.

This dissertation does not seek to provide a comprehensive account of all professional baseball players on the stage around the turn of the twentieth century. Rather the focus is on contextualizing the theatrical endeavors of four representative players who illustrate the ways a player's persona could transfer between two entertainment industries through their participation in multi-act dramas: Adrian "Cap" Anson, Mike "King" Kelly, Christy Mathewson, and Ty Cobb. The players selected as case studies were done so in part due to their on-field excellence, marked by their selection to Baseball's Hall of Fame. Not an arbitrary decision, the restriction to

²¹ Richard Piorceck, "Baseball and Vaudeville and the Development of Popular Culture in the United States, 1880-1930" in *The Cooperstown Symposium on Baseball and American Culture, 1999* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2000).

only use Hall of Fame players is based in part on the selection criteria. Since a player cannot be elected to the Hall of Fame during his playing career, the player must not only have had a statistical justification of excellence but also remained identifiable enough in the minds of the electing body to achieve the honor. This excludes players like the aforementioned “Turkey” Mike Donlin, an outfielder for the New York Giants, who quit professional baseball for a time in order to tour the vaudeville circuit with his wife, actress Mabel Hite.²² Not all players in the Hall of Fame that appeared on stage are represented here either, as the study is focused specifically on players with theatrical pursuits in multi-act productions that created, embraced, or attempted to reject their on-field persona. This is not an attempt to write a biography of each of these players. The events of their lives are relevant to the extent of how they were used in their theatrical careers. For Mike Kelly and Cap Anson, they were involved in theatrical endeavors until the end of their lives; for Christy Mathewson and Ty Cobb, their forays into theatre were much briefer.

Several histories of baseball have provided valuable coverage of the time period of baseball’s Pre-Ruth era. The multi-volume work *Baseball* by Harold Seymour and Dorothy Seymour Mills is widely considered the preeminent baseball history. The first two volumes, *Baseball: the Early Years* (1960) and *Baseball: the Golden Age* (1971) both provide thoroughly well-researched information on the industry, its participants, and its fans from the sport’s pre-professional era forward. Rather than rely on a statistical history of the game, the volumes provide social context to the game’s development and growth. Similar is David Quentin Voigt’s own multi-volume history *American Baseball*, whose first two volumes – *American Baseball: From Gentleman’s Sport to the Commissioner System* (1966) and *American Baseball: From the Commissioners to Continental Expansion* (1970) – offer both detailed information and thoughtful context of the time period. Because single-volume surveys tend to devote less space

²² Seymour and Mills, *Golden Age*, 118.

to the period between the establishment of the professional era and the beginning of the live-ball era, this study makes infrequent use of several other valuable baseball histories such as Donald Honig's *Baseball America* (1985), Charles C. Alexander's *Our Game* (1991) and Benjamin Rader's *Baseball: A History of America's Game* (third edition, 2008).

The essays included in the multi-volume *Cambridge History of American Theatre* (1999) edited by Don B. Wilmeth and Christopher Bigsby have provided a solid base for the theatrical information in this dissertation. Other histories like Garff B. Wilson's *Three Hundred Years of American Drama and Theatre* (second edition, 1983), Ethan Mordden's *The American Theatre* (1981), Bernard Hewitt's *Theatre U.S.A. 1665-1957* (1959), and Glenn Hughes' *A History of American Theatre* (1951) served as valuable supplemental references because of their ability to reflect back on American theatre history. At the same time, histories of the American stage published during the era under examination, such as Norman Hapgood's *The Stage in America, 1897-1900* (1901), Lewis Strang's two volume *Players and Plays of the Last Quarter Century* (1902), Arthur Hornblow's three volume *A History of the Theatre in America: From its Beginnings to the Present Day* (1919), and *The American Theatre As Seen By Its Critics: 1752-1934* (1934) edited by Montrose Moses and John Mason Brown, provided context for how it was believed theatre was developing at the time.

Theatrical histories with a more specific scope provided their own context. The economic conditions of the theatre at this time are analyzed in Alfred Bernheim's *Business of the Theatre: An Economic History of the American Theatre, 1750-1932* (1932) and Jack Poggi's *Theater in America: the Impact of Economic Forces 1870-1967* (1968) and by some of the essays in *The American Stage: Social and Economic Issues from the Colonial Period to the Present* (1993) edited by Ron Engle and Tice Miller. Bruce McConachie's *Melodramatic Formations: American*

Theatre & Society, 1820-1870 (1992) provided context for the production and reception of melodrama in American theatres, as did *Melodrama: the Cultural Emergence of a Genre* (1996) edited by Michael Hays and Anastasia Nikolopoulou, Frank Rahill's *The World of Melodrama* (1967) and two books by Robert Bechtold Heilman, *Tragedy and Melodrama: Versions of Experience* (1968) and *The Iceman, the Arsonist, and the Troubled Agent: Tragedy and Melodrama on the Modern Stage* (1973).

Among the foremost researchers in the history of baseball during this era is Steven A. Riess. Riess' book, *Sport in Industrial America, 1850-1920* (1995), approaches the rise of sport in late nineteenth-century America with an eye toward its relationship to entertainment in general during the era. Focusing on a wider array of sports than just baseball, Riess looks first at sport in regards to the process of urbanization before moving onto the resulting issues involving race, class and education. Other works that place baseball into the wider sporting field during this era include John Rickards Betts' informative documentary history, *America's Sporting Heritage: 1850-1950* (1974). Similar to Riess, Donald J. Mrozek's *Sport and American Mentality 1880-1910* (1983) examines how sport in general breaks away from lower class associations and gains respectability among the middle and upper classes.

With a focus more on baseball's role in society, another of Riess' books, *Touching Base: Professional Baseball and American Culture in the Progressive Era* (1999), argues that a narrative emerges during this period that produced American myths, symbols and legends that reflected the aspirations of the American Progressive mindset. People saw in baseball what they wanted to see rather than remaining tied to the reality of the game. The public response to the game is also important to Leverett T. Smith, Jr.'s *The American Dream and the National Game* (1970). Using theories of play proposed by Johann Huizinga to analyze social criticism and

literature regarding the game as well as the reactions of the public to transformative events in the game, Smith shows how baseball went from irrelevancy and charges of immorality to being seen as a storehouse for lost values. Warren Goldstein's *Playing for Keeps: a History of Early Baseball* (1989) goes further back to the pre-professional era and the early phase of organized baseball to examine the conflation of work and play as baseball transitions into an industry.

Several valuable books help to further contextualize baseball as an industry. *Never Just a Game: Players, Owners, and American Baseball to 1920* by Robert F. Burk (1994) examines baseball as an industry providing information on the labor issues that affected the owner-player relationship throughout the time period. G. Edward White's *Creating the National Pastime: Baseball Transforms Itself 1903-1953* (1996) notes contradictions between the economic and labor models that baseball established including the wholesale exclusion of one segment of potential workers due to racial attitudes. *Labor and Capital in 19th Century Baseball* by Robert P. Gelzheiser (2006) concentrates specifically on labor issues including the failed attempt by the players to form their own league to break the owners' monopoly on baseball as a product.

Much more limited though are the works that concern ballplayers from the time as actors or theatrical performers. Rob Edelman explores the acting career of Mike Donlin in "Mike Donlin, Movie Actor: Roll 'em!" from the *Baseball Research Journal* in 2001 and "Baseball, Vaudeville, and Mike Donlin" from 2008 in the journal *Base Ball*. These two articles serve to detail Donlin's theatrical and cinematic career as he oscillates between his baseball and the stage before becoming an actor of bit-parts in motion pictures following his retirement from baseball. Analysis of how Donlin's theatrical performances worked remains outside the informational scope of the articles, as it does with Edelman's "Ty Cobb, Actor" from the 2010 issue of *The National Pastime* produced by the Society for American Baseball Research. Frequently, the

primary focus of articles on ballplayers as actors is on their motion picture work as it is in George Grella's "The Actor as Ballplayer, the Ballplayer as Actor," published in a collection of papers delivered at the 2001 Cooperstown Symposium on Baseball in American Culture.

More valuable to this study has been work done regarding boxers as performers. In *Boxing, Masculinity, and Identity: The "I" of the Tiger* (2007), Kath Woodward looks at contemporary boxers and their portrayal in the media and contends that the athletes construct a public identity through their actions both in and out of the ring. Alan Woods examined a boxing champion from the era focused upon in this study in "James J. Corbett: Theatrical Star" published in the *Journal of Sport History* in 1976. Woods contends that much of Corbett's appeal on stage came from the work by his theatrical manager William A. Brady's efforts to cultivate the boxer's public image.²³ Managers like Brady had become adept at cultivating an image for a performer in the latter portion of the nineteenth century. Augustin Daly had been able to create interest by crafting a public image for each of his actors, particularly those recognized as his "big four" – John Drew, Ada Rehan, James Lewis, and Mrs. G.H. Gilbert (Ann Hartley). Daly broke with the standard practice of hiring actors to play a particular line of business. Instead, by putting actors in roles he thought suited their personalities, Daly was able to craft a public image for each actor that he could use to promote them, the production and the company as a whole.²⁴

In addition to books and articles written by each of the players (or at least published under their name), this study relies upon work done by previous researchers uncovering and detailing the biographies of the individual players examined here. Howard W. Rosenberg has written four volumes over Cap Anson and his relationship with his contemporaries: *Cap Anson*

²³ Alan Woods, "James J. Corbett: Theatrical Star," *Journal of Sport History* 3, no. 2 (1976): 162-175.

²⁴ Garff B. Wilson, *Three Hundred Years of American Drama and Theatre*, second ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1982), 153.

1: When Captaining a Team Meant Something in Baseball's Early Years (2003); *Cap Anson 2: The Theatrical and Kingly Mike Kelly, U.S. Team Sport's First Media Sensation and Baseball's Original Casey at the Bat* (2004); *Cap Anson 3: Muggsy John McGraw and the Tricksters; Baseball's Fun Age of Rule Bending* (2005); and *Cap Anson 4: Bigger Than Babe Ruth; Captain Anson of Chicago* (2006). Rosenberg presents information involving Anson and the secondary subjects of each book primarily from newspaper articles that have been gathered through the Library of Congress with a limited attempt to impose an overarching narrative. Grouping information together by topic for the most part, Rosenberg states his intention to present as many primary sources as possible.²⁵ In this way, his volumes become valuable source books, and the information provided has proven to be a valuable source for information regarding both Anson and Kelly. The biography of Anson by David L. Fleitz, *Cap Anson: the Grand Old Man of Baseball* (2005), which is more narrative-driven in its approach, has also been valuable in the details of Anson's life and career. Similarly, Marty Appel's *Slide, Kelly, Slide: The Wild Life and Times of Mike "King" Kelly, Baseball's First Superstar* (1996) provides a larger view of the player's life. Three biographies of Christy Mathewson are used here: Ray Robinson's *Matty: An American Hero* (1993), Philip Seib's *The Player: Christy Mathewson, Baseball and the American Century* (2003) and Michael Hartley's *Christy Mathewson: A Biography* (2004).

Evidence has recently been presented by William R. Cobb's article "The Georgia Peach: Stumped by the Storyteller" that investigation into Al Stump's famous article "Ty Cobb's Wild, 10-Month Fight to Live" printed in *True: the Man's Magazine* in 1961, as well as the expansion of that article into Stump's subsequent *Cobb: A Biography* (1994), has shown that some information cannot be corroborated, and that Stump may have embellished or even fabricated

²⁵ Howard W. Rosenberg, *Cap Anson 1: When Captaining a Team Meant Something; Leadership in Baseball's Early Years* (n.p.: Tile Books, 2003), xii.

several stories in order to sell memorabilia.²⁶ As a result information that seems to have originated solely from Stump's work has been largely omitted here unless it could be verified with other sources. Among these other sources are Charles C. Alexander's *Ty Cobb* (1984), which is thoroughly researched and documented, and it sufficiently fills out elements that Cobb's own published work has chosen to omit.

The A. Bartlett Giamatti Research Center at the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum in Cooperstown, NY serves as a central archive for baseball related materials and has provided a variety of sources for this dissertation. The Giamatti Research Center houses over three million documents related to baseball history ranging from newspaper clippings and photographs to books and dissertations. Additionally, there is a player file containing documents for each of the more than 17,000 men who have appeared in at least one game in the major leagues. Fittingly, there is much more information available in these files for players with longer and more distinguished careers such as the four Hall of Fame players examined here. This dissertation has used the primary sources available at the archive to uncover information that might have been deemed to be peripheral or otherwise outside the scope of the larger biographical works mentioned above, but play an essential role here (such as a scrapbook devoted to Ty Cobb's tour as an actor in *The College Widow*).

The vast resources available in the University Library at the University of Illinois made access to many other materials possible. Texts of the productions in which these players participated, such as George Ade's *The College Widow*, are included in the library's holdings. Other materials could be acquired through interlibrary loan services when not readily available in the library itself. A microfilm copy of Charles Hale Hoyt's unpublished dramatic works acquired

²⁶ William R. Cobb, "The Georgia Peach: Stumped by the Storyteller," *The National Pastime: Baseball in the Peach State*, SABR 40, 2010, 84-101.

from the New York Public Library contains three plays which are examined here: *A Runaway Colt* (1895), *A Rag Baby* (1884), and *A Tin Soldier* (1886). While the University Library at the University of Illinois has the published 1917 version of *The Girl and the Pennant* written by Rida Johnson Young, the New York Public Library holds the 1913 version performed in New York in October of that year.

The University Library also holds microfilm copies of many of the newspapers from the late nineteenth century in cities where the players did perform both on the field and on the stage. Relevant to a player's on-field persona, included among the accounts of individual games in these newspaper accounts were often personal stories, notes or bits about the players. For baseball fans who could not see the games in person, box scores could provide a technical view of what occurred on the field that day, but these other accounts were critical in the shaping of fans' perceptions of a particular player's style or personality. In relation to their theatre work, newspapers provided previews and reviews of a production in which a player was involved. These mentions could appear in either the sporting or theatrical section of the newspaper. In addition to the reviews of productions found in the New York, Boston and Chicago newspapers, the theatrical and sporting weekly newspaper, the *New York Clipper*, was essential in reconstructing the tour routes for Mike Kelly and Ty Cobb as well as providing a national perspective on the players.

Following this introduction, there are four chapters and a summary conclusion that includes possibilities for further research. Due in part to overlap in the included players' careers, the chapters are arranged thematically rather than chronologically. Chapters one and two concern the stage work of players fitting a model of the public perception of a baseball player and how it was possible in certain circumstances to transcend the player's association to the game. Chapters

three and four examine how players who were able to take a more active role in shaping their public image used the stage to suit their own needs.

The first chapter, “A Better Actor Than Any Ballplayer, A Better Ballplayer Than Any Actor: Cap Anson as the Prototypical Ballplayer On Stage and Off,” looks at Chicago White Stockings/Colts captain Adrian “Cap” Anson who had great influence on the course of the National League as a player from its founding in 1876. Near the end of Anson’s playing career, playwright Charles Hoyt wrote a play named *A Runaway Colt* in which Anson starred as himself. Typical of many baseball players on stage, Anson’s appeal came primarily from his identification as a baseball player. This chapter examines how Anson’s presence in the play was dependant on his image as a baseball player, and that Hoyt’s careful cultivation of a gentlemanly image for Anson as a ballplayer had additional benefits in furthering baseball’s courtship of late nineteenth century, middle-class respectability.

In the second chapter, “Less Applause When He Finished Than When He Entered: Mike ‘King’ Kelly Performing Success and Failure on the Field and on the Stage,” a teammate of Anson’s, Mike “King” Kelly, is used to examine how certain players were able to move beyond a strict association with baseball when on stage. Kelly’s sale from Chicago to Boston for an unprecedented \$10,000 in 1886 associated him with wealth and success. Kelly’s appearances on vaudeville stages and in full-length plays were infused with references to money and accomplishment in addition to his Irish heritage. Believed by some at the time to be the inspiration for Ernest Lawrence Thayer’s popular “Casey at the Bat,” his recitations of the poem took on a different tone as his ability to play the game at a high level began to fade.

The third chapter, “‘Matty’ Does a Play: Christy Mathewson’s Baseball Persona and the Creation of a Melodramatic Stage Hero,” examines New York Giants pitcher Christy Mathewson

as a playwright rather than a performer. Co-written with established playwright Rita Johnson Young, *The Girl and the Pennant* featured the new female owner of a ballclub as the object of a conspiracy by her team's manager to force her to sell out and leave the game. Possibly reflecting real-life events between the only female owner in the major leagues and her own manager, the play's savior is a character that fits Mathewson's own persona as a hero and presents an example of how a baseball player should behave. Through the actions of this melodramatic hero, baseball is shown how it can rid itself of gambling and corruption while providing a role for women within the structure of the game.

The final chapter, "Ty Cobb: 'As Gentlemanly as a Kick in the Crotch'" analyzes Detroit Tigers outfielder Ty Cobb's life as a performance that tended toward villainy rather than heroism. Cobb was aware of the reciprocal nature between the persona he created on the field and the persona he had as a public figure, and he used it to his advantage in both areas. Participating in a touring production of the play *The College Widow*, Cobb's desire to display the public persona that people expected of him came at odds with the role he was performing. In the end, the Cobb persona dominated the character he played rather than participating in the stage reality of the play.

The personas that each of these players created and utilized reflect in certain ways the tensions evident in American culture and society at the time. In many ways, the persona displayed by each of them both on stage and off conforms to an American white, middle-class, masculine identity that was heavily invested in establishing a prominence in society and maintaining that status once achieved. Further, the alignment of the players' personas with heroic or villainous social traits and types helped to establish a narrative within the baseball world that develops along similar lines to the melodramatic theatre in which these four players participated.

Each season, each series, each game, and even each pitch in baseball was invested with the melodramatic idea that there is a hero and a villain, obstacles to overcome and something in dire need of being saved.

CHAPTER 1

A Better Actor than Any Ballplayer, a Better Ballplayer than Any Actor: Cap Anson as the Prototypal Ballplayer On Stage and Off

Among the first professional baseball players to have a supplemental theatrical career was Adrian C. Anson. Like most of the ballplayers that eventually followed him onto the stage, Anson's theatrical relevance lay in his presence as a recognizable ballplayer. The majority of his time on the stage was in vaudeville houses after his playing career was over. Here he performed baseball-related jokes and songs as well as personal recollections from his life in the game. The motto displayed on his personal stationery during this time read, "A Better Actor than Any Ballplayer, a Better Ballplayer than Any Actor."¹ This linguistic juxtaposition, while being a marketing tool, was quite symbolic of the persistent interplay of the two professions that typically occurred when a player appeared on stage. For the typical player, his existence as a ballplayer superseded his theatrical surroundings.

Anson could claim such a bold motto because the 1895 production of *A Runaway Colt* featured him as the first professional player to perform in a starring role in a multi-act play. The appearance traded on the baseball celebrity that Anson had gained on the field through his achievements and style. This chapter focuses on Anson's participation in the play by first examining the persona he had previously established that prompted his involvement with the 1895 production. Subsequent examination of the production shows that in many ways, Anson's appearance on the stage in *A Runaway Colt* can serve as an example of how the majority of

¹ Adrian Constantine Anson Player File, A. Bartlett Giamatti Research Center, National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum, Cooperstown, NY.

players that appeared on the stage worked, whether in multi-act dramas or vaudeville pieces. He was playing a version of himself. The play had a theatricalized demonstration of his ball playing ability as he hits the game winning home run. His athletic ability and strength were also displayed in more practical ways in the play. The script mined humor from the misunderstanding between baseball slang and everyday conversation. However, Anson's performance did more than just show that he was a baseball player; it required the audience to recognize him as a baseball player. His presence as a star in a multi-act drama rather than a bit part or a vaudeville piece allowed for more than just one or two of these signifiers that the performer is a ballplayer to be on display. The play had the opportunity to say something about ballplayers and baseball in general by emphasizing that Anson was a player. The portrayal on stage showed Anson was respectable, and as a representative of ballplayers in general, they could be seen as respectable too. In this way, Anson's performance and the play contributed to the growing respectability of the game in the late nineteenth century.

The Iowa native began his professional baseball career when the first professional organization, the National Association of Professional Base Ball Players, was founded in 1871. When the National League of Professional Baseball Clubs succeeded that organization five years later, Anson was among its founding members. As the captain and first baseman of the Chicago team, Anson played in each of the league's first twenty-two seasons and cultivated a persona that became renown throughout the game. A player's baseball persona, since it was built in part on his achievements over the course of his career, would understandably change over time. This was especially the case in a career as long as Anson's. During Anson's first year in a professional league, the 1871 National Association season, Anson was the fifth youngest player competing that year. In the last seven years of his career before his retirement after the 1897 season, Anson

was either the oldest or second oldest player in the National League. Anson's longevity became one of his most considerable career achievements. Many of the nicknames given to him over the years were earned through his longevity including "Pop," "Uncle," and "Old Man."

By the time he retired, whether it was acknowledged by his contemporaries or not, Anson was the all-time statistical leader in the National League for games played, hits, runs scored, runs batted in, extra base hits, plate appearances, and total bases.² During individual seasons of his playing career, Anson led the league twice in batting average and placed second an additional five times. Out of his twenty-seven professional seasons, Anson finished in the top ten in yearly batting average twenty times.³ A feared batter, Anson also led the league in 1881 in hits and finished second in that category four other times. Though it may have gone relatively unnoticed as it was not an officially designated statistical category until 1921, Anson led the league in Runs Batted In eight times, and finished in the top ten in the more recognizable category of runs scored ten times over the course of his career. Through these quantifiable achievements, Anson had distinguished himself as one of the premier players in the profession.

One of Anson's most identifiable aspects, reflected in the nickname that appears on his Hall of Fame plaque, "Cap," was his status as the captain of the Chicago National League team for nineteen seasons. Team captains during this time controlled the club on the field serving many of the same functions of the modern-day manager, and Anson proved himself to be one of

² Several of these statistical categories did not become officially recognized until well after Anson's playing career, so their totals were tallied retroactively. While not used in his day, the categories are presented here as evidence of the dominance of his career. Still, I have included here only "counting stats," or categories that have been accumulated and tallied rather than calculated like an average or percentage because the sheer numbers of the totals could be easily measured against his contemporaries. All statistical information from <http://www.baseball-reference.com>

³ Batting average, a "calculated stat", was printed in newspapers beginning in 1874 and was in wide use throughout Anson's career. John Thorn and Pete Palmer, eds., *Total Baseball* (New York: Warner, 1989), 2286.

the best.⁴ The Chicago club under Anson in the 1880s was league champion five times and finished in second place in three other years. No other team matched that record of success during Anson's career. Anson's clubs had a winning record in the league for fifteen of the nineteen years he led them. As both a player and a captain, Anson's proved through his quantifiable achievements that few, if any, were his superiors on the baseball field.

As much as his statistics stood out against the other players in the league, Anson was easy to visually distinguish through the style of play that helped him achieve those statistics. Anson could often be recognized as the largest person on the field throughout his career standing over six feet tall and weighing approximately two hundred pounds. Anson biographer Howard Rosenberg found newspaper accounts of the player demonstrating his size by walking the ninety feet from home plate to first base in only ten strides.⁵ Even though a large man, Anson was very devoted to keeping excess weight off and being in shape during the season. He was often found running and using training methods for athletes that were believed to be the most effective at the time. Even as he got older, he was in better physical condition than many of the younger men who played for and against him.⁶

Other visual characteristics made Anson stand out among his contemporaries. The use of gloves by fielders, particularly first basemen, increased throughout Anson's career, and by 1892 Anson was the only player at his position in the league who was not wearing any type of glove

⁴ While captains were players who controlled the team, there were also managers who served the same function but as a non-player. Clubs would often have either a manager or a captain with most clubs in the late nineteenth century employing a playing captain such as Anson.

⁵ Howard W. Rosenberg, *Cap Anson 4: Bigger Than Babe Ruth; Captain Anson of Chicago* (n.p.: Tile Books, 2006), 285.

⁶ Howard W. Rosenberg, *Cap Anson 2: The Theatrical and Kingly Mike Kelly, U.S. Team Sport's First Media Sensation and Baseball's Original Casey at the Bat* (n.p.: Tile Books, 2004), 282-5.

while in the field.⁷ With or without a glove, Anson was never considered particularly adept at either fielding or base running because his large frame caused him to be much slower than many of his contemporaries. His principal baseball skill, however, lay in hitting. Even for his time, Anson was unusual in how he stood while at the plate. Keeping both feet together and batting from the right-handed position, he faced the pitcher fully forward with the bat held below his waist. As the ball approached, Anson would raise the bat and swing his left side toward the pitcher to make contact with the ball. This method proved to be deceptive to the defensive players who were unable to guess where Anson would be aiming his hit until he was actually swinging. Anson's size and considerable upper-body strength, combined with the thick-handled bats he swung, allowed him to strike the ball with great force. The balls he hit into play were often hard line-drives that were particularly difficult to catch even by fielders who did wear protective gloves.⁸

Anson's voice, which was considered another notable physical characteristic, was often on display because of the attitude he took toward the games that were being played. In possession of a large voice that carried well in the small ballparks of the day, Anson was well-known for his arguing with the umpire – an act also known at the time as “kicking.” Whenever some injustice was perceived, it was Anson's responsibility, as team captain, to argue the point. Rosenberg believes that, in addition to any minor outbursts while not directly confronting an umpire, Anson likely averaged one extended argument with the umpire per game.⁹ The traits that made Anson noticeable on the field – his size, obvious physical strength, and voice – were all

⁷ David L. Fleitz, *Cap Anson: The Grand Old Man of Baseball* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2005), 221.

⁸ Fleitz, *Cap Anson*, 12, 20. Howard W. Rosenberg, *Cap Anson 3: Muggsy John McGraw and the Tricksters; Baseball's Fun Age of Rule Bending* (n.p.: Tile Books, 2005), 332.

⁹ Howard W. Rosenberg, *Cap Anson 1: When Captaining a Team Meant Something; Leadership in Baseball's Early Years* (n.p.: Tile Books, 2003), 126.

traits that had been used to great success on the stage by American actors such as Edwin Forrest and John McCullough throughout the nineteenth century. Anson's prominence on the field reflected an image of masculine identity that those actors had popularized on stage for American audiences since the 1820s.

Anson held an authority over the Chicago baseball club that was unparalleled by any other playing captain of his time. Though a former ballplayer himself, owner of the club Al Spalding deferred much of the control of the day to day operations to Anson, so he could devote his energies toward his sporting goods business. While often operating under the directives of Spalding, Anson took command of the players both on and off the field invoking rules of behavior for his players. Fines were levied for drinking or other disorderly conduct. Although the fines were often rescinded or proved otherwise ineffectual in curtailing the behavior, Anson was reported to be a strict disciplinarian. Though rare, Anson's authority was occasionally displayed on the field. Biographer Howard Rosenberg noted two such instances. In an event the *Chicago Herald* called "rare" because it occurred on the field, Anson reprimanded a player in full view of the crowd because of the player's apathetic play during an 1885 postseason series.¹⁰ Anson also reportedly ordered club owner Spalding off the field when the latter had approached Anson who was in discussion with an umpire.¹¹ Whether Anson meant the order as a joke or was in earnest, the situation served to display Anson's authority in the baseball world. Anson's performance of authority in these public situations gave further credence to the authority and control ascribed to him by players telling stories about private instances. The culmination of these stories and displays was a perception that Anson was perhaps the most powerful player in all of baseball.

¹⁰ Rosenberg, *Cap Anson 1*, 202.

¹¹ Rosenberg, *Cap Anson 1*, 75-6.

Another important element of Anson's persona was his drive to win that fueled the vast majority of his on-field efforts. He possessed a seemingly unparalleled knowledge of the rules of the game, which he regularly used to his advantage. Much of his frequent arguing developed from his thorough understanding of the rules of the game. With his teams usually strong as base runners, one of his most common points of contention was whether an opposing pitcher was committing a balk while there were runners on base.¹² Though he may have intended to rattle the opposing pitcher, the constant arguing of rules may have had a similar effect on umpires. As the rules and pure mechanics of the game were changing so often through his career, these arguments proved that Anson was fully aware of the rules and may get the benefit in future calls from an umpire. Anson also encouraged his players to take advantage of the rules as they were written to increase the team's chances of winning. These tricks included purposefully dropping fly balls or third strikes in order to record multiple outs instead of just one.¹³ Though adept at working within the rules, Anson would also break them if he thought it would help them win. Using his size, Anson would at times intentionally and illegally obstruct throws or fielding attempts by players while running the bases, or he would purposefully collide with a baseman to disrupt a play.¹⁴ Through his many arguments and sometimes questionable tactics, Anson earned the reputation among many of the fans in cities other than Chicago of being a man who did not play in a gentlemanly manner.

Such criticism was not exclusive to Anson as many people felt the professional game could not be reconciled with respectable society. In John Rickards Betts' history of sports in

¹² Rosenberg, *Cap Anson 1*, 120.

¹³ Rosenberg, *Cap Anson 3*, 245.

¹⁴ Rosenberg, *Cap Anson 3*, 254-6.

America, *America's Sporting Heritage: 1850-1950*, he points out that a conflict between the concept of fair play and an overemphasis on winning permeated the entirety of sporting culture in the late nineteenth-century. At particular issue in baseball at the time was the purity of amateur competition against corruption of morals evident in the professional mindset.¹⁵ Critics of baseball could point to obvious instances of rule-breaking as a symptom of the professional mindset that realized winning provided financial benefits, so winning took precedence over sportsmanship. These critics also pointed to aspects of the game, such as kicking, that baseball permitted to occur within its rules. The sanctioning of publicly arguing an official's decision displayed evidence that professional baseball was not suited for decent people. Appeals were made by "lovers of clean sport" to encourage fans to stay away from the game if such unruly behavior was going to persist.¹⁶ However, the yearly increasing attendance in professional baseball shows the appeals were regarded more as a wish than a requirement.

While critics of the game as a whole may have had an issue with how the game was played, extending this battle of fair play versus rule-breaking to the majority of those involved with the game would be a misapplication. Condemnation of on the field conduct by players was viewed in a relative way by fans, sportswriters and players. Actions that would be derided when performed by an opposing player would be celebrated if committed by a player on the hometown team. When one of Anson's former players, Mike Kelly, was playing against Chicago for Boston, Kelly repeated an old trick from his Chicago days by running from second base to home plate without approaching third. Though he had never had a problem with it when it happened to

¹⁵ John Rickards Betts, *America's Sporting Heritage: 1850-1950* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1974), 186. Though unfinished, Betts' work was one of the first to address the rise of sports in America.

¹⁶ Betts, *Sporting Heritage*, 116.

his team, Anson's objections to the umpire forced Kelly to return to third base.¹⁷ Expectations that a player should abide by all umpire rulings were further complicated at times by inconsistent interpretations of the constantly-changing rulebook.¹⁸ Penalties for overt rule-breaking within the game were slight, even when caught, and the rewards offered by winning were much greater. Anson and many of his players on the Chicago team clearly preferred winning and its benefits to an undue allegiance to a relativistic moral code.

Anson's persistence in arguing minute details that was prompted by this emphasis on winning often led to him being the primary object of derision in cities his team visited. Boston newspapers began calling him a baby in 1875. Though he was one of the youngest players in the professional ranks, the connotation was clearly focused on his frequent "crying" to umpires. The nickname persisted for much of his playing career and its use was widespread in varying degrees by both writers and fans. For one of Chicago's visits to New York, a local paper tried to draw fans to the ballpark by declaring that a 220-pound baby would be on exhibition at the Polo Grounds.¹⁹ As the most readily recognizable player on the field, Anson was the popular target for comments, jeers and jokes from a crowd spurred on by seeing Anson at the ballpark. At times, even Chicago's fans directed criticism against and made fun of their team's captain. However, for a fan to have the chance to ridicule Anson, it did have to be done at the ballpark.

Anson understood the value of advertising for a ballclub, and the more he made a spectacle of himself while visiting other cities, the more people wanted to come see him be put in

¹⁷ Kelly, *Play Ball*, 34-5.

¹⁸ David Quentin Voigt, *American Baseball: From Gentleman's Sport to the Commissioner System* (Norman: U of Oklahoma P, 1966), 185.

¹⁹ Rosenberg, *Cap Anson 4*, 74-7.

his place by the hometown team.²⁰ While his style of play managed to draw the ire of a number of opposing fans, also helping were the sports writers in the other cities of the league. Anson had no complaints whether the reports about him were wholly accurate, and he understood the role the newspapers had in drumming up interest in the game.²¹ Just as he rarely complained about anything written about him in the papers, Anson believed a paying fan had every right to complain while at the park, and he took a fair amount of disparagement from the fans both at home and on the road. Anson rarely struck out while at the plate, but pitchers could often get two strikes on him. *New York Herald* writer O.P. Caylor wrote that when that happened, both home and away crowds would begin to chant “strike him out!” After his death, a Chicago newspaper noted Anson’s extraordinary ability to disregard the taunts thrown at him while on the field.²²

For all of his confrontations on the field, Anson kept his focus on the participants of the game and rarely directed any ire toward the crowd. His combative stance with the umpires became an expected part of the afternoon at the ballpark. These antics were typically well-received, even in cities the team was visiting, provided that the display did not go on too long.²³ The notoriety he received for his battles with umpires made him seem larger than life. After doing advance work to promote an all-star team featuring Anson that was doing a world tour in 1888-89, Leigh Lynch reported that fans in San Francisco were very anxious to see Anson based on his reputation. Lynch said that one fan demanded to know how many umpires Anson had

²⁰ Rosenberg, *Cap Anson 1*, 96.

²¹ Rosenberg, *Cap Anson 4*, 15.

²² Rosenberg, *Cap Anson 1*, 98-9.

²³ Rosenberg, *Cap Anson 1*, 98-9.

killed, and Lynch believed that unless Anson destroy the field and commit murder while in the city, the fans would be disappointed.²⁴

Anson proved to be a great draw. His Chicago teams consistently led the league in attendance. In the early years of the National League as teams were added and subtracted on a yearly basis, it was the revenue brought in by the Chicago ballclub that provided enough financial stability in the early 1880s to keep the league from folding.²⁵ Teams often received a boost to their attendance whenever the Chicago team was in town, and much of the interest came from the reputation that preceded Anson. By 1891, New York newspapers were reporting that Anson drew more of a crowd to the ballpark than any other star.²⁶ For theatrical producers looking to use an athlete in a production, a track record as a popular attraction would prove essential, and the persona Anson had built made people want to see him.

However, producers wanting to profit from putting a professional player on stage had to deal with the fact that their appeal was far from universal. While some critics satirically characterized the professional player as a man of leisure, working for only a few months of the year, waking late daily, exercising for a few hours and receiving an exorbitant amount of money, the majority of the perspectives associated the game with the rougher elements of society. Many fans of the game were fond of gambling and drinking, and newspaper presentations of many of the players often did little to limit the association with these social vices. Accounts of drinking or fights by players were often reported in newspapers, and this rough image became the popular perception of how most ballplayers behaved.²⁷ The willingness of participants to break “blue

²⁴ *Sporting Life*, August 8, 1888. Rosenberg, *Cap Anson 1*, 112.

²⁵ Rosenberg, *Cap Anson 1*, 36.

²⁶ Rosenberg, *Cap Anson 1*, 98.

²⁷ Harold Seymour and Dorothy Seymour Mills, *Baseball: The Early Years* (New York: Oxford UP, 1960), 330-2.

laws” in some cities by playing on Sunday further served to alienate respectable crowds from associating with the game.²⁸

For Anson, and most of the players of the time, the popular perception was not entirely accurate. As Rosenberg has shown, it was true that Anson frequently bet on baseball, but the bets were often made publicly as a boast on his team or as advertisement for upcoming games and were done within the rules of the National League.²⁹ As for drinking, though his portrait had appeared in a print advertisement for E&J Burke’s ale during the 1880s, Anson was famous for his dislike of alcohol and drinking.³⁰ Along with Chicago club owner Al Spalding, Anson believed that drinking was putting the game in jeopardy and actively sought to correct the vice among the team’s players. Anson, with Spalding’s support, levied fines on players for drinking during the season, and Spalding went so far as to hire a private investigator to report on the drinking habits of the Chicago players. It was well known by the men throughout the league that Anson could not be corrupted by either gamblers or drinking. Unlike many of the players in the league, Spalding felt that Anson “had been above reproach” in his personal life and that “his integrity was unquestioned.”³¹

For many, Anson was the face of the National League – recognizable as a player and a captain as well as an owner. When the vast majority of popular and talented players left for John Montgomery Ward’s Players’ League in 1890, Anson remained with Chicago’s National League

²⁸ Seymour and Mills, *Early Years*, 211, 261. Though the National League prohibited Sunday baseball for several years, other leagues permitted the activity as well as selling alcohol on the grounds on Sunday with the result being a mark against the sport as a whole rather than toward a specific league.

²⁹ Rosenberg, *Cap Anson 2*, 321, 352. The National League allowed betting on one’s own team beginning in 1877 so long as the player did not associate with gamblers. Rosenberg found that Anson bet on his team 57 times between 1876 and 1900. This was by far the most bets made by any player, manager or owner associated with baseball beating second place by 48 bets.

³⁰ Rosenberg, *Cap Anson 2*, 297.

³¹ Rosenberg, *Cap Anson 1*, 35.

franchise.³² He owned stock in the Chicago ballclub, and when the New York franchise was on the verge of bankruptcy and the stability of the league was threatened, Anson was among several National League men to invest in that club as well. While he had an obvious financial stake, Anson's support of the National League gave him another opportunity to display his loyalty. Under the national agreement between ball clubs, teams could place a predetermined number of players on a reserve list thereby preventing other teams from signing them between seasons. For most of his career, Anson was not placed on that list by Chicago, and in the face of occasional overtures by other teams, Anson proudly proclaimed his loyalty to the Chicago club.³³

The Chicago team reflected Anson's identity in a variety of ways. Following Anson's own character, the team was considered to be the most disciplined in the league. Even when featuring some players of questionable character, their individual statistical achievements while with the Chicago club often exceeded what they had done elsewhere due to Anson's diligence.³⁴ Moreover, the public identification of the team's nickname came directly from Anson. While not formalized at the time, team nicknames were often subject to change and typically were based on some outstanding feature of the club such as their uniform color. While the Chicago club had been known as the White Stockings until 1887, an influx of new, younger players juxtaposed against the aging Anson prompted a change to the Colts, and at times even to "Anson's Colts" to directly refer to the man that held the reins.³⁵

³² Ward's league lasted only one year and many players returned to the National League either immediately or after brief employment with the rival American Association.

³³ Rosenberg, *Cap Anson 4*, 68.

³⁴ Rosenberg, *Cap Anson 1*, 65, 68.

³⁵ When Anson eventually left the club, the team was briefly known as the Orphans until finally becoming the Cubs in 1902. Both nicknames implied an absent parental figure.

The ability to be regarded as a gentleman had indeed been democratized and expanded in American society by Anson's time according to Stow Persons in *The Decline of the American Gentility*. Membership in what Persons calls the new gentry elite that emerged in the wake of the Jacksonian era was available to nearly anyone who patterned his lifestyle on the Emersonian principles of individualism and self-reliance.³⁶ Anson was clearly worthy of respect within the game from both his on- and off-field actions, and away from the field Anson held certain attributes commonly associated with gentlemen. He had attained wealth through his own physical efforts. He was recognized as a leader and was regarded as a professional. Merely being a professional baseball player put Anson in a suspect social position, but American society had seen others overcome similar obstacles. Despite the lower social rank normally associated with their profession, actors like Forrest and McCullough had been able to achieve gentleman status in their lifetime by their embodiment on stage of the principles of individualism and self-reliance. Social status tied to vocation was not an impenetrable barrier for status as a gentleman in late-nineteenth century America.

The perception existed both inside and outside of baseball that one could not be both a ballplayer and a gentleman. Prominent former professional player turned lawyer John Montgomery Ward expressed such feelings publicly. He intimated a duality among players between behaving as a professional was required to behave and behaving as a gentleman should behave. Players were obligated to kick vehemently against an unfavorable decision as a demonstration to both their owners and fans that they were committed to winning. Of course, the public arguments were not considered to be gentlemanly behavior. Ward believed a vast number of players would prefer to accept an umpire's erroneous decision and behave in a gentlemanly

³⁶ Stow Persons, *The Decline of the American Gentility* (New York: Columbia UP, 1973), vi, 3.

way if it was not for the demands of the profession.³⁷ Though in his personal life Anson held all the trappings of a gentleman, most people saw the displays of uncouth behavior on the ball field and the frequency with which it occurred. The result was that the image of Anson the ballplayer superseded the image of Anson as a gentleman and the duality could not be effectively reconciled.

This did not prevent him from being a celebrity, however, and Anson was indeed a celebrity in the baseball world by 1895. The reputation he had earned through his accomplishments and style on the field preceded him both in league cities and on separate tours. In each of these locations, fans paid to see him, and non-fans came to see the man the newspapers seemed to so often categorize as a menace. He had appeared in advertisements and his preferences in presidential elections were noted in the newspapers.³⁸ Those newspaper writers as well as the advertisers of E & J Burke brewery borrowed from Anson's baseball fame and, by taking him out of his baseball context, attributed a level of credibility to him regarding his apparent choice of beverage or politician. These agents performed the role of the cultural mediator by promoting his expertise as a leader as a justification for the relevancy of his perspective. When theatrical producer and playwright Charles Hale Hoyt attempted in 1895 to capitalize in the theatre on Anson's achieved celebrity from the ball field, the basis for it was in his ability to draw people to see him in person. Celebrity provided him his greatest potential as a theatrical star.

During the same time period Anson's persona in professional baseball was being developed, the American theatre was changing in ways that made it possible for athletes to appear as theatrical stars. In the 1870s the established production model of a star actor travelling

³⁷ *New York Sun*, January 30, 1898. Rosenberg, *Cap Anson 1*, 90.

³⁸ Rosenberg, *Cap Anson 1*, 58.

to different stock companies and performing in several plays in repertory was eclipsed by a new, more cost-efficient model. The new combination companies formed in one city and then toured an entire production of one play with a complete cast and required scenic elements to different cities. Still based around a star performer, these new performance packages changed not only touring practices but also the existence of stock companies in New York which had specialized in repertory performances.³⁹

One effect of the change was on the quality of set pieces used in productions, as John Frick points out in the essay “A Changing Theatre: New York and Beyond” in *The Cambridge History of the American Theatre*. Longer runs of a play permitted more money to be invested in the spectacular elements for a particular production rather than for multiple plays.⁴⁰ As a result of the increased investments, the aesthetic quality of the scenic elements was greater and could better reflect a producer’s desire for spectacle. The productions by Henry Irving in 1883 included more three-dimensional set pieces than had been seen before on American stages.

Accompanying the increase in scenic realism was an increased desire for verisimilitude in the presentation of roles. English actor E.S. Willard scheduled a special matinee for local potters when he performed in New York portraying a potter in an 1890 production of *The Middleman* in order to lend credence to his ability to perform the tasks of the profession correctly.⁴¹

Representational settings and verisimilitude were marks of a push in the commercial theatre toward authenticity in productions.

³⁹ John Frick, “A Changing Theatre: New York and Beyond,” in *The Cambridge History of American Theatre, Volume Two: 1870-1945*, eds. Don B. Wilmeth and Christopher Bigsby (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999), 200-1.

⁴⁰ Frick, “Changing Theatre,” 202.

⁴¹ *New York Times*, December 23, 1890; *Chicago Evening Post*, October 23, 1891.

Even more authentic was the use of professionals to portray people from that profession on stage. For athletes on stage, it began with professional boxers John L. Sullivan and James J. Corbett who had both starred in different plays as boxers in the early 1890s.⁴² Under the star-system that preceded the era, the star would have to know several roles and be able to play them in repertory. That was no longer the case. While neither boxer could be considered a gifted actor in comparison to other theatrical performers, the nominal star of a production did not necessarily have to be a competent actor in the wake of the change to the combination company model of theatre. Both men were indeed stars of their profession having earned recognition as champions in the sport before they appeared on stage in starring roles.

Previous to his starring role in *A Runaway Colt*, Anson had appeared on stage once before. On October 5, 1888, both the Chicago and New York teams went to see Charles Hoyt's *Parlour Match* at the Theatre Comique in Harlem after the conclusion of the second game of their three game series. Comedians Charles E. Evans and William F. Hoey starred in the production, and before the performance, they met with their friend Anson. According to the *Chicago Daily News*, Anson confided to Hoey at the meeting "that he believed he was cut out for an actor, although cruel fate had decreed it otherwise." Hoey convinced him to give it a chance that night and, as the *Chicago Daily Tribune* wrote, "they hurried him behind the scenes and drilled him for about fifteen minutes in the lines written for the boss of a gang of laborers." His costume of long, grey whiskers, a wig, and blue overalls mostly obscured him, but Anson delivered two lines and appeared in a dance number alongside the rest of the cast.⁴³

⁴² Gerald Bordman, *American Theatre: A Chronicle of Comedy and Drama, 1869-1914* (New York: Oxford UP, 1994), 298-9, 337, 339, 367.

⁴³ *Chicago Daily News*, October 6, 1888; *Chicago Daily Tribune*, October 6, 1888.

The reactions of the players from both the Chicago and New York teams to Anson's appearance in the play drew special attention to him. According to the *Chicago Tribune*, Anson kept step during the dance by intently watching the man next to him, and nearly fell down a trap door after trying to avoid a bucket of water being thrown at another character. The *New York Times* reported Anson did not have much to do in the part, but "what he did was done rather awkwardly." He maintained to the *Chicago Daily News* that he thought he could develop into a fine actor, noting, "With a little training, I think I would be all right."⁴⁴

The *Chicago Tribune* reported that Evans and Hoey offered Anson an engagement for the winter, but he refused because of his impending tour of Australia with other baseball stars. In a brief interview in the *Chicago Daily News*, Anson said that Hoyt had offered him \$500 a week to play "Monk" in one of the playwright's new pieces, but Anson doubted the sincerity of the offer, since Hoyt knew about the Australia trip as well.⁴⁵ Rumors again appeared in 1891 of Hoyt writing a play about Anson, but the play would not actually work for the playwright until four years later.⁴⁶

When *A Runaway Colt* was produced in 1895, it was Hoyt's thirteenth play to debut in New York City and the fourth at his own theatre. After beginning with several purely farcical plays, Douglas L. Hunt points out that Hoyt started to write more satirical comedies concerned with social themes such as women's suffrage and Prohibition.⁴⁷ Along this vein, *A Runaway Colt* deals with gambling and baseball's place in society, but it also contains some of the same broad

⁴⁴ *Chicago Daily Tribune*, October 6, 1888; *New York Tribune*, October 6, 1888.

⁴⁵ *Chicago Daily News*, October 6, 1888; *Chicago Daily Tribune*, October 6, 1888; *New York Tribune*, October 6, 1888.

⁴⁶ Rosenberg, *Cap Anson* 2, 58

⁴⁷ Douglas L. Hunt, introduction to *Five Plays by Charles H. Hoyt* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1941), xi-xii.

humor that made Hoyt's earlier plays popular. Hoyt had written characters enamored with sports in previous plays, but this was his first play focused around a sport.

The story of the play begins with a young man, Manley Manners, who has contracted to play baseball for the Chicago team without the knowledge of his well respected family. As the play opens, he has left the team without permission. At his family's home, he awaits a visit from Chicago Captain Adrian Anson who he hopes can convince Manley's father to let him rejoin the team. After Reverend Manners eventually grants permission, the family follows the team south to St. Augustine, Florida and then to Chicago. Meanwhile, a scheming bank cashier has convinced Manley's younger brother to bet bank money on Chicago to win a game, so he can blackmail the family into letting him marry the young woman they have been raising when Chicago loses the game. The expected happy ending comes as Anson saves the day in the bottom of the ninth inning with a two-run home run thereby not only winning the game but saving the entire family in the process.

The image of Anson presented in the play is managed to an almost impeccable degree. The play's presentation of Anson addresses the man's reputation in the first act. To keep his family from suffering embarrassment as a result of small town gossip, Manley has persuaded Anson to register at the hotel using his first name as his surname. When Anson arrives at the house early to speak to Manley before his scheduled arrival for dinner at six, the family hears Anson announced to be Mr. Adrian. In contrast to the descriptions of Anson given by some of the Manners family calling him "awful" and a "brutal creature," the servant reports this Mr. Adrian looks "very respectable."⁴⁸ The duality that is created in the play between Anson's preceding reputation and his physical presence as Mr. Adrian allows for some humorous moments when he is described to himself to be a "terrible man" and based on misconstrued

⁴⁸ Charles Hale Hoyt, *A Runaway Colt*, in *The Dramatic Works of Charles H. Hoyt*, 8, 11, 16.

newspaper reports, a pugilist and a thief.⁴⁹ While the horrible Anson is said to “drink terribly,” the gentlemanly Mr. Adrian refuses the offer of wine, stating simply that he “doesn’t indulge.”⁵⁰ Established as a family man with a wife and two daughters, a businessman who can offer Manley a well-paying job, and as a very polite teetotaler, one member of the family remarks that Mr. Adrian is “so different from Anson.”⁵¹

Even though the split is played for comic effect, this duality of Anson reflected the public’s perception of him. As a ballplayer, he was a terrible force on the field, but Anson held all the bearing of a gentleman when he was away from it. Hoyt uses the juxtaposition of the mythic tales and terrible image of Anson the ballplayer against the physical presence of the real Anson on stage to humanize him, and the emphasis on his gentlemanly conduct distances him from the negative associations his name carried. By the end of the first act, when Anson and Adrian are revealed to be the same person, the audience, like the Manners family, has been guided to see Anson not only as the ballplayer, but also as the person.

As the play continues and moves from the domestic setting of the Manners’ home to the ball fields of St. Augustine, Florida, and in the final two acts Chicago, the idea of Anson as a baseball player is reintegrated into this gentlemanly mien. The skills that make Anson a fierce competitor on the ball field prove useful in his ability to save the family from ruin. His physical strength honed over the years through his playing allows him to lower Dolton Manners down through the window to retrieve the betting ticket that would guarantee his family’s ruin if lost. During this rescue, Anson also displays his cunning by convincing Babe Manners that she cannot let go of the rope or her brother will fall. The situation forces her to stand and listen to a young

⁴⁹ Hoyt, *A Runaway Colt*, 17, 19.

⁵⁰ Hoyt, *A Runaway Colt*, 20.

⁵¹ Hoyt, *A Runaway Colt*, 20.

man, Tennyson Greenfield, who has been trying to clear up a misunderstanding with her.⁵² The strength and intelligence for which Anson was known on the field are recontextualized into the performance of noble acts of saving a family and helping a young couple in love get back together.

After the first act, the play does not ignore the unruly aspects of Anson's baseball persona; rather, it does redirect them somewhat to make him seem much less contemptible. Deserved or not, Anson's overriding perception had him as a public user of profanity.⁵³ In the play, Tennyson, who has never uttered a profane word in his life, claims that to do so is one of the treasures in life and should be saved for a special occasion. Anson jokes that Tennyson has obviously never had to deal with an umpire. When the young man is set to eventually let loose a string of profanities at the end of the act, Anson clasps his hand over the man's mouth and warns the women present to run because he will not be able to hold him for long.⁵⁴ By using another character to offer up a defense of profanity, Hoyt is able to justify Anson's association with swearing and use it to comic effect without actually putting the words in Anson's mouth. Further, Anson's joke gives an extremely limited context for when he believes such action is permissible for him – only within the boundaries of a ballgame, and then still only in confrontation with an umpire. Anson's attempt to prevent the cursing by Tennyson by physical means reinforces the implied limit between what is allowed by Anson the ballplayer and what by Anson the gentleman.

⁵² Hoyt, *A Runaway Colt*, 76.

⁵³ Biographer Howard Rosenberg finds Anson reportedly using profanity in arguments on the field, and concedes that Anson likely had several favorite profane expressions, but doubts that the majority of the time they were used in a voice above a whisper. *Cap Anson I*, 94-6.

⁵⁴ Hoyt, *A Runaway Colt*, 41, 59

In a similar fashion, Hoyt addresses the most notorious element of Anson's persona – his proclivity for arguing with the umpire. During the final act as characters are describing the ballgame being played off stage, a character enters to say that the umpire has beaten the Chicago team by calling a player out who should not have been, and as a result Anson was kicking. The event occurs off stage and the stage directions state that the “quarrel at back gradually subsides” before the curtains are drawn back by a character and the final inning is played in full view of the audience.⁵⁵ The description by the characters frames Anson's protest as a justified cause putting the audience in sympathy with not only Anson but also the family whose salvation depends on a win by his team. Further, by placing it off stage, Hoyt effectively deemphasizes this aspect of Anson's persona and implies his other qualities are much more representative.

Throughout the rest of the play, Anson's virtues are on display as much as his vices are softened. While in Florida, Tennyson encounters Anson with “I know you won't have a drink, but will you?”⁵⁶ His refusal again reinforces his actual teetotaler position by accentuating the difference between doing it for maintaining a public image and doing it for his own reasons. Anson's honesty is put on display when the play's villains approach him about throwing the game. With the intention of a \$2,000 bribe, which is approximately the yearly salary to be paid to Manley Manners, and the reasoning that one game does not decide a championship, Will Haight approaches Anson in his office off stage. After several crashes are heard, Will staggers back to the stage “a total wreck” just before the act ends. In the act's final tableau, Anson asks him threateningly if he has anything more to say. Will replies, “Not a word.”⁵⁷ Later, as the two

⁵⁵ Hoyt, *A Runaway Colt*, 99.

⁵⁶ Hoyt, *A Runaway Colt*, 41. (Emphasis original)

⁵⁷ Hoyt, *A Runaway Colt*, 80.

Haight brothers arrive at the ballpark to witness the decisive game, they recall the thrashing given to Will by Anson earlier in the play.⁵⁸ Despite his reputation for fighting and aggression, the play again puts strict perimeters on when Anson would actually resort to violence, and makes it clear it would only be done in the cause of doing what is right.

In a minor plot point, Anson discloses later in the play that the one thing that may cause him to take a drink would be the eccentric New York socialite and celebrity chaser named Rosie Hope who has set her sights on Anson while in Florida. The situation is presented as one of the penalties of greatness and celebrity. Anson fears the possible scandal that could begin in the gossip section of the New York papers if she is spotted with him because each is known in their own way. Anson goes out of his way to avoid contact with her. In one of the play's funnier moments, after tearing off his overcoat when the sounds of someone possibly drowning are heard, Anson deliberately puts back on his coat and hat and hastily exits the stage when the victim is announced to be Rosie.⁵⁹ He declares, "I'm a married man with a family of girls. I don't want any woman, young or old running after me."⁶⁰ His aversion to even the appearance of marital impropriety is repeated in the play after he has pulled Dolton back in through the window. The young Babe Manners hugs him as he uncomfortably exclaims, "What would Mrs. Anson say!"⁶¹

When each notorious vice of baseball players is touched upon – drinking, gambling, and carousing with women – they are all addressed specifically as things in which Anson does not take part. As if to reinforce the idea of his overwhelming virtue in relation to the popular

⁵⁸ Hoyt, *A Runaway Colt*, 91.

⁵⁹ Hoyt, *A Runaway Colt*, 52. It is later implied in the play that Rosie feigned drowning in order to get Anson to jump in to save her. *A Runaway Colt*, 56.

⁶⁰ Hoyt, *A Runaway Colt*, 51.

⁶¹ Hoyt, *A Runaway Colt*, 78.

perception of a baseball player, Anson's dissociation from each negative aspect is shown at least twice in the play. Hoyt has made Anson into a popularly acceptable representation of a ballplayer by acknowledging but minimizing Anson's ungentlemanly conduct and displaying all of his honorable points. Hoyt's play shows that a gentleman can be a baseball player, and it also exhibits the game itself as a virtuous endeavor. Hoyt presents that the game could contain men of physical ability who fulfilled the American male ideal of self-sufficiency and personal fortitude.

In his time as a theatre professional, Hoyt had seen the actors that had embodied that ideal gain a level of respectability that he was effectively proposing was within reach of ballplayers. Benjamin McArthur points out several factors in his book, *Actors and American Culture, 1880-1920*, that enabled the rise of actors within the American social hierarchy during this time. McArthur argues the increasing urbanization of the country in the last two decades of the century saw a decline of the role of the church and of polite society as authorities in shaping urban culture. Actors, as part of a larger mass culture that reflected and fulfilled the needs of the urban public, were able to become recognized as respectable members of the society.⁶² By the mid-1890s, baseball's role as part of that mass culture had been increasing to the point where players of the game could make a similar transition to respectability.

In the play, the most impassioned defense of the game occurs at the end of the first act and comes from the character of the Bishop visiting the Manners' home. First shocking the family by expressing his personal admiration for Anson, the Bishop explains his own past with the game as the way he paid his way through college. He cites the myriad of professions in the stands – from clergy and physicians to merchants and college professors – as proof of the game's respectability. When asked by a member of the family whether the game exists only for gambling, the Bishop replies that people already gamble on everything from yacht races to

⁶² Benjamin McArthur, *Actors and American Culture, 1880-1920* (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1984), 141.

national elections, and he maintains that both drinking and gambling can be avoided at the ballpark.⁶³ His argument for the game is successful with the family, and it serves as a blueprint for how Hoyt constructs the play itself to bring the game toward respectability by showing the benefits to its players, the decency of the fans it draws and the negation of its association with gambling.

While the promotion of Anson as the ideal baseball player takes central focus in the play and proves the reputability of players, other players are shown to be further examples of admiration. Manley Manners is a noble, upstanding young man whose guilt at the breach of familial trust forces him to reconcile both his family and his desired profession. All of the ballplayers seen on stage are presented as respectful young men. Even though they poke fun at the former ballplayer, Sager, who is now the clubhouse attendant, they all respectfully shake his hand when they discover that he was responsible for getting Anson to play professional baseball.⁶⁴ The game is presented as good, honest work requiring intelligence and physical strength built through training. Those who have played the game profit from it and not solely financially. As the Bishop says, “the boys who win the battles on the ball field grow to be the men who win the battles of life.”⁶⁵ Moreover, the Bishop serves as example that the money that can be made from the game can elevate the poor into positions of respect.

In the final act as the fans are arriving for the game at the ballpark, Hoyt subtly appropriates an element of well-respected contemporary homes by having guests announced as they arrive. Not every fan in attendance is so honored, but the scorecard vendor and an offstage orchestra announce several high-profile fans who all happen to be actors. Among the fans

⁶³ Hoyt, *A Runaway Colt*, 26-7.

⁶⁴ Hoyt, *A Runaway Colt*, 61.

⁶⁵ Hoyt, *A Runaway Colt*, 26.

announced are DeWolf Hopper, Digby Bell, H.C. Barnabee, Nat Roth and Della, Nat Goodwin, and George Floyd. As each arrive, their identity is reinforced with either musical accompaniment, such as the song “Baby” from Hopper’s starring turn in *Wang*, or a spoken reference to a well-known role, such as Barnabee’s Sherriff of Nottingham.⁶⁶ Like the Bishop’s focus on those from the professional ranks as fans in his appeal to the Manners, Hoyt has used several well-respected people as attending fans who would be known by his target audience of theatre goers. Each actor mentioned was a well-known fan of the game, and though the characters that appeared on stage were not the actors themselves, the inclusion of them in the play as a procession serves as a visual reinforcement of the decency of baseball crowds and, by extension, the game itself.

Hoyt shows that baseball is something that has both a history and a future and should be therefore respected by having the old-timer Sager talk to the players in the clubhouse. It is clear in the world of the play that the future of the game does not involve gambling. Though a wager is a key element to the plot, there are no players involved in it beyond Will Haight’s futile attempt to bribe Anson to throw the game. Indeed the characters who are involved in the bet are shown throughout to be either villains like the Hights or fools like Dolton Manners. Hoyt further distances them from the idea of professional gamblers, whose impetus for placing a wager is to solely make money, by establishing for both Rankin Haight and Dolton a larger motivation for their actions to be wed to women that would not normally have them.

The play debuted on November 12, 1895 and had three performances at the Weitling Opera House in Syracuse. Initial reviews believed that it showed promise and that Hoyt’s writing

⁶⁶ Hoyt, *A Runaway Colt*, 90. Barnabee played in the DeKovan and Smith operetta *Robin Hood*. The scorecard vendor mentions that it is a pity that Mr. MacDonald could not join him at the ball park. MacDonald played Little John in the productions.

suited Anson well.⁶⁷ The show toured through upper New York stage stopping in Auburn, Oswego, Troy, Buffalo, and eventually Brooklyn before its scheduled opening in New York City. Before opening in the city on December 2 for its three week run, Hoyt changed the final act to put more baseball action on stage including the entire final inning between Anson's Colts and the Baltimore team – complete with audible cracks of the bat and decisions of the umpire.⁶⁸ When possible, Hoyt employed other actual players to participate in the final inning. The presence of other professional players on the stage like Arlie Latham and umpire Tim Hurst increased the authenticity of the play's climactic ballgame. The intended effect was that when Anson hit the ball tossed to him from off stage for the game-winning home run, it would seem like a moment that could have actually happened rather than a scripted one.

The production travelled to Chicago where it spent the week of Christmas at the Grand Opera House before moving to Milwaukee and eventually closing its run in Minneapolis on January 11. The production was not successful financially, and its tour, which was scheduled to proceed to Cleveland and Pittsburgh, was much shorter than anticipated. Anson claimed later that Hoyt closed the production because he was having difficulties with another of his shows running at the time and decided to cut the run short. Anson boasted that the production came within \$23 of breaking a record at the Grand Opera House in Chicago, with \$2000 coming on Christmas night alone, and that it had the most successful week by a show in Chicago since the 1893 World's Fair.⁶⁹ The report from Chicago in the *New York Clipper* notes that the production

⁶⁷ Rosenberg, *Cap Anson 2*, 61.

⁶⁸ Fleitz, *Cap Anson*, 243.

⁶⁹ Rosenberg, *Cap Anson 2*, 65-6.

did have a successful week. However the same piece implies that the show was intended to run another week at the same location but a change of bill had recently been made.⁷⁰

The play certainly had neither the longevity nor the financial success of Hoyt's previous pieces. The critics directly blamed Anson as a performer. From the beginning of the production reviews commented on vocal quality that was monotonous and line delivery that varied neither for situation or staging.⁷¹ With his legs and hands in constant motion, he was visibly uncomfortable on stage until the final act when he was required only to play baseball, and he looked to one reviewer that he was desperate to be sitting whenever he was standing and just as anxious to be standing when he was sitting.⁷² Though he claimed that for his debut in Syracuse that he was simply waiting for his cue, reviews from several different locations noted that whatever scene he was playing would grind to a halt when he forgot his lines. The rest of the cast did not fare much better in many of the reviews with the most scathing notice coming from Anson's hometown *Chicago Times* which called the entire production a "spectacle of incompetence for three long hours."⁷³

The problem, some believed, was that in seeking Anson to play Anson, Hoyt received precisely that. The same *Chicago Times* review believed that Anson "defied every canon of histrionic art." President of the National League Nick Young told the *Washington Post* a month after the play's closure that he was not surprised it failed and that the public did not take to Anson as an actor. He added, "He has a stern, cold demeanor on and off the ball field, and an

⁷⁰ *New York Clipper*, January 4, 1896. It is likely that it was the three week run in New York City that doomed the play financially. Though it was never well-received critically, the novelty of having Anson on stage made the production successful at several locations.

⁷¹ Rosenberg, *Cap Anson 2*, 63.

⁷² *Oswego Daily Times*, November 16, 1895.

⁷³ Rosenberg, *Cap Anson 2*, 64.

audience in the theater wouldn't warm to him despite his great reputation as a ball player."⁷⁴ In a satirical article calling Anson a disciple of the Eleanor Duse style of realistic acting that eschews exaggerated nature while on stage, the *New York Sun* declared that Anson's triumph was "as a realistic portrayal of a man who cannot act, and doesn't propose to try."⁷⁵ While both Young and the writer for the *Sun* were judging the artistic merit of Anson's performance, Anson's failure as an actor in fact served to strengthen his authenticity and presence as a ballplayer on the stage. His inability to effectively play the role aesthetically served to reinforce the idea that he was in fact only a baseball player, and it helped to increase the authenticity Hoyt was trying to build.

The alterations Hoyt made to the play between its opening in Syracuse and its debut on the New York stage were done to give the production more authenticity. The review of the opening performance by the *Syracuse Standard* began with a lament that the ball playing of the final inning near the end was not visible to the audience. It was merely described by the characters in the grandstand and supplemented by the very impressive sounds of the bat striking the ball. The same paper reported that Hoyt had already made changes before the play left town for a one night performance in Auburn, NY.⁷⁶ The changes centered on putting at least some of the described action from the ballgame onto the stage so it could be seen by the audience. As the spectacle of the final act grew, so did the cast until it swelled to more than forty members, most of whom were employed solely for the staged ballgame.

As mentioned above, real life players when available were engaged to play the roles of the Baltimore club. Early in the New York run, several actual members of the champion Baltimore team greeted Anson backstage and were enlisted to play themselves in the staged

⁷⁴ Rosenberg, *Cap Anson* 2, 66. *Washington Post*, February 12, 1896.

⁷⁵ *New York Sun*, December 16, 1895.

⁷⁶ *Syracuse Standard*, November 12, 1895 and November 14, 1895.

game much like he had been years earlier by his comedian friends.⁷⁷ Other professionals like Arlie Latham and Tim Hurst joined the production piecemeal during the run to work alongside the actors cast to play real life ballplayers. The incorporation of other actual ballplayers in the game did make the playing of the final inning more credible as well as increase the spectacle of the show's end, but more conspicuous was the inclusion of actors filling the roles of other known people.

With the addition of a realistic baseball scene into the play, hiring only professional players to fulfill those additional roles would not be cost effective, so the roles were filled by actors instead. The *Brooklyn Eagle's* review noted, supported with a quote by Anson, that the actors cast to play several of the ballplayers were much too overweight to be believable in their roles, and that one of the actual Chicago players in the audience was quite amused to see his portrayer on stage.⁷⁸ Also, Hoyt had included the above mentioned parade of famous actors into the grandstand just before the game is set to start. Along with actors portraying Colt players such as Bill Lange and Bill Everitt as well as players for the Baltimore team, stand-ins were also required to fill the roles of recognizable theatrical actors such as Digby Bell, DeWolf Hopper and Nat Goodwin. The absences of these real-life actors, who are identified both by name and by a distinguishable role they had played, as well as the presence of noticeably unfit ballplayers work to enhance Anson's presence as the only person on stage who is not being impersonated by another. Just as his inability to conform to the conventions of stage acting emphasizes his authenticity in the role, Hoyt's specific calling attention to Anson's presence through the absence of others reinforces the perception that Anson is exactly who he appears to be on stage.

⁷⁷ Fleitz, *Cap Anson*, 244. The players decided some impromptu retribution for being cast as the losers in the final scene and as Anson rounded third base after his game-winning hit, one of the players tripped him causing him to crash to the stage floor.

⁷⁸ *Brooklyn Eagle*, November 26, 1895.

In the preview for the play's first performance, the *Syracuse Herald* wrote that Hoyt was not treating his subject for the play satirically for a change because he "admires the game and the sturdy, honest athletes engaged in it." The preview went on to say that the play showed "how honestly, incorruptibly, and how far beyond the reach of the influence of the gambling fraternity our national game is."⁷⁹ Hoyt's desire to have his play show the world that the game was honest, incorruptible and an asset to society used Anson as its standard bearer. Crucial to Hoyt's case was Anson's presence in the role portraying himself. Though considered an aesthetic and financial failure primarily because of his performance, Anson's inability to be seen as anything other than a ballplayer bolstered Hoyt's implied argument that the game and its players were worthy of respectability by foregrounding the authenticity of the man who was the popular representation of professional baseball players in the last decades of the nineteenth century. Hoyt's writing made Anson and the game seem respectable, but Anson's performance made the content seem believable. Following the play's run in Chicago the *New York Clipper* noted that "baseball cranks consider Anson a great actor. The people of the dramatic profession consider him a great ball player."⁸⁰ That he was both was what made him so effective.

Still, Anson's reputation would carry the mark of his failed stage performance back to the ball fields for the final two seasons of his career. The crowds that enjoyed seeing him fail on the field had a fresh wound at which to pick. He was teased by fans, players and writers both on the field and in the papers. Opposing teams asked him why the rest of the cast had not used coaching signals to tell him when to act.⁸¹ To make a living as he grew older occasionally playing

⁷⁹ *Syracuse Herald*, November 10, 1895.

⁸⁰ *New York Clipper*, January 4, 1896.

⁸¹ Fleitz, *Cap Anson*, 246.

exhibition or semi-professional games, Anson turned to vaudeville. More than ten years after his final year in the league beginning in the fall of 1910, his acts centered on his career and legacy in the game like most ballplayers on the stage. He offered his opinions on current ballplayers and told stories of his playing days when, by his account, players were uniformly better. He recited a baseball poem by Grantland Rice and eventually included skits written by Billy Jerome, Ring Lardner, and George M. Cohan. In addition to vaudeville houses where he would perform up to four times a day, Anson also sought bookings to perform his act at league parks. His acts became popular enough to be included on the Orpheum circuit of vaudeville theaters. Refusing or denied financial assistance from the league in which he was once the most prominent figure, Anson's theatrical career eventually provided him with a steady income following his retirement from the game. It also gave many people the opportunity to see him that had never seen him in person on the baseball field. Before his death in 1922, listed in the Chicago census records of the 1910s, Anson's occupation was marked as "actor," but all of his performances featured him appearing only as himself.

CHAPTER 2

Less Applause When He Finished Than When He Entered: Mike “King” Kelly Performing Success and Failure on the Field and on the Stage

In his 1888 book *Play Ball: Stories of the Diamond Field*, Mike Kelly recounts his first theatrical endeavor. As a boy in Paterson, New Jersey, he produced a play for the other neighborhood boys alongside childhood friend and fellow future professional baseball player Jim McCormick. At the end of their play, the eighteenth century English thief Jack Sheppard is hanged for his crimes.¹ Except for the quick reaction of his father, McCormick, who was playing Sheppard, nearly perished at the same time as his character. Until that point, Kelly explains, he and his friend were convinced that the best professions they could have a future careers would be as railroad engineers, baseball players, or as actors. While the incident seemed to have cured McCormick of the acting bug, Kelly ended the tale with, “I still have hopes, however.”²

Earlier in 1888, Kelly made his Boston stage debut as Dusty Bob in Charles Hoyt’s *A Rag Baby* at the Park Theatre. Though he had briefly appeared in a one-time benefit sketch in Detroit earlier in the decade, the Park Theatre appearance was his first as acting a character in a full-length play. Despite poor weather and a play that was nearing four-years old, the Park was full to overflowing. At his first appearance late in the third and final act, the show was stopped

¹ Kelly does not mention the precise source material for the play. Although likely suspects include WT Montcrieff’s *Jack Sheppard, the Housebreaker, or London in 1724* from 1825, William Harrison Ainsworth’s novel *Jack Sheppard*, or the John Buckstone stage adaptation of the novel from 1839, the version performed was probably a bastardized version of the story.

² Mike Kelly, *Play Ball: Stories of the Diamond Field* (Boston: Press of Emery & Hughes, c1888; repr., Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2006), 8-9.

for several minutes due to the large and loud reception he received for stepping on stage.³ In the newspaper reports afterward, the headlines featured Kelly's name, and he was mentioned in the stories well before the production's star, Charley Reed. The Hoyt & Thomas Company enjoyed packed houses throughout Kelly's limited engagement during the production's Boston run. Such attention hardly seemed fitting for a novice actor with only ten lines in the play, but the acclaim surrounding Kelly was due less to his acting ability or even his being a baseball player than it was to his status as Boston's newest celebrity figure.

Like the other ballplayers of the time that appeared on the stage, Kelly's participation was clearly a gimmick used to bring patrons to the theatre. However, none of his contemporaries had fame on a scale comparable to Kelly. As it was with other players, his persona was built initially through his achievements on the field and the style with which he accomplished them, but after his sale to Boston, Kelly's persona became inseparable from the ideas of wealth and success. This chapter examines Kelly's persona before and after the sale and the interplay between his work on the field and on the stage until his death in 1894. By the time of his Park theatre debut, Kelly's stage presence became about more than just being a professional baseball player. As his dual careers continued and eventually declined, Kelly was at once a ballplayer acting and an actor playing baseball.

Kelly played professional baseball at the major league level for thirteen years. His career spanned three leagues and four cities, but most of his statistical success came as a player for Cap Anson's Chicago National League team. During the seven seasons he spent in Chicago from 1880 to 1886, Kelly led the league twice in batting average and three times in runs scored. He consistently appeared in the top ten players in the league in those two categories as well as hits, doubles, and home runs. A key member of Anson's team, Kelly helped Chicago finish in first

³ *Boston Herald*, March 27, 1888. Rosenberg, *Cap Anson 2*, 45.

place in the league in five of the seven years he played there and in second place during one other year. Following Kelly's departure, Chicago would not win another league championship under Anson. While his statistics and on-field accomplishments placed him among the elite players in the game, it was Kelly's style of play that distinguished him from many of his contemporaries.

Highly regarded by other players for his intelligence, Kelly was either an innovator or contributor to the development of several tactics still used in the game today. Marty Appel, one of Kelly's biographers, notes that he was credited along with Anson as possibly originating the hit and run before it was popularized and put into consistent use by the Baltimore Orioles of the 1890s.⁴ In his book, Kelly suggests himself as the first catcher to start using signs to the pitcher, which became standard practice within two years.⁵ Perhaps his most recognizable innovation in the game was what would come to be known as the "Kelly Slide." The typical technique as a base runner approached a base was that he would extend himself forward and slide directly toward the base. Kelly's technique required the runner to slide his body behind the base and beyond the reach of the fielder. The runner would then use only one foot to touch the base. The fielder is given less of an opportunity to tag the runner with the ball thereby increasing the possibility of success by the runner.⁶ The maneuver was copied very quickly by other ballplayers and became one of the standard plays of the game.

Kelly excelled as a base runner. He would slow down while running between bases so that he might coax a throw from one of the fielders to the base he was heading to in an attempt to

⁴ Marty Appel, *Slide Kelly Slide: The Wild Life and Times of Mike "King" Kelly, Baseball's First Superstar* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow P., 1996), 42.

⁵ Kelly, *Play Ball*, 25.

⁶ Rosenberg, *Cap Anson 2*, 7.

get him out. Through his delay, another runner might have time to score, and his speed was such that he could often retreat or advance safely.⁷ Additionally, a key element of his base running prowess came from his ability to deceive the pitcher and catcher regarding his intentions to steal a base. Kelly would initially feign indifference toward stealing. Standing motionless on first base until the pitcher began to deliver the ball, Kelly would then take off for second base and often have such an advantage that the catcher would find it useless to attempt to throw him out. This technique was deemed so effective that it was included in a chapter on base running in an instructional book from 1884 on how to play the game.⁸ Biographer Howard Rosenberg found articles describing how Kelly made his deceit even more effective. He would also periodically bluff stealing in order to draw a throw from the catcher while he returned to first base.⁹ While this fooling of the opposition had a strategic use, it had an entertainment value to crowds as well since it appeared that Kelly was toying with the other team. For all his technical skill, Kelly was perhaps an even better showman.

For a portion of his career, when no foul balls were counted as strikes against the batter, Kelly would often purposefully fouling off pitches with either full swings or bunts in order to extend his at-bat indefinitely. The practice had the dual benefit of annoying the pitcher while simultaneously entertaining the crowd. Each foul ball and subsequent bit of laughter from Kelly would delight the crowd and enrage the pitcher until Kelly was eventually drew a walk or found a pitch to his liking.¹⁰ In this way and others, Kelly was an opportunist who took advantage of situations as they arose. One story from an opponent in 1887 tells of Kelly scoring from second.

⁷ Rosenberg, *Cap Anson 2*, 218.

⁸ Kelly, *Play Ball*, 92.

⁹ Rosenberg, *Cap Anson 2*, 264.

¹⁰ *Chicago Tribune*, September 6, 1886.

Looking back to the field, he saw that the batted ball had gone through a gate in right field and the fielder was giving chase. Immediately Kelly ran to shut the gate, allowing the other runners to score as well.¹¹ In another instance, to prevent an appeal by the defense that a runner had not touched a base, which would have continued the game rather than allowing his team to have scored the winning run, Kelly threw the ball into the crowd and the umpire was forced to let the play stand.¹² Without prohibitions against it, Kelly supposedly inserted himself in the game during the middle of a play as a foul ball came near the bench. Announcing “Kelly now catching for Chicago,” he caught the ball and argued the batter must be called out since no rule specified when one player may be substituted for another.¹³ Kelly’s actions in these situations were technically within the rules, or lack thereof, that had been established in the league, and served to create for him an aura of playfulness and excitement that made him a player that people wanted to see.

He also flagrantly broke the rules when he thought he would not get caught. Kelly became noted for his penchant for disregarding third base on his trip around the bases. Games at the time were officiated by only one umpire who typically stood in the middle of the diamond and who had to keep watch of the ball during a play. When a ball was hit to the right side, the umpire’s back would be turned to third base, where a runner could take an unseen shortcut. Appeals by a team against the runner were often unsuccessful as the umpire could not say that he saw anything at all and was only allowed to rule on what he saw. Rosenberg’s research notes at least four attempts by Kelly in 1881 alone, the first year that the practice was reported in the

¹¹ Kelly, *Play Ball* 166. *Boston Globe*, March 29, 1887.

¹² Rosenberg, *Cap Anson* 2, 173.

¹³ *New York Telegram*, November 20, 1894. Kelly reportedly lost the argument, but a rule was enacted the next day prohibiting such substitutions.

newspapers.¹⁴ The play became less successful for Kelly later in his career as his reputation grew and umpires, opponents, and crowds were increasingly aware of the possibility. While playing in Providence, an attempt by Kelly was thwarted as the groaning of the crowd alerted the umpire and Kelly was forced to return to third base.¹⁵ In *Play Ball*, Kelly tells of pulling the trick later in his career against Chicago and Cap Anson. He was called out after Anson argued with the umpire, but after the game Anson admitted that he was partly cheering for Kelly as he cut the base.¹⁶ This mixed reaction was likely what fans of other teams felt as well when Kelly performed the trick.

His frequent challenging of the rules gave Kelly frequent opportunity to “kick,” or complain, to the umpire. Even before he joined the Chicago team, Kelly had gained a reputation as a “kicker.”¹⁷ Several times in his book, Kelly mentions that he believed kicking was one of the main attractions of baseball despite the protestations seen in the newspapers. He argues that a good player can only be seen as great in a fan’s eyes through their ability to kick.¹⁸ He used talking as a tactic during the game with a steady stream of chatter from either the bench or a coaching position just off the field. He often attempted to disrupt the opponents by trying to make them laugh with his constant talking.¹⁹ Several stories existed of Kelly’s ability to affect the game itself through only speaking. Boston writer Tim Murnane recalled that when catching Kelly would shift his body so the umpire could not see the location of the ball. He would then

¹⁴ Rosenberg, *Cap Anson* 2, 4.

¹⁵ *Chicago Tribune*, September 22, 1881. Rosenberg, *Cap Anson* 2, 4.

¹⁶ Kelly, *Play Ball*, 34-5.

¹⁷ Appel, *Slide Kelly Slide*, 32.

¹⁸ Kelly, *Play Ball*, 6.

¹⁹ Rosenberg, *Cap Anson* 2, 106.

yell “strike,” before the umpire could rule on the pitch.²⁰ In 1886, after a runner had advanced to second on a passed ball, the player asked Kelly if it had been a foul ball. Kelly responded that it had, and the player started back toward first. After he was tagged with the ball and called out, the player and his captain protested that Kelly had lied. The umpire replied that he had never said that it was foul and the player had instead asked Kelly.²¹ Once while coaching at third base, Kelly called out to the pitcher to see the ball. When the opposing pitcher tossed the ball to Kelly, he stepped out of the way and let it roll away from the field, so Kelly’s teammate could advance from first base.²²

Kelly’s relationship to the fans was also in part dependant on his constant chatter. Like his kicking, it was to him an opportunity to make the game more entertaining. He often teased the fans in the stands by boasting about his own skill or taunting the other team, and in turn, fans made Kelly a target when he made a mistake or his team was behind. In 1887 at a game in Indianapolis, after being thrown out at the plate, Kelly was taunted with the phrase “razzle-dazzle” that he had yelled at the fans earlier in the day. Kelly responded to the crowd with a bow.²³ Actor Digby Bell, Kelly’s friend and a big fan of baseball, believed the effect the crowd could have on a player was similar to applause for an actor and a player would play better to gain the support or sympathy of the home fans.²⁴ For Kelly, the crowd had an integral role in not only how he played on the field but also how he performed.

²⁰ “Murnane Recalls Great Generalship of Mike Kelly,” *The Evening Mail*, December 1912, located in Michael J. Kelly player file, A. Bartlett Giamatti Research Center, National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum, Cooperstown, NY.

²¹ *Chicago Tribune*, August 18, 1886. *Chicago Herald*, August 18, 1886.

²² *Brookfield [NY] Courier*, November 9, 1894.

²³ Rosenberg, *Cap Anson* 2, 29.

²⁴ *New York World*, September 15, 1889. Rosenberg, *Cap Anson* 2, 82-3.

Through all these actions and achievements, Kelly had acquired a good amount of fame in baseball: players knew they had to be aware of his tricks, sportswriters regularly reported his exploits, and fans came to the games to see him. However, Kelly's fame was localized, and it stayed within the game. In the classifications of fame offered by Chris Rojek in his study on celebrity culture, *Celebrity*, Kelly's fame would be considered to be renown but not a full celebrity. For Rojek, the distinguishing characteristic is the proximity of the famous to those who are paying attention. The renowned individual maintains a social or para-social level of contact with the audience much the same as Kelly did through his interactions with fans. The crowd sees themselves on the same level socially as the renown. The leap to celebrity requires more distance between the famous person and the audience that serves to separate the two from each other.²⁵ For Kelly, the agent that distanced him from his audience and put him at the celebrity level was his sale to Boston and his resulting image of wealth.

Within baseball, Kelly's value to a team existed on multiple levels. The ability of proficient batsmen, like Kelly, often played a significant role in putting their teams in positions to win. Winning teams, of course, generated more revenue than did losing teams through increased attendance during regular season games within the league, larger gate receipts from exhibition games played against non-league members, and postseason contests between the leagues that were often winner-take-all series. Kelly's playing helped propel Chicago to multiple league championships, and he was called by one teammate the "life and soul of the Chicagos."²⁶ Between his first and second years with the Chicago team the average per game attendance jumped by 400, and as the team moved into a new park for the 1882 season, attendance averaged

²⁵ Rojek, *Celebrity*, 12.

²⁶ "Ed Williamson on Kelly's Release," Kelly player file, National Baseball Hall of Fame.

3,000 per game.²⁷ With a fan-focused player like Kelly also contributing to a winning team, Chicago was a very popular and profitable ball club.

On the field, catching was the most physically demanding position on a baseball team before protective equipment such as masks or even gloves came into use. Players who were willing to play the position had much greater value to their teams, and they could often demand higher compensation than other positions on the field.²⁸ Kelly appeared as a catcher for more than a quarter of the games he played for Chicago. Mostly used as a relief catcher filling in for the regular catcher earlier in his career, Kelly in 1886 had evenly split the catching duty with Silver Flint. As a player, his all-around play was matched only by one contemporary catcher, Buck Ewing, but as a trickster and as an attraction, he was unrivaled by any of his contemporaries. After the 1886 season, Kelly's last with Chicago, team owner Al Spalding felt Kelly had a value to the team that was hard to measure beyond his statistical achievements. Spalding believed Kelly's trickery on the field, his ability to steady young players and his general amusement of spectators all increased his actual value.²⁹

Kelly understood this multi-faceted value he had to a team, and he expected to be compensated appropriately. As an effort to keep costs under control, the National League had set a cap at \$2,000 for a player's salary in 1885.³⁰ However, these salaries could change throughout the season with bonuses paid or fines levied. Spalding, a well-known temperance supporter, used such fines and withholdings of payment in an effort to keep his players from drinking, and hired

²⁷ <http://www.baseball-almanac.com/teams/cubsatte.shtml> Figures accumulated from *Sporting News* and *New York Times* reports.

²⁸ *Chicago Tribune*, April 10, 1881.

²⁹ *Chicago Herald*, January 9, 1887.

³⁰ Alfred H. Spink, *The National Game*, second ed. (National Game Pub., 1911; repr. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 2000), 28. *New York Times* Oct. 18, 1885 in *Early Innings: A Documentary History of Baseball, 1825-1908* (Lincoln, NE: U Nebraska P, 1995), 139-40.

a private investigator to report on his players' off-field habits – particularly Kelly's, who was famously a frequent bar patron. A detective reported to Spalding that he had seen Kelly in a saloon on Clark Street at three in the morning. The papers sanitized the story by saying that he had been drinking lemonade. Kelly corrected the report, stating publicly, "I never drank a lemonade at that hour in my life. It was straight whiskey!"³¹ Rosenberg's research shows that in 1886 alone, Kelly lost \$325 from his contract as a result of his drinking.³² Making less than what he had been signed for and much less than his overall value was really worth, Kelly made public his refusal to play for Spalding's team again after that season.

Due to an implied clause in the contract of every professional baseball player, Kelly was bound to the Chicago team until they decided what to do with him.³³ An attempt by the New York team to buy Kelly's rights for \$7,750 was rebuffed because Spalding refused to let Kelly play for that city.³⁴ Boston, which had traditionally seen larger than average crowds whenever Kelly's Chicago team visited, offered \$5,000 at first, then \$9,000, and eventually met Spalding's asking price of \$10,000.³⁵ The sale was conditioned on the Boston team reaching a contract with Kelly, who wanted more than the standard \$2,000. The agreement they reached called for Kelly to receive the maximum salary per league rules, but the Boston owners agreed to pay Kelly

³¹ Appel, *Slide Kelly Slide*, 99.

³² Rosenberg, *Cap Anson 2*, 110.

³³ Seymour and Mills, *Early Years*, 109. The reserve clause was not formally written into player contracts until the 1887 season. However a clause in the standard contract required the player to abide by the written laws of the league. The implication of signing the contract was that the player was subject to the agreement between the National League and the American Association from 1883 that had explicitly stated the reserve clause.

³⁴ Appel, *Slide Kelly Slide*, 102.

³⁵ Kelly, *Play Ball*, 46

\$3,000 more to use his picture for advertising purposes – a right they already owned in the standard player contract.³⁶

The amount paid for Kelly was unprecedented in the game and American society. Players had been sold before, but none for so high of a price, nor had the player himself benefitted from the transaction.³⁷ Though the high amount of money being associated with Kelly was unique among baseball players, it seemed even larger in comparison to what his fans were familiar with in their own lives. American industrial workers averaged approximately 480 dollars in annual earnings in 1890, which meant that Kelly's annual salary was ten times what the crowd was making on the average.³⁸ Kelly was earning as much per year as United States Senators, and the sale price with which he was associated topped the annual salaries of the Vice President and the Cabinet Secretaries.³⁹ For many of his Irish fans, in Boston and beyond, Kelly's wealth took on further meaning. As many of the immigrants took less in wages than native born workers, particularly as unskilled laborers, Kelly's ascent from his poor origins personified for them the

³⁶ Appel, *Slide Kelly Slide*, 104. Anson reported that Kelly had received a total of \$12,700 for his seven years of work for Chicago. In 1887 alone, Anson reportedly received \$12,000 from the club through various ownership agreements. "Kelly a Spendthrift," Kelly player file, National Baseball Hall of Fame.

³⁷ The previous records for selling a player had actually come from entire teams being sold to another club and the new club choosing which players it would like to keep. On October 30, 1864, the Columbus Buckeyes were sold to the Pittsburgh Alleghenys for \$8000 with ten players retained by the purchasing club. On September 16 1885, the Buffalo Bisons were sold to the Detroit Wolverines for \$7000 with four players remaining on the new team. www.retrosheet.org.

Seymour and Mills note in *Baseball: the Early Years* that the selling of players' rights capitalized on their increased value versus their relatively low salary. John Clarkson, who was sold from Chicago to Boston the year after Kelly, was also effectively released for \$10,000, but typical of these transactions did not receive any of the money for the release, nor a salary increase from his new club. Seymour and Mills argue that by selling him for such a high price over his salary, the Chicago team essentially received two and a half years worth of Clarkson's services for free, plus they made money from the transaction. Seymour and Mills, *Early Years*, 110.

³⁸ Robert A. Margo, "Annual Earnings in selected industries and occupations: 1890-1926" in *Historical Statistics of the United States*, volume 2, Millennial Ed. (New York; Cambridge, 2000), 2-271.

³⁹ http://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/common/briefing/senate_salaries.htm
<http://www.usgennet.org/usa/topic/preservation/gov/usgov.htm>

American dream of success. Further, rather than sublimating his ethnicity in his social and economic rise, he remained identifiably Irish through his public behavior.

In 1881, circus owner Adam Forepaugh had held a contest for the most beautiful woman in America. The winner was promised \$10,000 and the lead in his parade and spectacle entertainment titled *Lalla Rookh's Departure from Dehli*. When actress Louise Montague was declared the winner, she was promoted as the "\$10,000 beauty," and the phrase entered the American lexicon.⁴⁰ The corresponding dollar figure to Kelly's sale price made a transference of the nickname to him inevitable, and he began to be referred to as the "\$10,000 beauty." The figure became ubiquitously linked with Kelly as a photograph of the certified check was often put on public display by Boston club owner Arthur Soden.⁴¹ Within a month of the purchase, the Boston club publicized a \$10,000 life insurance policy they had taken out on Kelly to protect their investment.⁴² Quickly, Kelly became a shorthand unit to measure a player's worth. After it was publicized that the Pittsburgh club wanted to purchase Cap Anson from Chicago, owner Spalding said that Anson was worth three Kellys.⁴³

The monetary price on Kelly quantified his success achieved through his work on the field, and he was quickly whisked into the higher social circles of Boston. Prompted by his friend, the actor Nat Goodwin, Kelly transferred his Elks membership from the Newark, NJ lodge to Boston, as the newspapers jokingly questioned if Newark had received the going rate.⁴⁴ Though closely aligned with men in the theatrical profession, the Boston Elks lodge also

⁴⁰ Martin Murray, *Circus: From Rome to Ringling* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1956), 252.

⁴¹ Appel, *Slide Kelly Slide*, 105.

⁴² *New York Herald*, February 16, 1887.

⁴³ Rosenberg, *Cap Anson 2*, 132-3.

⁴⁴ *New York Clipper*, April 9, 1887.

included the mayor as well as many of the city's prominent businessmen. The social status he gained within the Boston sphere radiated beyond the baseball world. At a party held by fellow Elk George W. Floyd in August 1887, Kelly was mobbed by women and men, all hoping "to squeeze the hand of the \$10,000 beauty."⁴⁵

Kelly was also dubbed to be baseball royalty by the ebullient Boston press.⁴⁶ After the sale, any mention of Kelly in the papers referred to him alliteratively as "King Kelly" or featured some association with his sale price. Most commonly, both were used. Associated primarily through these two signifiers, the \$10,000 beauty and the king, Kelly's identity built through his loquacious personality and innovative play we repackaged into a new statistic that held much more weight to those who did not follow baseball: money. What this rebranding effectively did for Kelly was to elevate him beyond a valuable baseball player into a star attraction.

Baseball capitalized on Kelly's star appeal by making him the key element of their advertisements for games. At his very first appearance as a member of the Boston team at an exhibition game in Baltimore, posters were plastered all over the town touting the appearance of the Boston team and the "\$15,000 Kelly" as they were combining his 1887 salary with his sale price.⁴⁷ Similar billboards were seen in Pittsburgh later in the year bearing the more common \$10,000 beauty moniker.⁴⁸ The treasurer for the Boston club, James B. Billings, was right when he remarked after acquiring Kelly that he would be "the greatest kind of an advertising card and his engagement will make the present season one of the most prosperous the club has ever

⁴⁵ *Boston Globe*, August 15, 1887.

⁴⁶ Rosenberg, *Cap Anson* 2, 11.

⁴⁷ *Boston Globe*, April 11, 1887.

⁴⁸ *Boston Globe*, June 30, 1887.

enjoyed.”⁴⁹ Average game attendance for Boston was nearly double of the previous season, while the total attendance for the entire league increased by more than 55,000 from the previous year.⁵⁰

Around Boston, other industries adopted his name to help sell their products. He was asked to serve as master of ceremonies and referee for several unnamed sporting events in Salem and Haverhill, Massachusetts during his first few months in the city.⁵¹ Later in that year, a cigar appeared around the city called “The Only Kell.”⁵² In the off season between his first and second years in Boston, Kelly also was asked to write a book of his life and his experiences in baseball. The book, “*Play Ball*”: *Stories of the Diamond Field*, was the first baseball autobiography produced in the United States and had a first printing of 25,000 copies.⁵³

Kelly’s raised profile also heightened expectations for his on-field performance, as many Boston fans expected that having him on the team guaranteed them the league championship for 1887. Fans expected him to get a hit every time at bat, and to score a run every time he was on base. For 1887, Kelly did not lead the league in any statistical category as he had in three areas the previous year. The closest he came to the top was second place in doubles and third in stolen bases. Aware of all of his tricks, crowds were vocal about Kelly’s play and were equally vocal that umpires should not let him get away with anything.⁵⁴ The newspapers speculated that the

⁴⁹ *New York Herald*, February 16, 1887.

⁵⁰ <http://www.baseball-almanac.com/teams/bravatte.shtml>

⁵¹ *New York Evening Telegram*, March 25, 1887.

⁵² Rosenberg, *Cap Anson* 2, 11.

⁵³ Kelly, *Play Ball*, ix.

⁵⁴ *Sporting Life*, April 27, 1887.

additional attention took a toll on Kelly's performance on the field since it was impossible to fulfill the role the public expected of him.⁵⁵

Since arriving in Boston and his transfer to the local Elks club, Kelly had been approached by actors Nat Goodwin and Charley Reed to appear on stage with them. A local minstrelsy company had also reportedly approached him to appear as their interlocutor. Kelly had managed to gain some additional theatrical experience since his childhood. He told a crowd in Boston that he had a non-speaking role in a Paterson, New Jersey theater as a young man that required only that he be thrown through a window. In July 1884, while a member of the Chicago team, Kelly appeared in a small role alongside umpire-turned-actor Frank Lane in a three-man farce called "He Would Be an Actor; or, the Ball Player's Revenge." The single performance was in Detroit at a benefit for an attendant at White's Theatre. His fellow Chicago players were in attendance, and as Kelly's character was being hit with a clapboard to end the show, Cap Anson started shouting for them to hit him more.⁵⁶

In early 1888 while he was stranded in New York for four days following a blizzard, Kelly reached a deal with Boston theatre producer Charles Thomas of the Hoyt & Thomas Company. In a week-long special engagement in March, Kelly would appear as Dusty Bob alongside Charley Reed's Old Sport in a remounted production of Charles Hoyt's *A Rag Baby*. For appearing in two scenes as well as the all-cast dance number finale, Kelly was to receive \$250.⁵⁷

The play, one of Hoyt's earliest, had debuted in New York in 1884 and had become a favorite in New York and throughout the northeast. The story begins as a man, named Christian

⁵⁵ *Boston Globe*, June 30, 1887.

⁵⁶ Rosenberg, *Cap Anson* 2, 41-2. Kelly, *Play Ball*, 83.

⁵⁷ *New York Clipper*, March 31, 1888.

Burial, has hidden his child at a boarding house in order to get back at his wife for threatening divorce. His brother-in-law, Tony Jay, buys the drugstore next door to the boarding house as he waits to steal the baby back. Because he knows nothing about dispensing medicine, Jay hires Old Sport to help him run the shop, which includes fighting rats in the cellar and running off tramps looking for free alcohol. Sport, who repeatedly calls himself a sporting man, is in training for a fight with Dusty Bob, who has been brought into town specifically to fight him. Jay and Sport break into the boarding house after starting a bonfire in the street as a distraction, but come away with a rag baby instead of the child. Fearing that their child has been kidnapped, Burial and his wife make up just before the real child is brought out by one of the girls of the boarding school who has fallen in love with Jay and was afraid he would fail in his attempt to get the baby.

The role of Dusty Bob required Kelly to storm the stage looking for Old Sport. Once finding him, Bob is quickly defeated as he is thrown into the cellar with the door shut behind him. He emerges from the cellar alone on the stage with a bear trap attached to the back of his trousers providing a sight gag as he exits. He returns at the end carrying Sport on stage, who has fallen from the second story window. As a commotion occurs outside, Bob speculates that it is the boxer John L. Sullivan passing by, which revives Sport immediately. The happy ending leads into the final chorus number and dance by the entire cast.

The play was written before Kelly's ascent to stardom both on and off the field, but his addition to the cast served to highlight portions of the play. Throughout the play, Sport professes his love for all types of sports from pedestrianism to boxing and baseball. His idolization of boxer Sullivan leads him to repeatedly shake Jay's hand since it was "the hand that shook Sullivan's." Jay eventually uses this idea in the end to make Sport fall for the woman who has been trying to get his attention by telling him that she had once kissed Sullivan. Used for humor

here, Sport's obsession with all things sporting speaks to the image of the time for the typical "crank" or sport fan. Obsessed with his hero, Sport tries to do everything to look like, act like, and be associated with Sullivan. In much the same way, Kelly was an idol to many of the people in those Boston audiences who were aware of what fashion he was wearing, what cigar he was smoking and what equipment he was using.

Kelly's appearance was expected to bring in large houses throughout his run during Holy Week in Boston.⁵⁸ The Park Theatre was packed at the opening on March 26, 1888, and the applause on his opening line lasted nearly a minute forcing Kelly to acknowledge his friends and fans.⁵⁹ Most of the reviews were ostensibly favorable, but acknowledged that Kelly's performance could stand a little work.⁶⁰ The production closed on March 31 and then was slated to tour the northeast for two weeks. Kelly, who was in training for the upcoming season, did not accompany the tour, but did reprise his role in Lynn, Massachusetts on Saturday April 8.⁶¹

Recounting his involvement with the play in his book, Kelly tells a story about attending his first rehearsal. Arriving at the theatre fifteen minutes early and finding the curtain drawn, he sits in the orchestra seating and falls asleep waiting for the rest of the company. He believes he sees the footlights come on and the curtain raise on a parade of stars that were all dead including Junius Booth Sr., John McCollough, Charlie Thorne, E.A. Sothern, John T. Raymond, Charles Fechter, Harry Montague, Charlotte Cushman, and Adelaide Neilson. The parade stops as they all bow to the arrival of William Shakespeare, who places a laurel on Neilson's head. The scene vanishes in mist, a clashing of music as the curtain comes down and Kelly wakes. Leaving the

⁵⁸ *New York Clipper*, March 31, 1888.

⁵⁹ Kelly, *Play Ball*, 86. Rosenberg, *Cap Anson 2*, 45.

⁶⁰ *New York Clipper*, March 31, 1888.

⁶¹ *New York Clipper*, April 14, 1888.

theatre, he meets Charley Reed outside who tells him they waited for a half hour on the stage for him, but eventually cancelled rehearsal because Kelly had not shown up.⁶² In the book, the story precedes Kelly's account of his opening night of the show. By presenting a company of greats emerging before him, the story serves to contextualize his stage abilities in that he acknowledges a significant distance between himself and the finest actors in history.

Though the part was not written for him, Kelly had several ways to identify with the character of Dusty Bob. Such alignment of a fictional character and Kelly's persona contributed to the play's success. A character announces Dusty Bob's arrival before the audience sees him. This was similar to how Kelly's arrival in Boston was announced in the papers, which began to generate interest in him even before he appeared. In both cases, the person's arrival is managed so it creates anticipation on the part of the audience. Dusty Bob is essentially a hired gun brought in to beat Old Sport and is intent to do the job that his employers have paid him to do. Kelly's auratic presence in that role was already imbued with the remunerative fame he had gotten upon coming to the city. After he left the production, the sporting section of the *New York Clipper* claimed that Kelly could have remained with the company "at a very large salary."⁶³

Kelly returned to captain the Boston National League team for the 1888 season, but neither his statistics or the team's standings improved dramatically from the previous season. Even his record sale price had been matched early in the season when his Boston team purchased the rights of his old Chicago teammate John Clarkson for another \$10,000. However, the purchase had little if any negative impact on the association of wealth with his persona, which he actively maintained. Part of Kelly's display of wealth was through his dressing the part. After the sale, newspapers often remarked on how he was dressed in the most current fashion of the day

⁶² Kelly, *Play Ball*, 84-5

⁶³ *New York Clipper*, April 14, 1888.

from a Prince Albert frock coat, vest, and fancy shirt to a multicolored sash that was a half yard wide. Kelly was often found sporting diamonds on a charm, as cuff links, or worn on his shirt, and he carried a gold-topped cane with him as he travelled. He would accessorize himself with several lap dogs including a small poodle called Nellie. Kelly also had a parrot named Paul that he believed was luck-bringing mascot.⁶⁴

The performance of wealth requires not only visible evidence of having it, but also exhibitions of its fluidity – coming in and going out – so that it seems endless. Kelly received several of these accessories in public ceremonies. At various times while on the field Kelly was given gifts or other tokens of admiration like a box of cigars and a statuette of himself batting, as well as a satin jockey’s hat and arrangement of flowers spelling “Kel.”⁶⁵ At the top of the fourth inning of a game in Chicago as Kelly came to bat, Cap Anson, after having just argued with the umpire, created an awkward situation when he walked out with a rifle to present to Kelly on behalf of an admirer.⁶⁶ The Boston Elks gave him a gold watch with rubies and a large “k” set in diamonds that was valued at \$500 in May of 1887.⁶⁷

In addition to these valuable gifts, Kelly showed that he had multiple sources of income beyond his baseball salary. Even before his sale, perhaps being used as a negotiating ploy in his stand off against the Chicago ownership, a newspaper reported that he may not continue his baseball career because he had apparently made over \$100,000 from speculating on wheat after

⁶⁴ Rosenberg, *Cap Anson* 2, 30, 116, 143, 156, 161, 168, 180. The parrot is featured in a humorous tale from the November 10 1886 issue of the *Sporting Life* concerning Kelly and his wife as they were hosting Rev. Thomas Green of Chicago’s St. Andrews Church.

⁶⁵ *Chicago Tribune* June 25, 1887. Rosenberg, *Cap Anson* 2, 130, 133.

⁶⁶ *New York Sun*, June 2, 1889.

⁶⁷ *Boston Globe*, May 10, 1887. Rosenberg, *Cap Anson* 2, 128.

the 1886 season.⁶⁸ The sale of his book within just a few months in 1888 brought him \$1,500.⁶⁹ Kelly partnered with a former umpire named John Kelly to open a bar in New York following the 1888 season. He reported that he had to go back on his promise to accompany an all-star team to Australia because the bar, named “the Two Kels,” was making so much money that he could not afford to leave it.⁷⁰ He often relied on his association with wealth as a source of humor. Approached in the clubhouse by club treasurer James B. Billings before a game in Boston, Kelly declared loud enough for everyone to hear “You can’t do it, Billings. I haven’t got a cent; you can’t borrow anything of me.”⁷¹

At the end of the 1888, Kelly agreed to return to the stage to participate in another remounting of Hoyt’s productions and began a two-week run on December 24th as the tough Rob Graves in *A Tin Soldier* at the Fourteenth St. Theatre in New York. Now with two full baseball seasons behind him as a star, Kelly’s public persona was played up in the advance publicity for the production. It was reported that Kelly originally asked the Hoyt & Thomas Company for \$2,000 to appear in the small role, but was negotiated down to \$1,000 and a new overcoat. The *New York World* reported that price Kelly got was the largest given to a non-actor. Hoyt stated in the piece that he believed that Kelly would draw in more than enough money to make up his salary.⁷²

⁶⁸ *Buffalo Daily Courier*, November 6, 1886.

⁶⁹ Rosenberg, *Cap Anson* 2, 146.

⁷⁰ *Boston Globe*, November 4, 1888. *Boston Globe*, December 22, 1888. The two Kellys were not related to each other.

⁷¹ Rosenberg, *Cap Anson* 2, 124.

⁷² *New York World*, December 17, 1888.

The production was advertised as one of Hoyt's great comedy-farce successes and "a seasonable satire on the plumbers' trade."⁷³ Its story revolves around a character named Rats who has just become a plumber's apprentice and is now enjoying fleecing his former employer, Brooklyn Bridge, alongside his new boss, Vilas Canby. As the curtain rises, Rats is returning the costume he took without Bridge's knowledge which he used to crash a party where he insulted a woman. While Bridge tries to keep his wife from finding out about the blame that is being placed on him, his two housemaids are working in union with the two plumbers to overcharge, under work, and otherwise swindle the Bridges. Victoria Bridge is hounded by the neighbor's servant who borrows things and relays messages from her employer that the Bridges must not be as wealthy as they let on. In the end, Bridges finds out it was Rats who has gotten him into trouble, and Canby, through a case of mistaken identity, is being ridden off on a rail.

As in *A Rag Baby*, Kelly's role as Rob Graves in *A Tin Soldier* required him to fight. After having brought in Victoria's mother's trunk, Graves re-enters just as Bridge's business associate says that he would pay ten dollars to have Rats beaten up. Graves demands fifteen, and once Bridge says that he would make it twenty-five if done well, Graves replies, "Young feller, I'll blot him off the earth."⁷⁴ Though he loses the off-stage fight that closes the first act, Graves returns in the third act when Canby wants two scheming colonels tarred and feathered. Graves asks for fifty dollars but eventually agrees for five and admits that he will have to postpone his grave robbing plans for that night. After his gang had already grabbed Canby and Rats in place of the two soldiers, Graves delivers the final line of the play when he demands his five dollars.

The play had received runs in each theatrical season since it had debuted in New York in May of 1886, well before Kelly's connection with it. Kelly got second billing behind Eugene

⁷³ *New York World*, December 23, 1888.

⁷⁴ Charles Hale Hoyt, *A Tin Soldier*, in *The Dramatic Works of Charles H. Hoyt*, 39.

Canfield, who played Rats, in the early advertisements for the two week run.⁷⁵ Upon appearing on-stage with the trunk, Kelly was greeted with “round after round of applause” and caught a large floral baseball with his name in red when it was thrown to him by admirers before he delivered his first line.⁷⁶ The *World* indicated that, in his New York debut, Kelly had “latent histrionic talent” that could be developed.⁷⁷ Still, Kelly was not hired for his acting ability. The Christmas Eve opening audience was filled with baseball fans, and the attendance for the run was reportedly good.⁷⁸

Unlike his previous stage appearance in *A Rag Baby*, Kelly’s participation in the role played more off of his fame for being well paid than for any of his on-field accomplishments. Hoyt’s interview with the *World* before the opening of the play discussing Kelly’s involvement revolved around Kelly’s exorbitant salary demands for his participation, and noted that even though his demands were not met, Kelly became the highest paid non-actor to appear in a play. Seeing Kelly in the role, the audience was presented with two separate on-stage negotiations for more money, and the final line reinforced this association as he demanded payment for a job that, in the play, was not particularly well done. In the transfer of his baseball persona to the stage, Kelly was no longer dependant on being a baseball player as much as he was being recognized for being a well-paid baseball player.

In the 1889 season, both Kelly and his Boston team rebounded in the National League. The team finished in second place just one game behind the champion New York club. Kelly had led the league in doubles, was second in stolen bases and won a poll conducted by the *Sporting*

⁷⁵ *New York World*, December 23, 1888.

⁷⁶ *New York Herald*, December 25, 1888.

⁷⁷ *New York World*, December 25, 1888.

⁷⁸ *New York Clipper*, January 5, 1889.

News on who was the league's most popular player. He received a medal with a gold mask and diamonds for bases.⁷⁹ It was also during this year that performer John W. Kelly, no relation to either the ballplayer or his bar-owning partner, wrote a song for vaudeville performer Miss Maggie Cline called "Slide, Kelly, Slide." The title phrase had been started as a call to the ballplayer while with Chicago, but had entered American slang as something to yell at someone who was attempting or should be attempting to avoid danger. The lyrics are based on the ballplayer and mention his catching and playing the outfield as well as the plans to "take you to Australia" should he have continued success.⁸⁰ The song became incredibly popular and was eventually recorded on Edison's wax cylinders in 1891 by George J. Gaskin. According to Kelly's biographer Marty Appel, the recording became the first popular recording to be considered a hit that could not be classified as opera, religious, patriotic or classical music.⁸¹

Kelly's financial success was obviously the exception to the rule among professional players. Upset over what they considered to be unfair working conditions, the players organized into a collective called the Brotherhood of Professional Base Ball Players in the late 1880s. Seeking firm salary commitments to be explicitly stated and honored in contracts and more specificity in the reserve agreement, the players were continually rebuffed in their attempts to negotiate with National League owners. In an effort to withhold their labor from the owners, the Brotherhood formed their own league after the 1889 season that did not abide by the National Agreement between the two established leagues: the National League and the American Association. Forming teams in the same cities as direct competition with the other leagues, most

⁷⁹ Rosenberg, *Cap Anson 2*, 172.

⁸⁰ Rosenberg, *Cap Anson 2*, 2. Kelly, *Play Ball*, 143-4.

⁸¹ Appel, *Slide Kelly Slide*, 136-7.

players switched allegiances to the new league by staying in the same city. Kelly was one of the Brotherhood's biggest supporters.⁸²

Kelly briefly stopped doing stage work in full-length shows after the 1889 season during the war between the National League and the Brotherhood; however, he still used the stage for publicity during this time. At Hooley's theatre in Chicago, on Thanksgiving 1889, Kelly was conspicuous in one of the stage boxes in the theatre as a guest alongside Hoyt for another of his plays, *A Brass Monkey*. At the beginning of the second act, Kelly and Hoyt came onstage and interrupted the play, asking the actor playing the auctioneer in the scene for his pen and ink. Hoyt introduced Kelly to the audience and, after a brief discussion of acquiring other players, had him sign his Brotherhood contract in view of the audience. The pair then allowed the play to resume with Hoyt telling Kelly, "now come outside and I'll pay you what advance money you need."⁸³ Kelly was the largest star in baseball, and his willingness to stand with his fellow players borrowed from that. This bit of public advertising for the new league borrowed Kelly's image of wealth and success as a means to promote an association with success for the new league. Such advertisement was particularly needed in Chicago since the most notable player who had not switched allegiances to the new league was that city's Cap Anson.

The Players League put a good product on the field, but ultimately could not compete with the two more established leagues. As the most visible player in the league, Kelly was often called on to comment on the battles between the leagues – particularly as the National League began to use its wealth to convince players to return throughout the season. Kelly refused an offer of \$10,000 from Spalding to return to the National League; though, he did accept a one

⁸² Seymour and Mills, *Early Years*, 221-50.

⁸³ *Buffalo Express*, December 2, 1889.

thousand dollar loan from the Chicago owner.⁸⁴ His steadfastness to the Brotherhood gave him his first public association with failure. On the field his Boston team won the Players League championship under his leadership, but he appeared in only 89 of the 129 games. Though his batting average remained high, he appeared among the league's top ten in only one offensive category. During the year Kelly was twice publicly given high-profile gifts. He received a gold-topped cane from admirers in Chicago when his team visited the city.⁸⁵ Drawing more attention, however, was the gift of a cottage, stable and property in South Hingham, Massachusetts valued at \$10,000 and given by a collection of his friends and admirers in Boston including boxer John L. Sullivan.⁸⁶

The collapse of the Players League after the 1890 season left him scrambling for baseball work having publicly burned several bridges with the National League. In the next season, 1891, Kelly took over the Cincinnati team in the American Association which came to be known as Kelly's Killers. After only 86 games, Kelly was released to join the Boston team in that same league to help salvage their dwindling gate receipts; however, Kelly quickly jumped back to the National League team in the same city after appearing in only four games. He remained with the Boston team in the National League for the 1892 season, but played very poorly through his 78 games. His batting average sunk to a career low of .189 when it had consistently been over .300 in previous years. Despite his waning ability, he remained a draw for fans. Still interacting with the crowds, he began using the opportunity to verbally respond to the stories that appeared in the newspapers about his increasing failures in the game.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ "Setting the Pace," Kelly player file, National Baseball Hall of Fame.

⁸⁵ Rosenberg, *Cap Anson* 2, 185.

⁸⁶ *Pittsburgh Press*, June 23, 1890. *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* August, 13, 1890. Rosenberg, *Cap Anson* 2, 187-9.

⁸⁷ Rosenberg, *Cap Anson* 2, 215.

During this time his theatrical work nearly completely halted. Kelly would appear for only one night in Hoyt's *A Temperance Town* at a Boston Elks benefit in December of 1892 at the Park Theatre.⁸⁸ Kelly began to take more advantage of the opportunities provided by the vaudeville stage in 1893. For most performers in the late nineteenth century, the move from multi-act, full-length plays to working in a vaudeville house was a clear step down. While there certainly was a loss of prestige associated with such a move, an actor's salary usually suffered as well from a combination of reduced pay and an irregular work schedule. For these performers, this transition from standard playhouses to vaudeville houses was often one that was done out of desperation. Kelly, whose performances in multi-act dramas was not his sole means of support, had little to lose by playing in vaudeville.

In January of 1893, he appeared in blackface for a few days in Wood and Sheppard's minstrel act called "Winning Cards" doing an olio of songs, dances and funny stories which closed on the seventh of the month to a good house.⁸⁹ Beginning on January 16, Kelly partnered with Billy Jerome, who had appeared with him in "Winning Cards," for a vaudeville act at the Imperial Music Hall as part of the Henry Burlesque Company. Kelly and Jerome paired to sing songs, and Kelly recited "Casey at the Bat."⁹⁰ Starting on March 26, Kelly was a special engagement doing a similar act and drew good audiences for two weeks with the Lilly Clay Company run by Sam T. Jack in Chicago.⁹¹

Jerome formed his own company with Kelly at the center for a tour of the Midwest after Kelly ended his engagement with Jack's Lilly Clay Co. The William Jerome Vaudeville Club

⁸⁸ *Sporting Life*, December 17, 1892.

⁸⁹ *New York Clipper*, December 31, 1892. *New York Clipper*, January 7, 1893. *New York Clipper*, January 14, 1893.

⁹⁰ *New York Clipper*, January 21, 1893.

⁹¹ *New York Clipper*, March 25, 1893.

began its run in Chicago on April 10 at the People's Theatre ending on the 15 before moving to St. Louis at the Standard Theatre from the 16 to the 22. The tour continued on to Louisville and Indianapolis before reaching Cincinnati for a run from May 7 through the 13 at the People's Theatre. Throughout the tour, Kelly was in negotiations to join the New York National League club for the 1893 season which had already begun. After receiving a silk umbrella and a gold-headed cane from admirers after one show, Kelly said "I began my ball playing in Cincinnati, and I think I'll wind up my acting right here."⁹² While the rest of the company continued on to Columbus and Detroit to finish out what was originally intended to be a ten week schedule, Kelly appeared in his first game with the New York Giants on May 25.

Unlike his previous ventures in Hoyt's plays, the vaudeville act could be tailored specifically to Kelly, so it is no surprise that it capitalized on the quick wit that crowds had seen him display on the ball field. In addition to comic banter between the two partners, Kelly's act with Jerome featured several comic songs including one called "Papa Wouldn't Buy Me a Bow Wow" and a duet that had them shaking hands at the end of every line, with Kelly asking an exasperated, "Now will you be good?" After reciting "Casey at the Bat" Kelly came on to sing a short comic verse about being forced to continue to play in the Bowery if Boston refused to pay him his salary and New York did not want him. In an interview with the *Chicago Record*, Kelly and Jerome discussed how he could make more money on the stage since Boston would not pay him his demand of \$3,000 for the year. Jerome said, "You see, 'Kell' has been drawing the biggest salary of 'em all and he can't afford to accept a cut like that. When he once accepts a cut he will never get up again." At the time, Kelly was earning about \$150 a week with the Jerome Vaudeville club.⁹³ Clearly, the persona he displayed did not venture far from the theme of wealth

⁹² Rosenberg, *Cap Anson* 2, 229.

and success that had by now become synonymous with his name. His image now also incorporated his financial successes from the publicity surrounding his appearances in Hoyt's plays.

Recitations of "Casey at the Bat" became a staple of Kelly's performing career when he resumed stage work in early 1893. Ernest Lawrence Thayer's poem, which was subtitled "A Ballad of the Republic, Sung in the Year 1888," had first been printed in the *San Francisco Examiner* on June 3, 1888. The poem became popular after actor DeWolf Hopper, a big baseball fan, had it given to him to recite as a between-act entertainment at a performance of *Prince Methusalum* in front of mostly baseball players and fans at Wallack's Theater in New York in May of 1889. Hopper would integrate the poem into his repertoire in 1892 and could perform it on command.⁹⁴

The popularity of the poem sparked a controversy over who was the real author as several people stepped forward, as well as who the subject of the poem was supposed to be. Several theories were offered for the real-life inspiration for the fictional slugger ranging from a player named John Cahill who was playing in the California League during 1888 to a left-handed pitcher named Dan Casey who played in the National League during that time.⁹⁵ In July of 1888, *The Sporting Times* published the last eight verses of the original poem in New York substituting Kelly for Casey. Shortly after its publication in the East, a story arose that Mike Kelly had written the poem citing his recent publication of *Play Ball* and the supposed influence of Boston's cultured atmosphere inspiring a newfound love of poetry. Fond of a good story, Kelly did nothing to dismiss these rumors and perpetuated the idea that the poem was at least based on

⁹³ Rosenberg, *Cap Anson* 2, 51.

⁹⁴ Eugene C. Murdock, *Mighty Casey: All American* (Westport, CT: Greenwood P, 1984), 5-6.

⁹⁵ Murdock, *Mighty Casey*, 22-6.

him.⁹⁶ Like the poem's title character, Kelly was a recognizably Irish name. He was flamboyant, dramatic, and perceived to be the best player on many of his teams, and likely would have represented the best chance to win the game in that situation. Kelly's interaction with and admiration from the crowds that mark Casey's demeanor had already become part of the real ballplayer's image.

Kelly delivered the poem in January 1893 after his performance in blackface in "Winning Cards" and continued to use it over his next two years of performing in various vaudeville venues. Not a trained actor like Hopper, Kelly's delivery of the poem apparently ranged wildly. One review derided his "sing-song, school-boy" recitation,⁹⁷ while another noted his soft voice, nervous manner, unorthodox gestures, and described his delivery of the moment of Casey quieting the crowd "as though it were a poem on the death of a child."⁹⁸ One article reflecting on his entire career well after his death noted that reviews for Kelly's performances featured "a lot less applause when he finished than when he entered."⁹⁹ His recitations drew unfavorable comparisons to Hopper. At a performance in 1893 in front of several teams including Kelly's New York team, Kelly was reported to have left "in wild disorder" after Hopper was called on to deliver the poem.¹⁰⁰ The advantage that Kelly's recitation had over Hopper and what made it a hit with audiences was the possibility that the story was autobiographical for him.

⁹⁶ Jim Moore and Natalie Vermilyea, *Ernest Thayer's "Casey at the Bat": Background and Characters of Baseball's Most Famous Poem* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1994), 237-9. Thayer would later maintain that there was no one player who was the basis for "Casey."

⁹⁷ Rosenberg, *Cap Anson* 2, 228.

⁹⁸ Rosenberg, *Cap Anson* 2, 50.

⁹⁹ Asa Bordages, "2 Things Kelly Could Do, Play Smart Baseball and Drink Straight Whisky," *New York World-Telegram*, May 13, 1939, located in Kelly player file, National Baseball Hall of Fame.

¹⁰⁰ *New York Daily Tribune*, June 11, 1893.

For Kelly whose theatrical career had been marked by treating his success in a comic fashion, the failure of Casey/Kelly at the end of the poem would have served him in the same mold. However, Kelly began reciting the poem after his baseball talents had started to erode and was finding himself more frequently acquainted with failure than he had been while playing baseball. In the 1893 season, though he was still reserved by the Boston National League team, they were unwilling to meet a salary demand that they felt was no longer equal to his ability, and loaned him to New York club. Kelly appeared in only twenty games for the New York Giants in 1893 and was reportedly out of shape the entire season which likely prevented him from playing in the major leagues again.

Anson later wrote that Kelly's fondness for whiskey allowed money to slip through his fingers like "water slips through the meshes of a fisherman's net."¹⁰¹ Kelly remained well-dressed and splendidly accessorized, and he was also a frequent gambler at cards, billiards and horse races. He told the *New York World* in May that spending much of what you earned was one of the requirements of being a star.¹⁰² Kelly was also noted donating to every charitable case that asked him.¹⁰³ A man who had written Kelly for a loan of \$5 to start him along the path to success received one dollar as a gift from the ballplayer.¹⁰⁴ As a friend of many theatre people, Kelly had reportedly paid for a stranded troupe to return to New York without promise of repayment after a production disbanded on the road.¹⁰⁵ However, as he lost his association with success, his streams of revenue dried up. It was revealed that he did not actually have an ownership stake in

¹⁰¹ Adrian C. Anson, *A Ballplayer's Career* (Chicago: Era Publishing, 1900), 115.

¹⁰² Rosenberg, *Cap Anson 2*, 230.

¹⁰³ *Chicago Tribune*, July 11, 1888. *Boston Globe*, July 14, 1888. "His Tribute to Kelly," Kelly player file, National Baseball Hall of Fame.

¹⁰⁴ Rosenberg, *Cap Anson 2*, 246.

¹⁰⁵ *Chicago Herald*, November 10, 1894.

the bar in New York. Instead he had been paid to let them use his name.¹⁰⁶ He had mortgaged the house that was given to him. In 1893 it was put up for sale for unpaid taxes and it had \$2,000 left on the mortgage at 5% interest.¹⁰⁷

Kelly liked to be the center of attention, but it is clear he had trouble being put on the spot while performing. For all his theatrical activity, Kelly maintained a consistent case of stage fright even in front of the friendliest audiences. During the run of *A Tin Solider*, Kelly remarked that he lost fifteen pounds on opening night and never would have gotten through it at all without another actor feeding him his lines.¹⁰⁸ He believed he was better at singing and dancing than he was at delivering lines and speeches on demand. At least he claimed he was more comfortable doing the former than the latter.¹⁰⁹ Yet before he partnered with Billy Jerome, he had said once that he would gladly rather let champion fighters John L. Sullivan or Jim Corbett hit him with a cleaver than have to sing on stage.¹¹⁰

Kelly did seem much more comfortable when he felt he was surrounded by friends rather than put on display. He performed “Casey” in bar rooms and for his Elks brethren likely in situations where it was requested but the pressure was much less for him.¹¹¹ In performing “Casey” on stage, Kelly could be seen as the amalgam of his images: he was once the \$10,000 Beauty, the admired ballplayer, imaginative and unmatched on the field, and at the same time he was an aging icon, a less-than talented performer who had been on a theatrical descent from full-

¹⁰⁶ Rosenberg, *Cap Anson 2*, 160.

¹⁰⁷ *Boston Globe*, April 28, 1893. Rosenberg, *Cap Anson 2*, 189.

¹⁰⁸ Rosenberg, *Cap Anson 2*, 46.

¹⁰⁹ Rosenberg, *Cap Anson 2*, 49.

¹¹⁰ Rosenberg, *Cap Anson 2*, 220.

¹¹¹ Alfred P. Cappio, ‘Slide Kelly Slide,’ *The Story of Michael J. Kelly The ‘King’ of Baseball* (Passaic County Historical Society, 1962), 15, located in Kelly player file, National Baseball Hall of Fame.

length plays to vaudeville to burlesque from the moment he began to appear on stage. In these rooms, Kelly could be more human than star, and the tale of failure of Casey to hit the ball was delivered from a man who would have seemed to have just swung and missed for the third time rather than a legendary image who was approaching the plate.

To make money after the 1893 baseball season, Kelly became a part of Mark Murphy's farce company performing in *O'Dowd's Neighbors*. Kelly claimed that he was getting \$50 per week and twenty-five percent of the gate receipts.¹¹² It was reported that beginning in the fall of 1894, he would star in a new play to be titled *The Irish Adonis* about a hero who runs away from home in Ireland to the United States where he becomes the king of the baseball players and is found by his father.¹¹³ Kelly left the company in April of 1894 to manage and captain the Allentown team of the minor Pennsylvania League.

Unable to reach an agreement with any major league team, his agreement to run a minor league team was similar to being relegated to vaudeville stages after being popular in more prestigious playhouses. The move was seen as a final effort by Kelly to stay in the game while trying to make some money on his fame.¹¹⁴ Near the end of his career, Kelly was using his theatrical connections to enhance his on-field image. The way he played the game was always supplemented by the latest gags and popular songs that were given to him by his friends in the theatre, and it was one of the ways that Kelly could attempt to drum up interest in his team.¹¹⁵ While playing in a game for Allentown, Kelly traded humorous comments in a running dialogue

¹¹² *New York Sun*, November 16, 1893.

¹¹³ *Boston Globe*, March 11, 1894.

¹¹⁴ He reportedly used the watch given to him by the Elks as security for the players on the Allentown team to return home via rail after the club went broke in Buffalo in 1894. Rosenberg, *Cap Anson 2*, 319.

¹¹⁵ Rosenberg, *Cap Anson 2*, 1.

with an Irish comedian who was in the reporters' box.¹¹⁶ While in the field, he would occasionally display the laugh he had used in *A Rag Baby*. When approaching the plate, he would strike a pose that his character had taken in *O'Dowd's Neighbors*. Throughout the games, he would whistle the tune to "Papa Wouldn't Buy Me a Bow-Wow." Even as his playing skills eroded, Kelly remained an attraction because of the show he put on while in the field.

Unlike Anson or the typical ballplayer who took to the stage in the late nineteenth century, Kelly's appeal never depended solely on him being a professional baseball player. The persona Kelly created moved fluidly back and forth from the field to the stage. It was reported at the time of his death from pneumonia in November 1894, that he was preparing to go on the road again for another vaudeville tour. With all of his gimmicks, tricks, and ability as a showman, he was capable of being both success and failure, an idolized star and an everyday fellow. Kelly was at once a ballplayer acting and an actor playing baseball.

¹¹⁶ Rosenberg, *Cap Anson 2*, 244.

CHAPTER 3

“Matty” Does a Play: Christy Mathewson’s Baseball Persona and the Creation of a Melodramatic Stage Hero

In early April 1913, an article appeared in the society section of the *New York Times* reporting that Christy Mathewson was going to make his debut as a playwright.¹ The celebrated New York Giants pitcher was collaborating with established playwright and lyricist Rida Johnson Young. Young had accompanied Mathewson and the Giants as they toured through southern states as part of their spring training. The article’s location in the paper next to the notable marriages and deaths in New York City rather than the sports or theatre sections spoke to how this professional baseball player was seen in the city. The respectable mien that Mathewson had from his playing had already been accepted into New York society and it was about to transfer to the stage.

According to the article the play was going to “dramatize the human interest side of baseball with several exciting incidents from Mathewson’s actual experience.”² Though he never appeared on stage, Mathewson’s persona was crucial to the play’s fictionalized portrayal of contemporary events. This chapter examines the persona Mathewson built as well as the transfer and utilization of that persona by Mathewson and Young into the melodramatic world of *The Girl and the Pennant*. The elements of his persona that were embodied on stage in the character

¹ A portion of this chapter appeared as “Staging a Feminist Movement in Baseball: Rida Johnson Young’s *The Girl and the Pennant*,” in *Baseball/Literature/Culture 2008-2009*, ed. Ronald E. Kates and Warren Tormey (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2010), 64-71.

² “Mathewson A Playwright,” *New York Times*, April 8, 1913.

of Copley Reeves reflected traits that Americans believed constituted the ideal hero, and the playwrights employed that hero to address several issues the sport had begun to encounter.

Following the work done by Erving Goffman in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959), Orrin E. Klapp conducted a type-analysis of popular American social types in *Heroes, Villains, and Fools: The Changing American Character* (1962), with the focus on his titular types. For Klapp, a person belongs to a particular social type “when his appearance and behavior approximate it so closely that he is widely recognized as an example of it – whether or not he is willing to declare himself as such.”³ In Klapp’s estimation, the hero as a social type is recognized by being better than the norm and serves as an ideal to others in the hero’s ability to rise above the ordinary. Noting an identifying theme and multiple sub-categories that fit the overall type, Klapp distinguishes five categories for heroes. “Winners” are determined by their status as a champion or through the defeat of others in competition. “Splendid performers” are recognized by audiences to be exemplary in their field. The third category, “heroes of social acceptability,” requires the person to be attractive, well-liked, and embraced or accepted by various groups. “Independent spirits” are identified by standing alone or by their willingness to forge a unique path. The final category of “group servants” is seen through their helping of others, cooperation, and their self-sacrifice.⁴ Due to his baseball accomplishments and the style that created his baseball persona, Mathewson’s celebrity in baseball fit well into each of Klapp’s five categories.

When on the field, Mathewson clearly displayed the traits of the first two of Klapp’s categories. Through both his team and personal achievements, Mathewson was identified as a “winner.” Teammate Larry Doyle famously declared that it was “great to be young and to be a

³ Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday Anchor, 1959). Orrin E. Klapp, *Heroes, Villains, and Fools: The Changing American Character* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1962) 11-12.

⁴ Klapp, *Heroes, Villains, and Fools*, 27-8.

Giant.” During Mathewson’s seventeen years with the club, the statement was quite apt. The team finished first in the National League five times and finished second an additional five. The Giants represented the National League in the World Series against the American League champions four times, including three consecutive years in 1911, 1912, and 1913, and they were champions in 1905.⁵ Mathewson was widely acknowledged as the team’s best player. He was the team’s most recognizable player as well standing six feet one inches tall and appearing even taller when on the pitching mound. The team’s success made them a popular attraction in the city. Their games at home were seen as events in the largest existing market in professional baseball, and they consistently attracted notable names and faces from the local political, business and entertainment worlds such as George M. Cohan, Will Rogers and Lillian Russell.⁶

Beyond New York, Mathewson had been recognized nationally as a star on the field since his performance in the 1905 World Series. In that series versus the American League Champion Philadelphia Athletics, Mathewson won three of the Giants’ four victories with each one being a complete game shutout. During the regular season that year, Mathewson led the National League for the first time in both wins and Earned Run Average. Before the end of his career in 1916, Mathewson would lead the league in wins four times and finish second another five times. He was first in the league in both ERA and strikeouts five times apiece. When he retired from playing, Mathewson’s statistical achievements placed him second in baseball history in wins and third in strikeouts.⁷

⁵ The Giants won the National League in 1904, but no World Series was held.

⁶ Ray Robinson, *Matty: An American Hero* (New York: Oxford UP, 1993), 118.

⁷ As of this writing, Mathewson stands tied for third in wins, ninth in ERA, and twenty-ninth in strikeouts for his career.

Mathewson earned a reputation as a “splendid performer” in part because of how well he played in high pressure situations. On the field, Mathewson was atypical for a pitcher at the time by changing his pitching approach depending on the situation. Most pitchers, particularly young ones, put their maximum effort into each pitch, generally becoming less effective through the course of the game as they physically wore down. Mathewson would conserve energy by reducing the effort on pitches in situations where the team was ahead and where a hit or even a single run would not necessarily jeopardize the outcome of the game. In his 1912 book on what it was like to be a pitcher in the major leagues, *Pitching in a Pinch*, he explained that the pitcher must remember that he has eight other men in the field that can help him to record an out. While exhaustion is one reason why a pitcher should not continually put forth maximum effort, Mathewson believed that the act of deceiving the batter by keeping more effective pitches in reserve was even more important.⁸ By doing so, Mathewson felt he had a better chance for victory in situations where the game was on the line. For Mathewson, success in these situations where the team is “in a pinch” is the point of separation between being a “Big Leaguer” and not. In these moments, the pitcher “must have something besides curves then. He needs a head, and he has to use it.”⁹ While the rest of the book’s chapter gives examples of instances when such a strategy both worked and failed, the explanation of how he was able to consistently find success shows that his status as a “splendid performer” was not attained by chance.

Mathewson was both attractive and universally well-liked as “heroes of social acceptability” should be. At a time when people in baseball did not often fraternize with players from another team, let alone players from the rival league, Mathewson was liked and respected by nearly everyone in baseball. Even Ty Cobb, the notorious American League player who rarely

⁸ Christy Mathewson, *Pitching in a Pinch* (1912; repr., New York: Stein and Day, 1977), 64.

⁹ Mathewson, *Pitching*, 57.

even got along with his own teammates, considered Mathewson to be a friend. To this end, the Giants pitcher was offered the position of president of a newly forming players association called the Fraternity of Baseball Players of America. Though he declined the presidency, he did agree to serve as a vice president alongside Cobb.¹⁰

When combined with his prominence in New York and throughout baseball, these qualities of attractiveness and likability made businesses and corporations seek him out to endorse their products. The items he chose to endorse and the way he recommended them contributed to the image of him as a wholesome and decent man. Mathewson's name appeared as author of a series of books for boys beginning in 1910 which were ghostwritten by other authors.¹¹ The young protagonists of these books were all made in Mathewson's image in that they were upstanding and industrious young men who were courteous, polite, and above all, went about their lives and their playing the right way.¹² His endorsement of a safety razor was contingent on having tried it before deciding. Believing that they had done him no harm, Mathewson appeared in advertisements for cigarettes, but expressed reservations that there may be a danger to young people who smoke to excess.¹³ He steadfastly refused to lend his name to a bar on Broadway despite considerable financial return because of the negative connotations associated with alcohol.¹⁴ Even after his playing career, Mathewson's name and nickname, "Big Six," were used on an indoor baseball game that promised "all the thrills of the diamond." Acknowledging Mathewson's appeal to the general public, Piroxloid Products Corporation

¹⁰ Robinson, *Matty*, 157.

¹¹ Michael Hartley, *Christy Mathewson: A Biography* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2004), 77.

¹² Philip Seib, *The Player: Christy Mathewson, Baseball, and the American Century* (New York: Thunder's Mouth P, 2003), 60-1.

¹³ Hartley, *Christy Mathewson*, 78.

¹⁴ Seib, *Player*, 73.

placed an advertisement in *Playthings* magazine promoting the game to potential retailers that asserted “Matty’s name on this game means profit to you.”¹⁵

Strengthening Mathewson’s endorsements and furthering his social acceptability was the public manner in which he followed his conscience particularly in religious terms. Upon entering professional baseball, Mathewson reportedly promised his mother that he would not play on Sunday. Biographer Michael Hartley traces Mathewson’s religious devotion that grounded much of his behavior back to his mother, Minerva. Raised in a Baptist family, Mathewson attended the Baptist preparatory school Keystone Academy in Factoryville, Pennsylvania which had been built on land purchased from his maternal grandfather. Christianity remained a big part of his life even as part of the marriage agreement between him and his future wife, Jane Stoughton, was that she agreed to become a Republican, like her future husband, if he agreed to become a Presbyterian.¹⁶ Protestant denomination notwithstanding, Mathewson was embraced by large segments of the Christian community.

Standing firmly with Mathewson on the issue of refusing to play baseball on Sundays was evangelist preacher Billy Sunday, who had been a professional baseball player alongside Cap Anson and Mike Kelly in Chicago during the 1880s. While other evangelists denigrated baseball as an unworthy pursuit, Sunday promoted the game as an illustration of the American character, and he championed Mathewson as the prime example of the game’s wholesomeness.¹⁷ Other Christian worshippers viewed the Giants pitcher similarly. Just before the beginning of the 1911 World Series, a service was held at the Grace Methodist Episcopal Church in New York

¹⁵ *Playthings*, March 1922, 61. Clipping from Christopher Mathewson player file, A. Bartlett Giamatti Research Center, National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum, Cooperstown, NY.

¹⁶ Hartley, *Christy Mathewson*, 27.

¹⁷ Seib, *Player*, 91.

with some of the Giants players present. Though he was not in attendance, the mention of Mathewson's name caused such a cheer by the congregation that the Reverend C.F. Reisner had to remind everyone they were in a house of worship rather than a ballpark.¹⁸

Mathewson's absence from the playing field on Sundays was widely conspicuous. Giants' owner Andrew Freedman was legally prohibited from having his team play at home on Sundays but, spurred by the profit to be had, did so on occasion. Mathewson was not expected by his owner to play in those games.¹⁹ Other teams frequently took advantage of the situation when hosting the Giants, particularly in cities where no Sunday blue-laws existed, and scheduled doubleheaders with the knowledge that they had a better chance to win if they were safe from facing Mathewson on the pitching mound.²⁰ This public display of his piety framing his actions in a religious context helped to reinforce his respectability nationwide.

Few popular figures of the time were accepted by both the baseball community and the religious community as Mathewson was. Making Mathewson's wholesomeness even more prominent was the juxtaposition with his manager, John McGraw. A man of little formal education, baseball was the center of McGraw's life. McGraw had been a player for St. Louis and Baltimore in the late 1890s and early 1900s and had gained a reputation for his rough, fiery style of play that began to characterize the upstart American League. He brought that same spirit to the National League when he was hired to manage the Giants beginning in the 1902 season. He demanded strict discipline for his players as he directed them in what to do in every baseball

¹⁸ Seib, *Player*, 85.

¹⁹ Hartley, *Christy Mathewson*, 24.

²⁰ Seymour and Mills, *Golden Age*, 359. The municipal restrictions on playing baseball on Sundays were lifted slowly through the early part of the 1900s until half of the teams in the major leagues could legally play at home on that day of the week. However, most teams continued to play in defiance of such blue-laws and would undergo periodic arrests and fines with little to no effect as the popularity of Sunday baseball financially outweighed the possible negative social aspects. Chicago, St. Louis, Cincinnati, Detroit, Cleveland and Washington allowed Sunday ball by the end of World War I, but for the practice to become legal league-wide took an additional fifteen years.

situation as though they were automatons. Stiff fines were levied on players who did not comply with his commands. He argued vociferously with umpires and, like he had done with other players during his playing career, would intentionally put his spikes through the tops of an umpire's shoes when he was particularly displeased.²¹ Off the field, the behavior of McGraw, who was the public face of the Giants, personified the perception of the typical baseball player. He could frequently be found at race tracks and pool halls in the company of gamblers like Arnold Rothstein, who was eventually part of the 1919 conspiracy to fix the World Series.²² Despite their differences, Mathewson and McGraw were great friends, and the constant presence of one made the other's behavior stand in sharp relief. At the beginning of their careers with the Giants, they and their wives shared a seven-room apartment in a very respectable section of New York near Central Park beginning in 1903.²³ It is likely that without the Mathewsons, the McGraws would not have been welcome in such a respectable neighborhood.

Part of what made Mathewson so widely acceptable for a baseball player was what also categorized him as an "independent spirit": his college background. The idea of college men playing baseball professionally was often seen to be incongruous, at least socially. College attendees were meant to be educated, well-bred, and refined while ballplayers were typically believed to be well short of those virtues. At the turn of the century, many hotels and restaurants separated ballplayers from the rest of the more respectable clientele and others refused service to ballplayers altogether.²⁴ Mathewson was able to show that the idea of collegiate respectability could be maintained even as a professional athlete.

²¹ Seymour and Mills, *Early Years*, 290.

²² Seymour and Mills, *Golden Age*, 140-2. Robinson, *Matty*, 47-8.

²³ Robinson, *Matty*, 48.

²⁴ Seib, *Player*, 35.

While the number of players with a high school education more than doubled between 1900 and 1914, Mathewson biographer Philip Seib reports only 22 percent of professionals playing between 1900 and 1910 had attended college, and the number rises only slightly for the following decade.²⁵ However, college ballplayers were often sought out by teams for various reasons. As was the case with Mathewson, more fans were willing to come to watch them play since they brought perceived respectability to the club. The college ballplayer also brought value to the playing side of the roster. Two of the most successful managers of the time, Philadelphia's Connie Mack and the Giants' manager McGraw, both believed that if physical ability and temperament were equal, college players had an advantage over other players because of their capability to think through situations.

At the heart of Mathewson's likability and acceptance was the general integrity he possessed befitting the idea of the intelligent and honorable college man. This was one of the primary aspects of his baseball persona. On the field, Mathewson was believed to be completely honest and above reproach even to the detriment of his own team in contrast to Mike Kelly's style of play. When a single umpire worked the game and could not get a clear look at a particular play, Mathewson was occasionally consulted for help on a decision.²⁶ One story holds that upon sliding into home plate, Mathewson had stirred up enough dust obscuring everyone's view that the umpire waited until Mathewson volunteered that he was out before making the call official.²⁷

²⁵ Seib, *Player*, 35. Seymour and Mills, *Golden Age*, 99.

²⁶ Robinson, *Matty*, 95.

²⁷ Frank Deford, *The Old Ball Game: How John McGraw, Christy Mathewson, and the New York Giants Created Modern Baseball* (New York: Atlantic Monthly P, 2005), 36-7.

Mathewson's honesty also played a role in one of the most notorious mistakes in baseball history committed in September 1908. Running from first base, Giants player Fred Merkle failed to touch second base in the bottom of the ninth after the presumed winning hit had been made. Upon Chicago's appeal, Merkle was called out and the game was declared a tie due to darkness. A win in the game would have given the Giants the pennant outright. Instead the team had to play a tie-breaker game for the right to go to face the American League's Detroit Tigers in the World Series. At the conclusion of the season, just before the additional game was played, the league's board of directors considered whether the tie game should have counted in the Giants' favor, and they sought affidavits from the players involved in the game. They made their decision on Mathewson's affidavit, given voluntarily, who saw from the first base coaching position that Merkle had not touched second. As George Dovey, one of the directors, declared, "We took all the other affidavits and threw them out. Matty's word was good enough for us." Dovey also pointed out that Mathewson's honesty cost him a significant amount of money that he would have made from playing in that year's World Series.²⁸

Befitting the image of a well-rounded college man, Mathewson displayed interests outside of baseball. Like several other players during the era, Mathewson wrote pieces periodically for newspapers in which he gave advice for youngsters on how to play the game correctly or he explained current events or big games in baseball. For most players the articles would have input from the player but be ghost-written by a sportswriter with whom the player was friendly. During his career, Mathewson followed this pattern, but after his retirement Mathewson informed his ghost-writer, John N. "Jack" Wheeler, that he would be doing his own writing going forward.²⁹ His 1912 book, *Pitching in a Pinch*, was another collaboration with

²⁸ W.J. MacBeth, "In All Fairness," *New York Tribune*, September 26, 1921. Seib *Player*, 51.

Wheeler. Wheeler's foreword to the book emphasizes the uniqueness of Mathewson's education asserting that "as a college man, [Mathewson] is able to put his impressions of the Big Leagues on paper graphically."³⁰

Though nearly all of his course grades were in the 90s, Mathewson left Bucknell after his junior year and never actually completed his degree.³¹ Later in his life, in a brief autobiographical piece titled "How I Became a Big League Pitcher," Mathewson advised all young players not to follow his path and to finish college first before entering professional baseball.³² Still, Mathewson's attendance at college became permanently linked to his persona, and he stood as the most positive representation of how respectable college educated men could make baseball.

Even Mathewson's off season work was unusual in how respectable it was. While other players often had jobs that were more strenuous physically than mentally, usually involving manual labor in their hometowns, Mathewson was known to work as an insurance agent in New York.³³ A flipbook produced by the James Perry Agency showing Mathewson's delivery declared him to be "Premier Pitcher of the World and Special Agent of the Prudential Insurance Company of America."³⁴ Author Homer Croy wrote about seeing Mathewson in his office that "it is hard to remember he is a baseball player" and that he was impressive as a businessman and

²⁹ Hartley, *Christy Mathewson*, 146. Robinson, *Matty*, 127.

³⁰ Mathewson, *Pitching in a Pinch*, xv.

³¹ Robinson, *Matty*, 25.

³² Christy Mathewson, "How I Became a Big-League Pitcher," *Boston Globe* January 17, 1926. Repr. in C.H. Claudy, *The Battle of Base-ball*, (1912; Jefferson, NC.: McFarland, 2005), 197.

³³ Hartley, *Christy Mathewson*, 74-5.

³⁴ Located at A. Bartlett Giamatti Research Center. National Baseball Hall of Fame.

gentleman.³⁵ Mathewson served as more than just window dressing as he was quite active in the business. Before the 1913 season, under the letterhead of “Christy Mathewson, Insurance,” he suggested an insurance plan for Cincinnati Reds owner August Herrmann to reimburse him up to \$10,000 for each of his players if they should die. Mathewson specified that there was no limit of liability and should the special locomotive car carrying the 25 insured men derail and everyone be killed, Herrmann could recoup \$250,000 and did not need their signatures for the policy to be valid.³⁶ The public at large began to trust Mathewson as a businessman over the course of his career. During the beginning of World War I when the American stock exchange was closed to avert panic, newspapers printed Mathewson’s assertion that he was going to continue with his market investments and intended to buy as soon as the exchange reopened and it was cited as something that helped to assuage public fears about the economy.³⁷

While there may be the expectation that a professional ballplayer would be a “group servant” to his team while on the field, Mathewson exhibited an amount of self-sacrifice that was remarked upon by his teammates. A significant portion of Mathewson’s success as a pitcher came from his use of a pitch he called the “fadeaway.” The pitch quickly became associated only with Mathewson throughout baseball, and young players would send letters asking him how to throw it. Thrown by a right-handed pitcher, the fadeaway traveled toward the plate like the mirror image of a typical curveball. Instead of the ball moving away from a right-handed batter as it approached, the ball would move in toward the batter. For left-handed batters, the pitch would move away from them. The pitch put unusual stress on the arm. The typical delivery of a pitch ended with the palm faced toward the body (in the case of a curveball) or toward the

³⁵ Robinson, *Matty*, 114.

³⁶ Mathewson player file, National Baseball Hall of Fame.

³⁷ Robinson, *Matty*, 166.

ground (in the case of a fastball). The fadeaway acquired its reverse action as a result of the palm of the hand being turned away from the body and finishing facing toward the sky on release of the ball. Mathewson claimed that to throw it was “killing on the arm.”³⁸ Because of the pain associated with it, as well as its effectiveness, Mathewson would save the pitch until he was “in a pinch” and needed it for a potentially game-deciding situation. Teammates, like Red Murray, knew about the discomfort Mathewson felt in throwing the pitch, but also knew that Mathewson would use it if he felt it was needed. His teammates would know when he was throwing it because left-handed batters would jump out of the way since the pitch looked like it was coming straight for them when it was being thrown in the strike zone.³⁹ Mathewson’s persistence in throwing the pitch throughout his career was based on his desire to continue to help his team despite whatever pain he experienced. Doing so earned the pitcher a respect and devotion that was unparalleled on the team.

More public, however, were Mathewson’s instances of forgiveness of teammates that had made a mistake in a crucial game. In these moments, Mathewson prioritized the solidarity of the team over personal feelings or achievements. In the wake of Merkle’s mistake of not touching second base in the game against Chicago, Mathewson declared that “it could happen to anyone” rather than join the chorus of blame towards his teammate.⁴⁰ A similar situation occurred in the deciding game of the 1912 World Series against the Boston Red Sox. With Mathewson on the mound, Giants outfielder Fred Snodgrass dropped a fly ball that ultimately led to the loss of the game, the series, and nearly \$1500 apiece for each Giants player. After the game, in the

³⁸ Robinson, *Matty*, 18. The delivery of the pitch, which later came to be known as a “screwball,” was reported to have permanently altered famed 1930s pitcher Carl Hubbell’s arm to hanging from his side with the palm facing away from the body.

³⁹ John “Red” Murray, “Personalities Presented by a Personality,” *The Sporting News*, January 25, 1934, 5.

⁴⁰ Robinson, *Matty*, 102.

clubhouse, Mathewson put his arm around outfielder and assured him that “any man is likely to make an error.” On the train back to New York, a similar refrain was repeated as Mathewson went up and down the aisles trying to console upset teammates reminding them that they “can’t blame a man for a physical error.”⁴¹ The Giants already knew about Mathewson’s feelings on the occurrence of physical errors in baseball. During June 1901 while the team was in St. Louis, Mathewson was in the eighth inning of what could have been only the third perfect game in the history of baseball when Giants centerfielder George Van Haltren dropped a fly ball for the only error of the game.⁴² In between innings, while in the dugout in front of his teammates, Mathewson made a point to go to Van Haltren and pat him on the back reassuringly before going back out to the mound and completing the no-hitter.⁴³

Mathewson’s appearance and behavior in the eyes of the public marked him as a hero. Klapp’s analysis of types does not require that a person qualify in each category in order to be seen as a hero. For most heroes, they would show qualities in one or two of these categories. Mathewson could be solidly identified in each of the five categories. The purpose of a society creating heroes and the other social types is a functional one. They create a sense of community through different methods. Heroes, like Mathewson, are praised and followed and can be used as models of appropriate behavior since they are better than the norm.⁴⁴ Among the major services social types perform for a community according to Klapp is an assistance with professionalization. A hero in this role can serve as a person to be emulated regarding work

⁴¹ Robinson, *Matty*, 149.

⁴² The perfect game remains one of baseball’s rarest feats as of this writing with only 20 having been pitched in the more than 130 years of major league baseball.

⁴³ Robinson, *Matty*, 32.

⁴⁴ Klapp *Heroes, Villains and Fools*, 13, 17. Roger R. Rollin, “The Lone Ranger and Lenny Skutnik: The Hero as Popular Culture,” *The Hero in Transition*, ed. Ray B. Browne and Marshall W. Fishwick, (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green Popular P, 1983), 14, 25.

performance as well as instilling pride in the workers of the profession.⁴⁵ When faced with new or unusual circumstances, a hero can provide a model for the right course of action.

In baseball at the beginning of the second decade of the twentieth century, the influence of gambling and other shady dealings among its participants had become increasingly more of a concern since it threatened the sport's burgeoning respectability. Further, the changing role of women in American society created a dilemma of how baseball could profit from their potential interest in the game, but keep them from having too much influence on the profession. Using his heroic persona as the basis for the main character in *The Girl and the Pennant*, Mathewson's play set forth a model of how baseball could deal with these pressing issues.

In contrast to Anson and the typical use of the stage by professional ballplayers, Mathewson did not physically portray the role that utilized his persona. As in Anson's case, the player's inability to act well or otherwise conform to an aesthetically pleasing portrayal on stage reinforced the reality of the player's status as a ballplayer rather than an actor. By not having Mathewson physically embody the role and allowing a trained actor to portray the character, the audience's focus is redirected away from the physical presence of the actor and back toward the content of the performance as was more typical of theatrical pieces. In this way, Mathewson's physical absence allows the auratic presence of his persona on stage to better reflect the content of the play.

As *The Girl and the Pennant* opens, the various members of the Eagles professional baseball team are gathered at their Sligo, Texas spring training site preparing for a season in which they and the Hornets are expected to battle for the league championship pennant. Among the players in attendance are Skeets Marvin, a third-baseman who fancies himself a comedian; Pitman, an older left-handed pitcher who is at the end of his career; Chief Wayne, a Native

⁴⁵ Klapp, *Heroes, Villains and Fools*, 21.

American catcher; and the two Reeves brothers, Punch and Copley. Punch is the 25 year-old left-handed pitching star of the team while his older brother Copley, who was a star in college at Yale, mostly sits on the bench and is charged with trying to keep his brother away from the alcohol that has been affecting his performance. A stipulation in their deceased father's will prevents Punch from receiving his share of the sizable inheritance until he goes six full months without Copley seeing him inebriated.

The new Eagles owner, Miss Mona Fitzgerald, has just inherited the team from her father. She has requested that her father's favorite player, Pitman, remain on the team. As word arrives that Miss Fitzgerald will be visiting, the news upsets manager John Bohannon because he expected her to sell the team to an investor who was going to give him half ownership of the franchise. Bohannon, put in financial debt after his wife ran off with another man, conspires with the rival Hornets owner Henry Welland to help the Hornets beat out the Eagles for the pennant. Despite several suggestions that she should otherwise rethink the decision before the end of the first act, Miss Fitzgerald reaffirms her trust in Bohannon as manager because her father had been able to trust him.

Listed among the names of the supernumerary baseball players in the cast of characters are Fred Terkle, Hans Flagner, and Cy Dobb. These burlesques on the names of several well-known contemporary players give the first tangible clue that astute viewers should try to identify the other elements of the actual game in the premise of the play. Player drunkenness was perceived as a fairly common problem of the day, and rumors were whispered of occasional dishonesty among players. Neither of these required a specific case to be recognized as a problem. However, the presence of women in professional baseball was a unique situation. Two and a half years before the play's debut, the first woman had gained control of a major league

baseball team as Helene Hathaway Robison Britton assumed full ownership of the St. Louis Cardinals on the passing of her uncle, M. Stanley Robison, in March 1911. This unusual situation became more prominent in the newspaper due to the events that occurred over the next few years before the play's debut in 1913.

Britton's father, Frank De Hass Robison, had owned the Cleveland Spiders with his brother before acquiring the Cardinals and bequeathing it to Stanley's control in September 1908.⁴⁶ The other owners in the National League expected Britton to sell quickly. She however refused initial purchase offers in April 1911 from Chicago businessman Charles Weeghman, since he wanted only ownership of the franchise and its players and not the ballpark or anything that tied to club to the city of St. Louis.⁴⁷ Holding onto the team, she ceded the presidency of the club during that month to an executor of her uncle's will, E.A. Steininger. Shortly thereafter, her own lawyer, James C. Jones, became president, and she held a vice president position until her husband, Schuyler Britton, assumed the club's presidency in January 1913.⁴⁸ Upon their divorce in February of 1917, Helene Britton became the first female president of a major league club.⁴⁹ Despite not occupying the top executive position in the six years between gaining ownership and becoming president, she was very active in the club's management throughout this period. She gained a temporary restraining order in April 1912 against Steininger shortly before his dismissal that June when he tried to replace the Cardinals' secretary with someone more favorable to him.

⁴⁶ Joan M. Thomas, *Baseball's First Lady: Helene Hathaway Robison Britton and the St. Louis Cardinals* (St. Louis: Reedy P, 2010), 151. Thomas asserts from her biographical research on the Robison family that despite appearing variously as De Haas, de Hass, and de Haas, that De Hass is the correct spelling for Frank Robison.

⁴⁷ "St. Louis' Club," *The Sporting News*, April 8, 1911.

⁴⁸ Thomas, *Baseball's First Lady*, 58, 69-70, 76. Gai Ingham Berlage, *Women in Baseball: The Forgotten History* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1994), 67.

⁴⁹ Thomas, *Baseball's First Lady*, 108-9.

The suit brought by Britton and her mother against Steininger stated that she did not believe he was voting their 995 shares in their best interest.⁵⁰

During her first season in control, Britton deferred on the field to the manager Roger Bresnahan, whom her uncle had brought in and had respected greatly. Bresnahan, a former catcher for the New York Giants and teammate of Mathewson, had been acquired by the Cardinals in December 1908 for a steep price and was installed as a playing manager. Under his leadership, the Cardinals had improved modestly from their previous season in both 1909 and in 1910. Bresnahan justified Britton's continued belief in him during 1911 by guiding the team to its first winning season since 1901. Following the season, Bresnahan accepted a five-year contract for \$10,000 per year and 10% of the club's profits during that time.⁵¹ In June of 1912, Britton declared that Bresnahan had complete control over all on-field decisions.⁵² Bresnahan was noted for his fiery personality and style of play similar to his previous manager in New York, John McGraw, and Britton asserted that Bresnahan was at his best when he was fighting.⁵³

However, the association between the two was tenuous. During the 1912 season, after a loss to Chicago, Bresnahan and Britton had differing opinions over some of the decisions in the game. Bresnahan declared afterward that "no woman is going to tell me how to run a ball game!" and the two reportedly did not speak again during the season.⁵⁴ A public glimpse of acrimony between the two came in August, when reporters revealed that Britton was responsible for blocking a trade advocated by Bresnahan that would have sent Miller Huggins to Cincinnati

⁵⁰ "A Court's Help," *The Sporting Life*, April 27, 1912. Thomas, *Baseball's First Lady*, 69.

⁵¹ Thomas, *Baseball's First Lady*, 63.

⁵² "'Card' Control," *The Sporting Life*, June 15, 1912.

⁵³ Marguerite Martyn, "Baseball Better Mental Exercise for Women Than Bridge," *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, April 14, 1912. Thomas, *Baseball's First Lady*, 67.

⁵⁴ Thomas, *Baseball's First Lady*, 70.

where he would become their manager. Framing her veto of the deal in economic terms, Britton believed that if Cincinnati wanted Huggins as a manager, they should pay to acquire a manager instead of only a ballplayer as the Cardinals had when acquiring Bresnahan.⁵⁵ Complicating the relationship further was that Bresnahan was involved in a local business group that had proposed an offer to buy the club from Britton with the intention of installing him as president.⁵⁶ The 1912 team failed to live up to their expectations, finishing sixth out of eight National League teams and once again with a losing record. The regression of the team brought about questions whether Bresnahan was actively trying to alter the pennant race between Chicago and his former club, the Giants, by not playing his best players in key series.⁵⁷

In what seemed at the time to be a bizarre move, the Cardinals released their player/manager at the end of the 1912 season, placing him on waivers, while remaining publicly adamant that they would not seek to improve their club through his trade or sale, nor would they bring him back under any conditions. Here again, club economics were presented as the driving point since not only had Ivy Wingo replaced Bresnahan as the club's primary catcher, but the aforementioned Huggins could replace Bresnahan as manager providing a net savings of \$4,000.⁵⁸ Britton refused to go into the details for the dismissal publicly. However, she was quoted in *The Sporting Life* during November that she "had placed confidence in Mr. Bresnahan for a time, but his actions forced me to get a man in his place."⁵⁹ That same month, *The New York Times* reported that she had told him before his dismissal that she believed that he had not

⁵⁵ "The Woman Magnate," *The Sporting Life*, August 31, 1912.

⁵⁶ "Bresnahan Out," *The Sporting Life*, November 2, 1912.

⁵⁷ Seymour and Mills, *Golden Age*, 31.

⁵⁸ "Bresnahan Out," *The Sporting Life*, November 2, 1912.

⁵⁹ "Mrs. Britton Has Reasons," *The Sporting Life*, November 2, 1912.

“tried hard” during the past year.⁶⁰ Bresnahan, only one year into his new five-year contract, demanded his remaining \$40,000 rather than the \$2,500 buyout offered by club president Jones. The ordeal was reported in newspapers nationwide for a few months until an agreement was reached in early January of 1913 that gave Bresnahan half of the money he was seeking and allowed him to become a free agent.⁶¹

These events occurred during the off-season before *The Girl and the Pennant* was announced and were likely fresh on the minds of the playwrights. Audience members who would have understood the parodied names of Fred Merkle, Honus “Hans” Wagner, and Ty Cobb in the cast list also would have recognized Miss Mona Fitzgerald as a version of Helene Hathaway Britton, and her nefarious manager, John Bohannon, as Roger Bresnahan. This seemingly slight connection is made more explicit during the first act when Fitzgerald and her friends first meet the ballplayers shortly after Bohannon’s conspiracy with Welland is divulged to the audience. Fitzgerald’s coquettish friend, Alice Tilford, greets the Eagles manager with “how do you do, Mr. Bresnahan?”⁶² Bohannon immediately corrects her on his proper name, but it does not prevent Alice from repeating the mistake again in the second act.

Other ballplayer characters also seem to have real life counterparts who had played on the Giants with Mathewson. The shared position between Giants catcher John “Chief” Meyers and Eagles catcher Chief Wayne implies an equivalence between the two, even as most Native American ballplayers during the era were laden with the nickname “Chief” whether they liked it or not. The jocularly of the Skeets Marvin character as well as his position on the field suggest

⁶⁰ “Roger Didn’t Try Hard,” *New York Times* November 26, 1912. Thomas, *Baseball’s First Lady*, 73.

⁶¹ Thomas, *Baseball’s First Lady*, 73.

⁶² Rida Johnson Young and Christopher Mathewson, 1913, *The Girl and the Pennant* typescript, Performing Arts Library, New York Public Library, New York, 26.

former third baseman and occasional vaudeville performer Arlie Latham, who, despite having a career mostly in the 1880s and 1890s, played a couple of games with the Giants in 1909 at 49 years old. The old left-handed pitcher Pitman can similarly be linked to left-hander Hooks Wiltse, who had been the oldest player on the Giants teams during both the 1911 and 1912 seasons. The younger left-handed pitcher in the play, Punch Reeves, shared not only an age and position similarity with Giants pitcher Richard “Rube” Marquard, but also a reputation for enjoying the nightlife of New York City to the point that it would affect his performance on the field.⁶³

Audience members looking for an on-stage representation of Mathewson needed go no further than Copley Reeves. Though he was neither a pitcher nor a star on the Eagles, Copley did share several of the markers of Mathewson’s baseball persona. It is shown that like Mathewson, Copley had gone to college and has had ample success in the business world. His personal sacrifice for the sake of his brother becomes apparent in the first act as he deftly defers his own romantic feelings for Miss Fitzgerald so that Punch can court her.⁶⁴ Overall, Copley is shown to be a hard-working, respectable man and a paragon of virtue and fair-play in baseball – qualities that might have been recognizable as Mathewson even if his name did not appear as a co-author of the play.

Under the definition given by David Grimstead’s study of the melodramatic form, *Melodrama Unveiled*, Copley fits the mold of the melodramatic hero, who is “simply perfect.” The typical melodramatic hero was pious and virtuous, sentimental and faithful, and would often function as the force for redemption in the play. Though they may have faults that are addressed

⁶³ *Baseball Encyclopedia: The Complete and Definitive Record of Major League Baseball*, Ninth ed., (New York: Macmillan, 1993). www.baseball-reference.com

⁶⁴ Mathewson also had a brother, Henry, who joined him on the Giants for a brief time.

through the course of the action, the melodramatic hero was a representative of what was supposed to be good in the world.⁶⁵ When the melodramatic hero was based on a historical person, the character could be easily shaped by the playwright to address the notable faults or they could be ignored completely with little notice by an audience. The task was more difficult in a play featuring a melodramatic hero based on a contemporaneously living person whose faults – whatever they were perceived to be – may strain the credibility of the necessary perfection of the melodramatic hero. Mathewson, or his heroic persona, could be an appropriate melodramatic hero because, as his qualification in all five of Klapp’s categories shows, he could be widely appreciated in a heroic manner. His persona was already perceived to be as perfect as a melodramatic hero needed to be.

The many allusions to recognizable players help to establish a connection to the real world of professional baseball while maintaining a detachment of fantasy. For the apparent frivolity of the script, it does address concerns that were central to both ballplayers and men in general. Copley, as the melodramatic hero and on-stage proxy for Mathewson’s persona, can deal with the fears held by professional baseball. Though they seemed overwhelming in the real world, the concerns regarding cheating and manipulation of the game as well as the encroachment of women into the organized structure of baseball could be manageable in the fantasy world of the play.

The play uses the star pitcher and Copley’s younger brother, Punch, to examine one of baseball’s ills. Ballplayers had a reputation for debauchery. The behavior was not confined to only just drinking and often involved socially illicit involvement with the opposite sex. The problem was often softened for the public by newspaper writers who would write off such

⁶⁵ David Grimstead, *Melodrama Unveiled: American Theater and Culture 1800-1850* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1968), 180-1.

behavior as an expression of the players' boyishness. Both role players and star players alike were noted for their dalliances and their carousing, which would on occasion affect their performances on the field.⁶⁶ In the world of the play, Punch Reeves exhibits these tendencies.⁶⁷

Punch's drinking is a known secret throughout the game of baseball, though the players are unaware of the stipulation in his father's will. Welland relies upon Punch's reputation to help him to secure the pennant for the Hornets over the Eagles. With his drinking leading him down a morally troubling path, Punch is lured to go out on the night before he is set to pitch the deciding game for the pennant. Welland arranges a meeting between Punch and a chorus girl of whom Punch is fond. The chorus girl is to invite him out for the evening with the intention of getting him so intoxicated that he would be unable to face the Hornets the next day. Concerned about him as well as their chances in the game, several teammates scour the city looking for Punch, who had not returned to the Reeves' shared apartment by late the next morning.

As the players tell Copley that they have found his brother, he makes them wait until he has left the room before they bring him in. Once Punch is deposited in his own room, Copley leaves for the game, locking Punch in the apartment as he goes to prevent him from arriving at the ballpark in a stupor. Copley asserts that the public must be led to think that Punch's absence is due to an injury or that he has gotten into a fight with Bohannon. The private matter is made public after the game when Welland feeds the story of Punch's confinement to the newspapers. In defending himself to his brother, Copley explains that locking him in kept him out of sight,

⁶⁶ Seymour and Mills, *Golden Age*, 101-6, detail some of the players of the era who became known for their involvement with women and/or alcohol.

⁶⁷ The real life player to whom Punch was an allusion, Rube Marquard, proclaimed in an interview well after his playing career that he never drank during his career. However, Marquard's name was often involved in scandal in the newspapers during the years just before the play's debut for his tempestuous romance with married actress Blossom Seeley. They were married after her divorce became finalized in March 1913. Lawrence S. Ritter, *The Glory of their Times: The Story of the Early Days of Baseball Told By the Men Who Played It*, Enlarged ed. (1966; New York: William Morrow and Co., 1984).

and since he didn't see Punch drunk, they will divide their father's estate in one week when Punch has put in his full six months. In detailing his own battles with temptation and his following Punch around for the last two years, Copley invokes the sense of family as a guiding force that has kept him both sober and devoted. Punch leaves with a renewed effort to change his boyish ways and to become "a man" like his brother.

Though in a fantasy world, the play alludes to the misbehavior of players as more than just a degradation of social conduct but as being financially irresponsible as well. Faced with fines and scandal through their actions, players wishing to remain in professional baseball are given a model to follow. By emphasizing self-sacrifice and supplication to a larger group (i.e. family) in the afterglow of having won the pennant through his direct efforts, Copley as a melodramatic hero relies on identifiable traits of the "group servant" category of the heroic social type. By showing how this problem could be corrected in this fictional world, the model for correction in the real world is established. The close association between Copley's melodramatic hero and Mathewson's social hero implies that what one can do, the other is capable to do. These same traits, notable in Mathewson's persona, extend to him the same status as a model of correction for real players who drink.

Beyond just personal respectability, such behavior placed the player in a position where he might be forced into corruption which put the whole structure of professional baseball at risk. Though it was not dealt with on a scale as it was with the Chicago White Sox of the 1919 World Series, the specter of fixed baseball games was prevalent through much of the pre-World War I era.⁶⁸ A frequent method of influencing a ball game was through a player "laying down" by not trying his best whether on the mound, in the field or at the plate. Given the frequent nature of

⁶⁸ Seymour and Mills, *Golden Age*, chapter 14, describes many instances of dishonesty in baseball during the era from gambling in general to players being bought to fix games or shaping the outcome of both batting and pennant races.

failure in baseball, such behavior could be hard to prove as intentional. Managers, too, could affect the outcome of a game by simply not playing certain players, as was alleged at Cardinals manager Roger Bresnahan.⁶⁹

This is precisely what Eagles manager Bohannon receives a voucher for \$25,000 and a promise for more from Welland to do in *The Girl and the Pennant*. Knowing that the Hornets were weak against left-handed pitching, Bohannon chose to start a younger, more inexperienced left-handed pitcher named McCracken over his star left-hander Punch in the last meeting between the two teams. As a result of his cumulative managerial decisions, the Eagles lost two games to the Hornets. When questioned about it by Copley, Bohannon defends himself by saying he was saving Punch for the tie-breaking game, which, as Copley points out, would likely not have been needed if Punch would have been pitched initially. Bohannon remains at the mercy of Welland through the play because the tip to buy into United Realty that he was given proved to be worthless. He is now dependent on Welland's promised World Series money.

Again, Copley acts heroically to save the situation. Suspicious of dishonesty on the part of his manager, Copley confirms his suspicions the day before the game by tricking Welland to acknowledge that he has known Bohannon for years after the manager has said that Welland was the one owner in the league he did not know. During the game, after an umpire had ejected two Eagles players already for yelling from the bench, an off-stage argument between Copley and Bohannon gets the manager ejected by the same umpire. Without Bohannon running the game for the Eagles, Copley is able to be put into the game and the Eagles come back to win in the bottom of the ninth inning after being down to their final out. The following day at Miss Fitzgerald's house, Copley confronts Welland with the documents proving his conspiracy with

⁶⁹ Frederick G. Lieb, *The St. Louis Cardinals: History of a Great Ballclub* (1944; Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 2001), 47-8.

Bohannon. Among the proof is the deed to the land Bohannon bought as well as the endorsed purchasing check made out by Welland, which had never gone through because as a director of United Realty, Copley has had the check in his personal safe all summer in case proof of this illicit association was needed.

Having essentially freed his dishonest but desperate manager from the debt of Welland, Copley offers a deal to the owner before he takes the evidence to the authorities. As Welland reaches for his money, Copley orders him in the language of an economic transaction to leave the house, the town, the game and the country immediately and to “put it all to the credit of American sport in general.”⁷⁰ The banishment of Welland from the country echoes an earlier speech in the play by couching willful dishonesty as something un-American. Again relying on indicators of Mathewson’s persona, namely his intelligence evident through his high position in the business world and a personal sacrifice that comes financially this time, Copley invokes the larger group of honest Americans to establish his place as a melodramatic hero. The presence of this type of player in baseball shows that the game can rid itself of its dishonest elements by emphasizing the fundamentals of the American character that all players regardless of ethnicity should strive to embrace.

While debauchery and corruption were known problems in the baseball world, the advance of women into the territory presented a new and acute menace. The underlying tensions of the play’s premise reflect fears that penetrated the era’s hegemonic masculine psyche. As Michael S. Kimmel shows in his essay “Baseball and the Reconstitution of American Masculinity, 1880-1920,” the concept of masculinity – particularly that of the white, middle class male – was believed at the time to be under duress at the turn of the century due to men’s

⁷⁰ Young and Mathewson, *The Girl and the Pennant* typescript, 135. The threat of this type of dishonesty to the actual game was not just one of sportsmanship or fair-play. It spoke to a larger issue in the economic structure of the game.

decreasing economic autonomy, the influx of immigrants into cities, and the burgeoning women's movement. Baseball represented a way of reclaiming that lost masculinity. By participating in the game, or even just by watching it, men would realize the values of hard work and fair play, and would profit from baseball's unique combination of solo and team play, thus allowing them to recapture a sense of autonomy that had been lost during their indoctrination into the team mindset of new industrialism. If the world was a feminizing space, the baseball field offered an oasis of masculinity that strengthened the body and soul.⁷¹ First treated as a novelty in the newspapers, then as a joke, Helene Britton's presence in baseball at the time developed into a direct threat to the masculinity of the game, one of the last sanctuaries available to the American male psyche.

The play examines part of these fears by suggesting that women in baseball would have a feminizing influence upon the players. The first act presents the introduction of women into the masculine work world of the ball field. To begin the second act, at the end of the season, the players are placed more firmly within the feminine world of high society as they attend a tea party at Miss Fitzgerald's estate. Upon his arrival, Bohannon states that the day's newspapers are ridiculing the team for attending the gathering. This is the latest symptom of a larger affliction. Since the beginning of the year, the stands at the ball park have been "packed with screeching females." Further, the "disease" has spread to the players as Chief Wayne has taken up playing bridge and Pitman was in the clubhouse practicing the Tango. All of this has turned his team into a national joke.⁷²

⁷¹ Michael S. Kimmel, "Baseball and the Reconstitution of American Masculinity, 1880-1920," in *Baseball History 3: An Annual of Original Baseball Research*, ed. Peter Levine, (Westport, CT: Meckler, 1990), 98-109.

⁷² Young and Mathewson, *The Girl and the Pennant* typescript, 55-6.

If, Kimmel reasons, baseball crowds are dominated by women, the effect is to emasculate the ballplayers. Yet the feminization of the Eagles has apparently not affected their abilities on the field since the team remains at the top of the standings with the tie-breaking game looming. What do threaten their abilities are the ever-present temptations that women represent. Punch is lured out the night before the game by the chorus girl arranged through Welland. Though, like the screeching female fans, the chorus girl is absent from the stage during the play. She is represented by a violet, perfumed note that is presented to the pitcher while he is at Miss Fitzgerald's gathering. In this way, Punch's lapse that threatens the pennant, his inheritance and his potential relationship with Miss Fitzgerald is one that is never embodied on the stage. Elusive and ethereal, it is a female temptation that is idealized and made more threatening through its absence.

The three women who do appear on stage embody both the nascent and the active fears about the new woman that extend beyond mere titillation. The first woman to appear on stage, the prim and precise 40-year old Miss Elvira Squibbs, maintains a manner and relationship to Miss Fitzgerald that suggests the typical role of a woman in authority. In the schoolmarm mold, she insists on strict discipline and rigid decorum. She also is an enthusiast of Mental Science or, at the least, the power of positive thought. Squibbs reflects the masculine fears of the independently minded woman who can and has survived without the attachment to a husband or other male figure.

The character of Alice Tilford reflects another fear of the early twentieth century male. As a souvenir seeking coquette, Tilford's frequent exclamations of "I love base-ball" are mocked by the players. However, her acquisition of souvenirs distinguishes her through the course of the play. Tilford's acquisitions are used as comic devices and allude to humiliations and defeats

suffered by the ballplayers. Saying it was so clever of him to strike out on such a little ball with such a big bat, Tilford asks Chief Wayne to put his initials on the ball that struck him out. By the end of the play, among the things she has taken include a player's mackinaw coat, a catcher's mask, a full uniform taken piecemeal from various players, and one of the team's equipment trunks in which to take all of her souvenirs home. The men eventually accept that what Tilford wants, she will get, and they offer little resistance. Her new possessions frequently are recontextualized in stereotypically feminine terms. Though she says she will tell all the girls that the catcher's mask is "the great John Bohannon's muzzle," she first declares that the mask would be "just lovely filled with ferns."⁷³ More directly, she notices Copley's collegiate fob in the shape of a baseball mitt. Earned by him for his achievements on the field while at Yale, the item is quickly secured by Tilford. After its capture and having attached it to her own necklace, Tilford rechristens the item by telling the player that she does not like to see men wear "jewelry."⁷⁴

The independently-minded matron represented by Elvira Squibbs and the childish usurper of property, Alice Tilford, serve as separate poles of the conflicting perception of the contemporary new woman. Just as Squibbs shows the feminist desire to develop autonomously, Tilford presents an equally feminine desire to remain protected and provided for.⁷⁵ This dichotomy briefly touches upon a tension at the central premise of the play. Believing the matronly Squibbs to be the new owner, the player Skeets exclaims, "owned body and soul and by

⁷³ Young and Mathewson, *The Girl and the Pennant* typescript, 42-3.

⁷⁴ Young and Mathewson, *The Girl and the Pennant* typescript, 80.

⁷⁵ Additionally, by using Mental Science all season, Squibbs, like the corrupt interests around the game, has been actively trying to alter the outcomes of games while Tilford is shown to be as childish as the players who succumb to drinking and temptation.

that!”⁷⁶ While the quote expresses the perpetual disquiet between owners and players, the situation presented in the play is now complicated by issues of gender. Until now, the labor concerns of ballplayers had been primarily defined along relatively benign employer-employee lines in times of general agreement and categorized as a master-chattel relationship during periods of unrest. As Tilford later states after Bohannon has temporarily convinced Miss Fitzgerald to sell Copley to the Hornets, “My goodness, she can buy and sell ‘em just like slaves, can’t she?”⁷⁷ The insertion of gender into the mix puts the players in the traditionally female role of property – an option not presented as particularly palatable to the ballplayers. Squibbs is presented to be relatively physically unattractive to the ballplayers while Tilford’s pleasing looks are offset by her attitude toward property. The acceptable balance between the two poles represented by these characters is suggested to be in Miss Fitzgerald.

Though she has come to own the team through inheritance rather than through her own personal hard work, Miss Fitzgerald is presented as the right kind of woman to have in baseball. First, she thinks of herself in masculine terms. In her introductory speech to the team, she briefly refers to herself as a boy before rephrasing. Miss Fitzgerald says that since her father didn’t have any male heirs, she took the role and had been learning the game since she was very young.⁷⁸ Later, she takes Copley’s advice to “square her shoulders like a man” to prevent his sale to the Hornets.⁷⁹ Described at her first appearance as “very feminine – not the managing type at all,” Miss Fitzgerald displays a male mindset that contradicts the appearance of feminine frailty.⁸⁰

⁷⁶ Young and Mathewson, *The Girl and the Pennant* typescript, 23.

⁷⁷ Young and Mathewson, *The Girl and the Pennant* typescript, 85.

⁷⁸ Young and Mathewson, *The Girl and the Pennant* typescript, 40-1.

⁷⁹ Young and Mathewson, *The Girl and the Pennant* typescript, 87.

⁸⁰ Young and Mathewson, *The Girl and the Pennant* typescript, 24.

Yet, for some in the play, certain traits that are seen to be strengths in men are characterized as feminine weaknesses as Miss Fitzgerald compared to her father. In her speech, Miss Fitzgerald describes how Old Fitz owned the team as the sport grew around him and as the team moved up from the bottom rungs of the minor leagues to the major leagues where it stands. His love was not for money, but for the game itself and for the players with whom he worked.⁸¹ These were seen as admirable traits in a man, even to Bohannan, who had a very good working relationship with the Eagles owner; however, the manager characterizes the same characteristics in Mona as symptoms of feminine “sentiment.” Upset that Miss Fitzgerald requires that Pitman, who had been with the team and her father since their beginnings, remain on the team, Bohannan bristles that she is passing up an opportunity to make money from selling the team because of this implied feminine sentiment.⁸² To try to defend her similarity to her father, Miss Fitzgerald acquiesces to Bohannan’s demand at the end of the first act that he remain the boss of the team. In so doing, she places herself under the protection of a more experienced male figure who she believes has her best interests at heart. After all, her father had told her that she would never have any trouble with Bohannan as the manager. However, as the audience is aware that Bohannan has already begun his double-crossing, the implication is that Miss Fitzgerald’s success will come only when the right kind of man is protecting her.

David Grimstead argues that the essential difference between the hero’s goodness and the villain’s evilness in melodramas was evident in how they treated women who were considered defenseless.⁸³ Because women were considered to be in constant need of protection, actions taken against women by men who were presumed to be in a protective role were always

⁸¹ Young and Mathewson, *The Girl and the Pennant* typescript, 42.

⁸² Young and Mathewson, *The Girl and the Pennant* typescript, 34.

⁸³ Grimstead, *Melodrama Unveiled*, 181.

considered to be the most heinous. Often heroes were content to remain complacent in a situation until provoked by the possibility of harm coming to a woman. Despite her position of ownership in the play, Miss Fitzgerald remains in a precarious position throughout. The estate left to her by her father consisted of little more than the ball club, which becomes her primary means of support. Bohannon's encouragement for her to sell is done under the guise of assisting her financial state because she's a woman. He explains that if he made mistakes that cost the team money, he would feel bad because he would be putting a woman in jeopardy.⁸⁴ Of course, his willingness to continue with his deception following the exchange shows his true character. Given the same information, Copley challenges Bohannon directly in the second act but only because he feels that he must. Copley states that if a man owned the team, he would prefer to let that man fight his own battles, but Copley is not content to "stand by and see a woman double crossed."⁸⁵

Key to Bohannon's role as a villain toward Miss Fitzgerald is that their encounters leave her feeling as though she's "nothing but a female."⁸⁶ The connotation here is that Bohannon focuses only on the traditional femininity as weak and powerless. In the second act as he tries to sell Copley to the Hornets, Bohannon steamrolls her into agreement. As he leaves, she finds herself again placed within the confines of the traditional female position, so she "turns mechanically to tea table and begins serving tea."⁸⁷ Once her strength is bolstered by Copley's

⁸⁴ Young and Mathewson, *The Girl and the Pennant* typescript, 34.

⁸⁵ Young and Mathewson, *The Girl and the Pennant* typescript, 66.

⁸⁶ Young and Mathewson, *The Girl and the Pennant* typescript, 35.

⁸⁷ Young and Mathewson, *The Girl and the Pennant* typescript, 79.

advice to present herself as more masculine, she declares that the sale is off since she is exercising her “woman’s prerogative.”⁸⁸

Miss Fitzgerald does not solely exist in the play as a defenseless female. She takes over management of the team during the final inning of the deciding game once Bohannon was thrown out. Asking one of the ejected players to relay the signals to the bench for her, she chooses to insert Copley as a pinch hitter. In a display of her baseball acumen, Miss Fitzgerald orders a surprise double steal with two of the team’s slowest runners on base. As the steals and Copley’s hit give the Eagles the win, her actions show that women can be a benefit to the game of baseball – provided that it is the right woman. Once again, though, her success is made possible in large part to Copley’s efforts.

Copley’s ability to make Miss Fitzgerald break the mold of the defenseless woman, even temporarily, marks him not only as a melodramatic hero, but a model of masculine treatment of the new woman. To convince her to resist Bohannon’s requests that she sell immediately, Copley tries to anger her into keeping the team by emphasizing the weaknesses and foolishness inherent in females.⁸⁹ His success shows that even independent women are still able to be manipulated by the right man – one who has good and honorable intentions. His willingness to allow her to be in control exists until the end of the play as the two inevitably become a couple. She asks if she would have to propose to him. After a brief misunderstanding, he asserts his control in the relationship by assuring her that he would do it; though, he does ask how he should.

For all the fears that women evoke for the game, the typical light comedy ending reinforces the place of the man in the world of the early twentieth century. Elvira Squibbs relinquishes her independence in order to accompany Pitman to his Kentucky horse farm. Alice

⁸⁸ Young and Mathewson, *The Girl and the Pennant* typescript, 89.

⁸⁹ Young and Mathewson, *The Girl and the Pennant* typescript, 39.

Tilford ends up with the ultimate baseball souvenir – a ballplayer husband. Ending the play with the implied marriage between the Miss Fitzgerald and Copley shows the world set right again. Copley has removed drinking and debauchery from the clubhouse. He has expelled a corrupt owner not only from the game, but from the country. Most importantly, he has essentially saved the Hornets both from having to be sold because of his wealth from his business interests, but also from the continued ownership by a single woman. His goal of trying to keep her family name in baseball ironically ends with the promise that Miss Fitzgerald will soon become Mrs. Reeves.

For the content of the play to affect any change in baseball, it would have had to have been seen. For it to have been seen, it would have had to have been a hit. Mathewson had reason to believe that the play could be a hit based on Young's track record. The playwright had two popular hits with the plays *Brown of Harvard* in 1906 and *The Boys of Company B* in 1907 as well as the 1910 operetta *Naughty Marietta* for which she wrote the libretto.

The play's initial production by the Arch Selwyn & Co. production company did not last very long in New York. A series of delays reportedly brought on because of Mathewson's absence from the theatre while he was playing for the Giants in the World Series caused the production to open a week later than originally scheduled. The item stated that the play "needed some additional baseball atmosphere."⁹⁰ It finally opened at the Lyric Theatre on October 23, 1913 – less than two weeks after Mathewson was charged with the loss against the Philadelphia Athletics in the Series' decisive fifth game. Despite his apparent availability, Mathewson did not attend the play's opening night, and it was not reported whether he attended any subsequent performances either.

⁹⁰ *New York Sun*, October 15, 1913.

Several reviewers were relatively lukewarm and noted the lackluster performance but seemed optimistic about the long-term chances for the play. The review appearing in the *New York Clipper* believed that the play was destined to be a “great big popular success.”⁹¹ The *New Rochelle Pioneer* wrote that the play was “destined to have a long career on Broadway.”⁹² The *New York Times* review asserted it was an “invigorating entertainment” and found the last act to be particularly well-written.⁹³ The *New York Herald* thought that the play might help fans to be able to bridge the long winter before the beginning of the next baseball season.⁹⁴ That was not to be the case. Audiences seemed to have agreed more with the review in the *Auburn Citizen* that called the production a “picturesque fiasco,” and called Mathewson “wise enough to keep away from the scene of the disaster.”⁹⁵ One of the production’s major failings, according to the *New York Tribune*, was keeping the climactic baseball game off stage and relayed to the audience as though a horserace was being announced. The *Tribune* review summarized what they believed to be the appeal to the “usually exotic audience” in attendance at the first night as well as who was likely to blame for the production with,

Leaving aside the sporting – if Mr. Mathewson will pardon the word – interest of last evening’s event, an interest is always felt whenever the man of action ventures into the more subjective world, when Colonel Roosevelt discusses futurist art or the Emperor William composes a song – setting this apart, and coming down to the purely artistic merits of the play, one may only surmise, of course, where Mr. Mathewson leaves off and Mrs. Rida Johnson Young begins. It is to be hoped that he doesn’t go very far, for Mr. Mathewson is a great and serious athlete, and, from any serious point of view, the piece is very horrible indeed. Almost as, or perhaps even more, terrible than “Brown of Harvard,”

⁹¹ *New York Clipper*, November 1, 1913.

⁹² “The Girl and the Pennant,” *New Rochelle Pioneer*, November 1, 1913.

⁹³ “Cheers and Laughs for Baseball Play,” *New York Times*, October 24, 1913

⁹⁴ “The Girl and the Pennant in for a Winning Run,” *New York Herald*, October 24, 1913.

⁹⁵ *Auburn Citizen*, October 25, 1913.

which Mrs. Young also wrote, and thousands of people appeared to like immediately, as, indeed, they may like this.⁹⁶

Variety reported on November 7, during the play's second week, that the production had lost an estimated \$5,000 between the show's expenses and the disappointing house receipts. It closed in its third week after a total of only 20 performances. The play was briefly revived for a one-week run about two months later in the first week of January 1914. A completely different company featured a new cast to showcase the stock company's new leading man in the Harlem Opera House managed by Benjamin Franklin Keith.⁹⁷

It seems whatever Mathewson and Young sought to do, it does not appear to have been successful. Financially, the play lost money. Aesthetically, the production received several very negative reviews. Practically, both issues in baseball the play addressed lingered as Britton eventually acquiesced to leaving ownership of league teams to men and players continued to fix games. By the time the play was published in 1917 with some minor changes, Mathewson's name had been removed as an author for an undetermined reason and Young considered it her only failure.⁹⁸ For Mathewson, it was his last foray into theatre.

⁹⁶ "'Matty' Does a Play," *New York Tribune*, October 24, 1913.

⁹⁷ *New Rochelle Pioneer*, January 3, 1914. *New York Sun*, January 6, 1914. The new leading man for "America's Premier Stock Company" was named Harrison Ford.

⁹⁸ Helen Christine Bennett, "The Woman Who Wrote 'Mother Machree'," *American Magazine*, December 1920, 186.

CHAPTER 4

Ty Cobb: “As Gentlemanly As a Kick in the Crotch”

While out driving just after the 1911 season, Ty Cobb was stopped by a policeman in New York’s Central Park. Cobb writes in his autobiography, *My Life in Baseball: the True Record*, that he was told to get down from the car. Cobb maintained that he was not speeding and refused to get out of the car. When the officer attempted to drag Cobb from the vehicle, Cobb “made a little pugilistic history” and punched the man in the face. The officer stumbled away from the vehicle and disappeared into the park. Cobb, who was no stranger to being in trouble with the law, was sure that he would shortly be set upon by a legion of police ready to exact revenge, and he “would get 99 years for this.” It was then that Cobb noticed a man with a camera hiding in the bushes nearby. Cobb reported that the entire incident was meant to be an attempt to “grab off some Page One space” by the producers of the play that Cobb was rehearsing.¹ Rather than let Cobb know what was going to happen, which would have required some acting on Cobb’s part to get the desired result, the producers instead chose to let Cobb be himself.

The incident illustrated some of the issues that Vaughn Glaser faced in having Ty Cobb as the star of his production of George Ade’s *The College Widow*. Scheduled to tour the country for sixteen weeks, from just after the conclusion of the 1911 World Series through mid-March of the next year, Cobb was given a guaranteed salary of \$10,000 to appear in the play.² For Cobb, the tour was clearly a money-making opportunity since his salary was larger than he had yet received for any one season of playing for the Detroit Tigers in the American League. Glaser,

¹ Ty Cobb with Al Stump, *Ty Cobb: My Life in Baseball*, (New York: Doubleday, 1961), 185-6.

² Charles Alexander, *Ty Cobb*, (New York: Oxford UP, 1984), 101.

however, was tasked with managing which version of Ty Cobb audiences would see when he walked on stage: the great ballplayer and Southern hero or the notoriously violent outsider. This chapter examines how the transfer of a player's baseball persona onto the stage became complicated when the character being portrayed by the ballplayer was mismatched to the player's persona. One review of the play said of Cobb's acting that "he never, for a moment, seems to forget that he is Ty Cobb 'playing' at hero."³ In fact, he had become so adept at playing "Ty Cobb" that audiences had a hard time seeing him as anything else.

Even before he reached the major leagues, Cobb was active in creating an image of himself as a ballplayer. In 1904 after receiving only limited playing time and being released from Augusta, Georgia team in the Class C professional South Atlantic League, the seventeen year-old Cobb agreed to play for Anniston, Alabama in the semi-professional Tennessee and Alabama league. Such a small league below the fully professional ranks was normally beyond the scope of newspaper sportswriters in the cities, but Grantland Rice of the *Atlanta Journal* inserted into his paper a note that stated "rumors had reached Atlanta from numerous sources that over in Alabama there's a young fellow who seems to be showing an unusual lot of talent." Many years later while sharing the stage with Cobb at a banquet, Rice explained that he had received a great number of letters detailing the young man's play and promoting him as someone who would eventually be a major league player. Due to the pressure, Rice felt obliged to acknowledge the player with the notice in the paper. After hearing the story, Cobb confessed to the crowd and to Rice that he had written all of the letters himself using a variety of handwriting styles and assumed names like Jackson, Jones, Smith, Brown, Kelly, and McIntyre. Cobb explained as motivation for the deceit, "I was in a hurry."⁴ Though he had grown up playing a style of

³ "At the theatres," *Birmingham News*, December 1, 1911.

baseball that was, as he described it, “as gentlemanly as a kick in the crotch,” he felt he could do well in the professional game if given a chance.⁵

Cobb proved himself to not only be a major leaguer, but what he accomplished on the field made him arguably the greatest baseball player of all time. He was elected to the Baseball Hall of Fame in the first class of 1936 after appearing on 222 of 226 ballots – more than any other player in the inaugural induction class, and as such is considered the first player enshrined in the Hall of Fame. He led the American League in batting average twelve times over his twenty-four year career. From 1907 to 1919, he failed to win the batting championship only once. His nine consecutive seasons leading the league in batting average still stands as a Major League record as does his career total of twelve times. He hit at least .320 in all but two of his twenty-four seasons, and in three seasons, he held an average over .400. His career batting average of .366 remains the highest of all time.

When he retired after the 1928 season, Cobb held more than forty-three records in batting, base running, and durability.⁶ Among the most notable records he held were in the categories of base hits and runs scored. The eight times he led the league in hits remains a record, and he became the overall career leader in base hits in 1923. His career total of 4,189 stood as the record for more than sixty years until September 1985.⁷ He was the all-time leader even longer in runs scored from the 1925 season until October 2001, when his career total of 2,246 was eclipsed. He still ranks in the statistical top five for games played, total bases, singles,

⁴ Cobb with Stump, *My Life in Baseball*, 47-8. Alexander, *Ty Cobb*, 17-8.

⁵ Cobb with Stump, *My Life in Baseball*, 41.

⁶ Alexander, *Ty Cobb*, 3.

⁷ It was believed at the time that Cobb’s total stood at 4191 on September 11, 1985 when Pete Rose was celebrated for breaking the record. Since then, Cobb’s official total has been revised to the 4189 number and his career batting average has been amended to .366 instead of the previously acknowledged .367.

doubles, triples, and stolen bases – with his fifty-four credited steals of home plate remaining as one of the virtually unbreakable records in baseball.

Standing just above six feet tall, Cobb was physically talented with both great speed and extraordinary coordination; however, the overall playing style he developed when he was younger was the most consistently visible aspect of his created playing persona. That style was shaped in large part by how he mentally conceived of the game. Part of Cobb's psychological strategy on the field was to do unusual things that had a very low chance of success, so that he could keep the other players off balance. Usually but not always when the Tigers were already well ahead, Cobb would attempt to steal a base even before the pitcher began his wind-up, or he would try to advance another base while an infielder held the ball. In Cobb's estimation, establishing himself as a threat for something unusual had more value toward his long-term goals than the potential run he represented on the base paths.

Cobb made himself into a threat within the bounds of the game. When at the plate, he was a threat to bunt while also a threat to make more powerful contact with the ball, so defenders were caught in between. On the bases, he was always a threat to steal a base, so pitchers were uneasy. In the field, his speed and accurate arm made him a threat to make plays that others could not, so runners advanced at their own peril. As such, Cobb explained that the opposition might be forced into making a mistake with "that Crazy Cobb" on the field.⁸ Quickly, his "Crazy Cobb" became known to fans as just "Ty Cobb." The acknowledged construction of this persona was a cornerstone of Cobb's on-field behavior and shaped how all of the players and fans at the ballpark understood him.

Cobb publicly championed what he called the "scientific approach" to baseball which required the hitter to use his intelligence to prioritize placement of a base hit between fielders

⁸ Cobb with Stump, *My Life in Baseball*, 66.

rather than swinging full strength with reduced precision.⁹ By “playing the percentages,” Cobb greatly increased his likelihood of achieving success. Not content to just follow Wee Willie Keeler’s famous dictum to “hit it where they ain’t,” Cobb often capitalized on opportunities that presented themselves during a game. More often, however, he created his own opportunities.

One way he felt he could put himself at an advantage on the field was through physical conditioning. Cobb frequently swung three bats while he was on deck waiting for his turn at the plate. The increased weight of three 40 ounce bats in his hands allowed a single bat to feel much lighter while at the plate, and it could be wielded with more combined force and precision. The practice was unusual for the time, and Cobb felt he needed to defend the action in his 1914 book *Busting ‘Em* as being more than just mere superstition.¹⁰ He used the same principle one spring when the team was training in Louisiana. Newspaper reporters remarked how much slower he appeared and speculated that Cobb was not going to be as quick on the field in the upcoming season. After spring training was over, Cobb revealed that he had asked a cobbler to install lead weights into the shoes he wore all spring in order to increase the strength and endurance in his legs.¹¹ Cobb’s opinions and methods of conditioning subsequently became widely publicized during the First World War. His reply to an Air Service trainee’s request for conditioning advice was distributed to all trainees of the Service under the Chief of Aircraft Operation’s endorsement.¹²

Another method that Cobb used to work the percentages in his favor was his constant study of the men he played against and then adapting his own approach to take away whatever

⁹ Ty Cobb, *Busting ‘Em and Other Big League Stories*, (New York: E.J. Clode, 1914, Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2003), 9.

¹⁰ Cobb, *Busting ‘Em*, 19.

¹¹ Cobb, *Busting ‘Em*, 109-12; Alexander, *Ty Cobb*, 99; Cobb with Stump, *My Life in Baseball*, 275.

¹² Alexander, *Ty Cobb*, 141.

advantage they had in the field. Recognizing his inability to hit the curveball thrown by left-handed pitcher Doc White, he repositioned himself in the back of the batter's box, so he could judge the breaking pitch more accurately. Against right-handed pitchers, since he had a better view of the ball, Cobb moved up to the front of the batter's box to swing at a curveball before it began to break.¹³ By watching the timing of how a particular outfielder raised his arm to return the ball to the infield or identifying other idiosyncrasies of the players on the field, Cobb knew he would be able to advance a base when the opposition was not expecting it.

Cobb was also adept at manipulating players to help him achieve his goals. Like many hitters, Cobb would feign a bunt attempt on one pitch, so the infielders would play in closer to him on later pitches and not be able to cover as much ground defensively when he was swinging away fully.¹⁴ But he also used more unusual methods of manipulation as well. Having had little luck facing Eddie Cicotte in his career, Cobb designed a tactic meant to rattle the pitcher. Leading off the ninth inning in a tight game against Cicotte, Cobb took his place in the batter's box and began talking to the hitter on deck while ignoring the pitcher completely. With his back toward the pitcher and his bat held by his side through the entire at bat, Cobb took four straight pitches for balls, and Cicotte became so enraged that he had to be taken out of the game.¹⁵ Through his physical conditioning, attentiveness to situations and knowledge of other players' behavior, Ty Cobb could be easily identified as the most prepared player on the field.

Cobb approached the game mentally with the "idea that you have something over the other fellow," which he considered to be a primary component in achieving victory.¹⁶ Often for

¹³ Cobb, *Busting 'Em*, 9-10; Alexander, *Ty Cobb*, 144.

¹⁴ Cobb, *Busting 'Em*, 21.

¹⁵ Cobb with Stump, *My Life in Baseball*, 83.

¹⁶ Cobb, *Busting 'Em*, 37.

Cobb, it meant showing the opposition that there was nothing they could do that would intimidate him. Often finding himself the target of bean balls by opposing pitchers, Cobb explained that his preferred course of action was to immediately taunt the pitcher on his wildness and move closer to the plate to tempt the pitcher to throw at him again.¹⁷ In his opinion, a ballplayer should not show any fear or allude to any personal weakness lest it be used against him.

Included among the things that Cobb believed showed weakness was kindness, and Cobb was ready to take advantage of players he thought were too nice. Cobb saw this as his particular advantage over future Hall of Fame pitcher Walter Johnson. Johnson, who was renowned for his pitching speed and accuracy, had accidentally hit one of Cobb's teammates in the head with a pitch and immediately ran in to try to help the motionless player. Seeing that Johnson was afraid of hurting anyone, Cobb began to routinely stand almost on top of the plate when facing the pitcher until the strike count was in his favor. Then Cobb would return to his normal position in the batter's box and wait to hit the next pitch Johnson inevitably threw in the strike zone. Cobb felt that Johnson's politeness permitted Cobb to hit .335 against the pitcher over the course of their careers.¹⁸

Cobb also took advantage of the friendship that fellow southerner and great hitter "Shoeless" Joe Jackson offered him throughout their careers by manipulating the uneducated hitter for Cobb's personal gain. At the end of the 1911 season, Jackson led Cobb in the batting race by nine points as their two teams met for a six game series. Though the two had always shared a friendly relationship, Cobb refused to acknowledge Jackson's greeting as the two passed on the field during the first game and stared at a point six inches above his head. Cobb continued

¹⁷ Cobb, *Busting 'Em*, 107.

¹⁸ Cobb with Stump, *My Life in Baseball*, 157; Alexander, *Ty Cobb*, 56.

to ignore Jackson's attempts at conversation throughout each of the games. The confused and dismayed Jackson slumped at the plate through the series while Cobb concentrated only on making hits until he had surpassed Jackson in batting average. As soon as the last out was made in the final game, Cobb ran over to Jackson, greeted him warmly, and congratulated him on a fine season. Cobb finished with a .420 average while Jackson had fallen to .408. Cobb summed up the incident in his autobiography published just after his death by saying, "it helps if you can help them beat themselves."¹⁹

Though he ostensibly liked both of the players mentioned above, Cobb's attitude toward the game required that he make enemies. Every member of the other team was Cobb's "blood enemy" no matter what previous experiences he had in playing against them. This was the only way, Cobb believed, that a ballplayer could gain any prominence.²⁰ While on deck, Cobb would watch the pitcher and construct a personal hatred toward his opponent, gritting his teeth while swinging his three bats, so that he would be in the right frame of mind to defeat the pitcher.²¹ When he became the manager of the Tigers, Cobb insisted that his men not fraternize on the field with the opposing team, so that they could maintain a state of mind ready for combat.²² For Cobb the game was a continuous battle. In fact, he frequently likened it to warfare, and he was always on the attack. Obsessed with victory, whether team-based or personal, he felt that if he could demoralize or humiliate his opponents at any point during the game, it put him in a better position to win in the future.²³

¹⁹ Cobb with Stump, *My Life in Baseball*, 176-7.

²⁰ Cobb with Stump, *My Life in Baseball*, 94.

²¹ Alexander, *Ty Cobb*, 90; Cobb with Stump, *My Life in Baseball*, 157.

²² Alexander, *Ty Cobb*, 157.

²³ Alexander, *Ty Cobb*, 91.

The Ty Cobb persona based on his Crazy Cobb that crowds saw on the field displayed both physical strength and sly intelligence. It preyed on both the physical and mental weaknesses of other players. It put the other players off-balance by presenting a constant threat to do something that was not typical. Within the game, this persona put Cobb in an advantageous position: he knew why he did the things he did even when it was not clear to others. Outside of the game, the Ty Cobb playing persona was neither predictable nor readily understandable, and it made it intriguing to watch.

The persona also displayed several of the traits identified by Orrin Klapp as qualities of a villain in American culture. Not necessarily diametrically opposed to the idea of the hero in American culture, Klapp describes the villain's role to often be the preeminent threat to the group to whom the hero serves.²⁴ The villain type may actually share traits with the hero type, but they are categorized differently because of either their motivating intent in performing an action or the moral lens through which society views their behavior. A display of physical strength, for example, could be considered either heroic or villainous depending whether it was done in either a defensive or attacking manner.

As with the hero, Klapp uses five categories for the villain type. The first are those who violate or threaten proper social order or status such as a rebel, rogue, or trouble-maker. Next are usurpers and abusers of power, authority or privilege like an oppressor or a "selfish grabber." Outsiders or strangers that violate the cohesiveness of a group are the third category. Those who are traitors, sneaks, or otherwise sow disloyalty are part of the fourth category. The final category consists of those who are variously deemed undesirable within a society for being a drain or otherwise unwilling to contribute to the general welfare. Klapp notes that the villain and hero help to promote a societal theme or value by providing either a negative or positive

²⁴ Klapp, *Heroes, Villains and Fools*, 50.

representation of it in action. By illustrating the break from the rule, the villain can serve society as “a safety valve for aggression.”²⁵

In *Busting ‘Em*, Cobb devotes the second chapter to his perspective on baseball crowds and what effect they have on the players. The persona he presented on the field was frequently infuriating to fans of the other teams. Cobb thrived on the animosity toward him displayed by opposing crowds. He felt he hit better on the road than he did in front of his own fans.²⁶ He credited the fans that rooted vociferously against him with helping him break from occasional hitting slumps.²⁷ Singling out the fans in Philadelphia and St. Louis, Cobb explained that the jeering made him work harder in those cities.²⁸ Cobb tried to do what he could to encourage crowds to hate him while visiting different ballparks.

Unlike Mike Kelly, Cobb’s interactions with the crowds as a player were for the most part adversarial. Taunted and jeered by these crowds, Cobb frequently returned fire with taunts and insults of his own. Near the end of a particularly tough extra-inning game in Boston, Cobb hit a home run to essentially seal the win. After touching the plate, Cobb gestured to the hostile crowd to “sit down and shut up.”²⁹ Even when a crowd was attempting to cheer him for a good play, Cobb admitted that he would rarely acknowledge them by tipping his cap like most players would do. He preferred to maintain a blatant dismissal of their disapproval and an obvious disregard for their approval.³⁰

²⁵ Klapp, *Heroes, Villains and Fools*, 51-66.

²⁶ Cobb, *Busting ‘Em*, 130.

²⁷ Cobb, *Busting ‘Em*, 17.

²⁸ Cobb, *Busting ‘Em*, 26.

²⁹ Alexander, *Ty Cobb*, 67.

³⁰ Cobb, *Busting ‘Em*, 27.

Cobb believed that, as individuals, fans were friendly and generally supportive even of players on the other team, but the anonymity provided by being a member of a crowd allowed more menacing behavior. Among the loudest and most rambunctious fans, Cobb observed, were people who were generally quiet away from the ballpark or who held subservient jobs like a waiter or bell hop. The jeering allowed at the game was one of the only ways for a person like this to assert himself.³¹ Cobb felt his persona provided a perfect target for their pent up hostility.

One of the ways that Cobb could become an easy target for the crowd's hostility was through the spiking of other players on the field. His spikes allowed him to be the aggressor on the base paths when he may have otherwise been at the mercy of the infielders, who now had the tendency to give Cobb a little more room on close plays at the base.³² Through his career Cobb became known throughout the game for his willingness to spike a man if he was in the way. For the most part, Cobb claimed the incidents were unintentional, and he believed that due to the seriousness of such injuries that no player in the league ever tried to spike another with the intention of putting him out of the game.³³ The threat of being spiked was a real concern for players at the time no matter whether they were the runner or the fielder. An ill-placed spike

³¹ Cobb, *Busting 'Em*, 32.

³² Cobb, *Busting 'Em*, 122.

³³ Cobb, *Busting 'Em*, 153. After his retirement, Cobb admitted that he had indeed intentionally tried to spike men on the field; though, he limited the number to only two occasions through his entire career and insisted that both times it was done as retribution for previous wrongs done to him. Cobb claims to have missed in his attempt at the first man – a catcher for Cleveland named Harry Bemis who had once used the ball clenched in his hand to beat Cobb's head while he was on the ground – but he acknowledged connecting with the other. The second man was Boston pitcher Dutch Leonard. Cobb had been hit by one of Leonard's pitches already in one game and believed that he had been throwing at his head. During his next at bat, Cobb bunted down the first base line forcing the first baseman to field the ball and forcing Leonard to cover the base. Leonard received the ball, made the out, and continued into foul territory. Ignoring the base completely, Cobb veered toward him and jumped at the pitcher's legs. Cobb's spikes sliced through Leonard's uniform but did not cut his skin. With the pitcher having just barely missed a possibly significant injury, Cobb claimed it was the last time Leonard ever threw at him. Though Cobb tries to set these two instances off as justified acts of vengeance, which he couches in lines from Shakespeare's *Hamlet* about being obliged to win a fight when forced to do so, Cobb knew his spikes were weapons on the base paths and, with a mind-set that every player was an enemy, he wielded them in a way that made his Crazy Cobb even more villainous. Alexander, *Ty Cobb*, 122; Cobb with Stump, *My Life in Baseball*, 125.

could mean the end of a player's career, and such an injury may mean the difference between continuing to play the game for a living with its financial benefits or returning to their towns to work in the manual labor jobs that many players had been able to at least stave off for awhile.

After having spiked Bill Bradley of Cleveland, whom Cobb said he had looked up to as a youth, Cobb was exonerated of any wrong doing by the injured player who said it clearly was not Cobb's fault.³⁴ However, many similar situations did not end so courteously. When Philadelphia's Frank Baker was cut on the arm by Cobb while sliding into third, the game was stopped as Baker's arm was bandaged and the Athletics' players demanded Cobb be removed from the game for dirty play.³⁵ Though a photograph appeared later showing Cobb attempting to slide away from Baker, Philadelphia's esteemed owner and manager, Connie Mack, accused Cobb of committing the act on purpose and called him the dirtiest player in the game.³⁶ In the subsequent weeks, stoked by the antagonistic articles toward him in the *Philadelphia Bulletin* by sportswriter Horace Fogel, Cobb received numerous death threats, and there was a visible police presence on his next trip to the city. The incident put his reputation for purposeful spiking and dirty play on national display.

Cobb saw such a reputation as generally useful when not taken to quite an extreme as it was following the Baker spiking. In 1908 while in New York, several Tiger reserve players sat on the bench and used files to sharpen their spikes as the New York players passed by. The prank was meant as a joke to scare the other team. Though he was not present, several sportswriters reported that Cobb was filing his own spikes in full view of the entire New York team in

³⁴ Alexander, *Ty Cobb*, 77.

³⁵ Alexander, *Ty Cobb*, 79.

³⁶ Alexander, *Ty Cobb*, 79-80.

anticipation of getting to slice apart their infielders.³⁷ The story made its way around the league and helped to establish Cobb's reputation as a spike-slashing, unscrupulous player. His aggressive base running and his increased involvement in spiking incidents made the story seem more and more believable for fans and, more importantly, for opposing players. For his part, Cobb would never actively deny the incident during his playing career and only began to refute it during his retirement. The story became another element of the threat he wanted his Crazy Cobb persona to present to the world and another way crowds could see Ty Cobb as a villain.

The general animosity among players and fans toward Cobb was evident in a plot launched in 1910 to deny him another of his much-valued batting titles. Late in the season, Cobb had overcome a four point deficit to Cleveland's Napoleon Lajoie. With two games remaining in the season and a multiple point lead in the race, Cobb did not play again that year. Through the year he had suffered from eye troubles to the extent that there was speculation that he was going blind. With the team's season standing assured no matter the results of the final games, he eschewed the final two games for the sake of his eyes. Other players around the league, however, felt that Cobb was sitting on his average and leaving less of a chance for Lajoie to pass him since as their averages stood, Lajoie would need a hit in virtually each of his plate appearances during the final doubleheader in St. Louis. Jack O'Conner, the manager of the St. Louis Browns, ordered his young and naïve third baseman to play at the edge of the outfield grass every time that Lajoie came to the plate that day. After the conclusion of the two games, Lajoie had gotten eight hits in nine at-bats with nearly all of them being bunts toward the deep-playing third baseman. Browns coach Harry Howell even approached the league official scorer for the game with a bribe to see if the result of the remaining at-bat could be changed from a fielder's choice to a hit. Lajoie was mobbed by approximately 10,000 laudatory St. Louis fans and received a

³⁷ Alexander, *Ty Cobb*, 67; Cobb with Stump, *My Life in Baseball*, 122.

telegram from eight of Cobb's Tiger teammates congratulating him on winning the championship. However, when the league's official statistician calculated the totals to determine a winner, Lajoie had an average of .3841 to Cobb's .3848, so Cobb was victorious again. Both O'Conner and Howell were subsequently banished from organized baseball while both Cobb and Lajoie, who had simply taken what the opposition was giving him, each received a brand new Chalmers automobile that had been promised to the winner of the batting race.³⁸

The Crazy Cobb image as a member of Klapp's second category of villainous abusers could be extended well beyond his playing persona. Away from the field, his propensity for violent outbursts not only got him arrested several times, but it also reinforced his image as an oppressor of others through physical means. Due in part to the image he had cultivated on the field, Cobb was often the one seen to be the aggressor or instigator. While he doubtlessly was at fault on many occasions, Cobb often claimed to be a victim of circumstance. For the most part, these confrontations revolved around Cobb trying to establish or maintain a level of social status he believed he deserved. Though physical conflict was just one way for him to measure himself against others, he seemed to enjoy it immensely. As a guest referee for a full card of boxing in New Orleans, Cobb allowed one fighter in the first fight to so thoroughly bludgeon the other that the crowd called for Cobb to stop the fight. Ignoring the pleas, Cobb let the beating continue until the local police ended the bout after entering the ring. Cobb was fired before the second bout began.³⁹

He believed that when he or any player had agitated fans enough to become violent, that they were much more likely to attack a ballplayer while he was still in his uniform than they

³⁸ Alexander, *Ty Cobb*, 95-6; Cobb with Stump, *My Life in Baseball*, 95-9. Subsequent analysis from years later of the 1910 season has shown that Cobb was initially credited with two more hits than he had actually achieved. Lajoie is now credited as having won the batting title over Cobb.

³⁹ Alexander, *Ty Cobb*, 75.

were when they would see him later in his street clothes.⁴⁰ One fan that ran onto the field to accost Cobb immediately after a game was quickly incapacitated by the ballplayer with a swift knee to the man's groin. Cobb explained to reporters the next day that players were entitled receive at least some respect while on the field, since "this ball park is our office."⁴¹ Certainly willing to both put up with and encourage the fans' hatred of him, Cobb felt it was permissible to retaliate when his status as a ballplayer was challenged, and he was even more defiant when he felt his personal status was demeaned as it was while in New York during his most renowned fight with a fan.

In May 1912, Cobb was under a barrage of abuse by a particularly belligerent fan that he had noticed on previous trips to the city. Seated in the stands near Detroit's bench, the fan, named Claude Lueker, taunted Cobb from the moment he appeared on the field. After trading insults with the fan like he typically did, Cobb twice attempted to avoid passing near Lueker when returning to the bench. Between the third and the fourth innings and perhaps goaded into it by teammate Sam Crawford, Cobb leapt the railing and bounded up twelve rows to reach Lueker. Cobb punched Lueker and, once he was knocked down, continued the assault by kicking and stomping on the man with his spikes. When another fan saw that Lueker was missing one entire hand and three additional fingers, fans began to yell that Cobb was beating a man with no hands. While still attacking, Cobb reportedly replied that he did not care if the man had no feet. Eventually Cobb was pulled from the fan by umpires and policemen, and he returned to the field past a line of his teammates who all held bats in case any fan wanted to follow Cobb back to the field. After being suspended for the incident, Cobb was still supported by his teammates who

⁴⁰ Cobb, *Busting 'Em*, 33.

⁴¹ Alexander, *Ty Cobb*, 145.

became members of the first major league team to strike during the season to protest the abuse that Cobb had to endure and what they felt was mistreatment of Cobb by league officials.⁴²

Tigers' manager Hughie Jennings reported Lueker had called Cobb a "half-nigger" immediately before the player jumped into the stands.⁴³ Such a comment was likely too much for Cobb to bear as he generally saw and treated people with darker skin as beneath him. He toured once with several other major league players to Cuba. Though he was quite pleased with the money made from the trip, he never returned due in part to the number of dark-skinned Cubans on the opposing team. Never again did Cobb play on the same field as black players.⁴⁴ While he may have briefly tolerated being on the same field and having the same status as black players while in Cuba, he was not as lenient in regard to African Americans in his everyday life who he felt did not respect his status as either Ty Cobb or a white man.

Reported incidents of physical confrontation between Cobb and African Americans were numerous. In 1907 Cobb slapped the African American groundskeeper of their spring training park and chased him around the park because he was drunk and had called Cobb "Carrie." Cobb's teammate Charlie Schmidt intervened in the fracas after Cobb began to choke the groundskeeper's wife who had begun yelling at Cobb to stop the assault.⁴⁵ In June 1908, after jumping out of the street away from a car that was speeding toward him, Cobb landed in some freshly poured asphalt. He felt the workman insulted him, so Cobb punched him in the face and into the asphalt himself.⁴⁶ After hearing his wife had argued with a Detroit butcher one day in

⁴² Alexander, *Ty Cobb*, 105-7; Cobb, *Busting 'Em*, 28-30.

⁴³ Alexander, *Ty Cobb*, 105.

⁴⁴ Alexander, *Ty Cobb*, 98-9.

⁴⁵ Alexander, *Ty Cobb*, 50.

⁴⁶ Cobb with Stump, *My Life in Baseball*, 94; Alexander, *Ty Cobb*, 68.

June 1914, Cobb called the man and went to confront him with his revolver in hand. He made the white butcher apologize over the phone, but when the butcher's young African American assistant began to argue, Cobb pistol whipped him until the police were called.⁴⁷ Nearing the end of his career in 1924, Cobb once again punched another African American groundskeeper this time in Philadelphia as the two argued over the use of the park's telephone.⁴⁸ Though he was arrested on several occasions following these incidents, most of the civil offenses were settled quickly given the privileges granted Cobb by his wealth and the standing he held with the affluent white citizens.

Even when pressed, the practical results of an altercation for Cobb were little more than an inconvenience. While in Cleveland in September of 1909, Cobb returned to his hotel at 2 a.m. from dinner with some friends. He argued with the African American elevator operator and slapped the man for being insolent. The hotel's watchman, George Stansfield, another African American, hit Cobb with his nightstick. As they wrestled each other to the ground, Cobb cut Stansfield several times with a knife he had in his pocket. Cobb was hit again in the head with the nightstick and eventually made it back to his room after other hotel employees separated the two. After the team left town the next day, Stansfield filed both criminal and civil charges against Cobb. Though the Tigers' attorney arranged a settlement for Stansfield to drop the charges against Cobb, the Cleveland police department announced their intention to continue their pursuit of the warrant against Cobb whenever he again came within the Ohio state line. With the Tigers playing the Pittsburgh Pirates in the World Series that year, Cobb was forced to avoid travelling through directly between the two cities on the train with his teammates. Instead his longer route went through Ontario and Buffalo whenever the series changed venues. Cobb

⁴⁷ Alexander, *Ty Cobb*, 119.

⁴⁸ Alexander, *Ty Cobb*, 171-2.

eventually appeared in court in late October and successfully plea-bargained down from felonious assault to simple assault and battery. He paid a \$100 fine.⁴⁹

In an incident that seems to have had more to do with where he was than who he was, Cobb's car was stopped by three men on the street in Detroit who attempted to mug him and his wife. Cobb slid from the car and fought the three muggers until one slashed him with a knife leaving a serious wound on his back. Unaware of his injury, Cobb chased the three as they fled. Catching one, he quickly thrashed him and then pursued one of the remaining muggers. Cobb cornered the man in an alley and vociferously beat the trapped man with an unnamed object implying that he left the man with grave injuries.⁵⁰ Similar to the spike-sharpening story, Cobb would not deny whether he had killed the man as it lent credibility to the image of himself he was trying to convey to the world.

Cobb's "selfish grabber" traits associated with his on-field persona were evident in his off the field life as well. Cobb was greatly motivated by personal gain, and he felt much of his status was determined through his acquisition of wealth. Cobb cited a watch made with three kinds of gold that was to be awarded to the American League batting champion for 1907 as the primary motivation for achieving that goal.⁵¹ Through his career similar prizes for individual achievement helped to push him, like the Chalmers touring automobile given to both him and Lajoie following the 1910 batting race controversy. Even when the team was contending for the

⁴⁹ Alexander, *Ty Cobb*, 80-6. Whites who did not properly respect Cobb's status were often subjected to the same kind of violent retribution. Cobb argued with a white waitress in 1925 over a bill he thought was wrong. The argument became so heated that the cashier hit Cobb over the head with a glass dish to prevent further escalation, and a nearby policeman wrestled Cobb to the ground. At the police station, Cobb acknowledged disagreeing about the bill and posted the \$11 bond. Cobb had previously beaten a white student and ballplayer for Wofford College who argued and taunted the professional player when their teams met as part of a spring exhibition. Alexander, *Ty Cobb*, 112, 174.

⁵⁰ Cobb with Stump, *My Life in Baseball*, 135-6.

⁵¹ Cobb with Stump, *My Life in Baseball*, 28.

league pennant, Cobb seemed more concerned about the financial benefits than the achievement itself. He felt that part of his eventual acceptance by his teammates was due to his ability to help get the team toward “pennant money” – the additional money the players received for their team being in the World Series.⁵²

In addition to his frequent association with the traits of abusers of power, Cobb was also easily identified as a stranger or outsider. Part of this categorization was due to his uniqueness as a southern man in professional baseball. Though he was by no means the first southerner nor was he the only one, he was still vastly outnumbered by players who came from elsewhere in the country. Neither league considered to be one of the major leagues in baseball had clubs farther south than St. Louis throughout Cobb’s career, so the crowds for whom Cobb played consisted of people much different than he, and the city for which he had to play was the northernmost in the league. With three quarters of Detroit’s population either first or second generation foreign immigrants when he debuted in the league, Cobb was indeed a stranger as an eighteen-year-old out of the South for the first time in his life.⁵³ Even his “Georgia Peach” nickname served as a constant reminder of Cobb’s difference from baseball’s primary audience. Cobb believed himself to be different as well. He wholly identified as a southern man in his biography taking a comparison of him to a soldier at Bull Run as a point of pride and calling the depiction of the South in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* a low blow to the region.⁵⁴ Teammate Sam Crawford believed that part of his attitude came from how Cobb saw himself as a lone southerner against a world full of northern Yankees.⁵⁵ He wrote in his biography of the legacy of the Cobb name both in his home

⁵² Cobb with Stump, *My Life in Baseball*, 60.

⁵³ Alexander, *Ty Cobb*, 31; Cobb with Stump, *My Life in Baseball*, 21.

⁵⁴ Cobb with Stump, *My Life in Baseball*, 31, 131.

⁵⁵ Alexander, *Ty Cobb*, 39.

state of Georgia and throughout the South, and he felt the high status afforded his family name in that region should be respected elsewhere.⁵⁶

Though his career progressed with a villainous reputation with northern crowds, he was received as a hero by many southerners since they identified many of his actions as defending personal pride, status or property. Fans would clamor to greet him whenever he trained in the South or when he toured the region with semi-pro teams to make additional money after the regular season. Participating in an automobile caravan from New York City to Winston, North Carolina to help promote a national initiative for “good roads,” people throughout the South lined the sides of the road waiting for him to pass, and they would not let him leave Roanoke, Virginia without giving a short speech.⁵⁷ Following allegations late in his career that he had conspired to fix games, five hundred supporters gathered at the Confederate monument in his home town of Augusta to cheer him. There they displayed a banner reading “TY IS STILL OUR IDOL AND THE IDOL OF AMERICA.”⁵⁸

Cobb was indeed held up by many people in power as a model for other southerners. Federal judge William H. Barrett and Augusta mayor William B. White praised him during the Augusta rally.⁵⁹ He received a wire from the two senators and ten representatives that made up Georgia’s entire congressional delegation commending and defending him following the Claude Lueker incident. Atlanta’s police commissioner defended Cobb’s action in the fight as the only way to have remained respectable while Atlanta’s mayor commended him for displaying the

⁵⁶ Cobb with Stump, *My Life in Baseball*, 21, 32-7.

⁵⁷ Alexander, *Ty Cobb*, 74.

⁵⁸ Alexander, *Ty Cobb*, 189.

⁵⁹ Alexander, *Ty Cobb*, 189.

principles of “Southern manhood.”⁶⁰ He was asked to address a joint session of the Mississippi legislature after they had voted to adjourn so they could see him play in an exhibition game that ended up being rained out.⁶¹ President William Howard Taft declared Cobb to be the nation’s most popular Georgian.⁶² When he could not reach a contract agreement for 1913 with Tigers owner Navin, a US representative from Georgia announced his intention to investigate whether baseball violated the Sherman antitrust Act. At the same time, Georgia Senator Hoke Smith requested a copy of Cobb’s contract to investigate among other things the legality of baseball’s reserve clause. Navin conceded most of his points to Cobb and a contract between the two was agreed upon. The congressional inquiries disappeared.⁶³

During the 1911 baseball season, Cobb finalized plans to appear on stage in Vaughn Glaser’s touring production of George Ade’s popular comedy *The College Widow*. Though he had previously declined a vaudeville tour for a reported \$200 a week following his breakout 1907 season, Cobb knew that the opportunity and the money would be there if he changed his mind. He was given a salary guarantee of \$10,000 for the play.⁶⁴ Despite some discussion about changing the sport to match Cobb’s own profession, Cobb would play a star football halfback named Billy Bolton.⁶⁵ Though centered on a Thanksgiving football game between rival colleges Atwater and Bingham, the play was constructed as a series of comedic situations with a rather thin plot. Due to the machinations of the Atwater College president’s daughter, Jane, the football

⁶⁰ Alexander, *Ty Cobb*, 107.

⁶¹ Alexander, *Ty Cobb*, 118.

⁶² Alexander, *Ty Cobb*, 87.

⁶³ Alexander, *Ty Cobb*, 112-3.

⁶⁴ Alexander, *Ty Cobb*, 101.

⁶⁵ Rob Edeleman, “Ty Cobb, Actor,” *The National Pastime: Baseball in the Peach State*. Ed. Ken Fester and Wynn Montgomery. (Cleveland: Society for American Baseball Research, 2010),103.

hero Bolton is lured to enroll at their campus rather than Bingham's. The contest is won for Atwater by Bolton just as it seemed all was lost. In typical fashion, at the end, Bolton also wins Jane's ever-lasting affection as she breaks away from her role as the titular "college widow."

Though Bolton wins the game and the girl, he certainly falls short of heroic status by Klapp's standards in the play. He is referred to as a great player before he appears, and his lack of humility shows he's well aware of the perception once he does arrive by using his status to get what he wants. He is shown to be disloyal to his father and Bingham by eschewing them for Atwater. Once enrolled, he professes his disinterest in coursework, studying, or anything not involving Jane or football. The soon-to-be twenty-five year-old Cobb was physically suited to play the college halfback with his wiry, muscular frame built from year-round physical activity, and his persona was just as complicated as Bolton's to be the hero of a play. By the time of the production's debut, the villainous perception of Ty Cobb had already been well established. Cobb had gained public notoriety for his hard play and aggressive nature including his fight with the groundskeeper and wife as well as his own teammate, the spiking of Philadelphia's Baker and the subsequent death threats, the felonious assault charge in Ohio, and the conspiracy hatched against him by other players in the league because he was so disliked.

The play opened in Trenton, New Jersey after the end of the World Series between the New York Giants and the Philadelphia Athletics on October 26. In one of the many interviews he gave during the tour, he claimed he had only four days to learn his part and a week's worth of rehearsals before the first performance.⁶⁶ Leaving New Jersey, the production visited Richmond on November 6 and continued to Norfolk and other spots in Virginia before performing shows in the Carolinas, Florida and Georgia over the next ten days. Before the month was out, the

⁶⁶ "Ty Don't Believe in This Acting Business," Ty Cobb Scrapbook 33 v.2, A. Bartlett Giamatti Research Center, National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum, Cooperstown, NY.

production had played in Savannah, Augusta, Atlanta, Birmingham, Chattanooga, Knoxville, and Nashville. It played to big houses throughout the month-long tour of Southern cities as Cobb was adored and feted along the way. A newspaper article from Columbia, South Carolina satirized the reception Cobb received in many southern cities by specifying in bold typeface that there “Will Be No Parade” upon Cobb’s arrival in town, and that at later stops in the tour the player “may be given an automobile or two in each of these towns as souvenirs.”⁶⁷

In December the tour turned northward, playing a week in Pennsylvania before travelling to Canada for a visit to Toronto for another week-long run ending on December 16. The latter half of the month was spent in Cobb’s professional home of Detroit and four other smaller cities in the surrounding area. Before the week-long run in Chicago to open the year, Cobb announced that he was leaving the production at the conclusion of its presentation in Cleveland on January 13 despite having bookings for the remainder of the month in St. Louis and Kansas City. Cobb cited the exhausting schedule as the primary reason for his departure. He told a Grand Rapids reporter that he rarely got into bed before one in the morning and frequently had trouble sleeping even then. The routine of travelling all day then performing once or twice before beginning anew the next day as had happened for the first month started to affect his conditioning for the upcoming 1912 season.⁶⁸ Later in life, in his autobiography, he admitted that actors, not ballplayers, should be considered the iron men of his era due in great part to the near constant travel they had to endure to do their jobs.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ “Called ‘the Georgia Peach;’ Great American Here to Visit Columbia, Scrapbook 33, Baseball Hall of Fame. Tour schedule gleaned from issues of *the New York Clipper*.

⁶⁸ T.H. Kline, “Interviewing Ty Cobb, Here as Actor, Proves to be Decidedly Pleasant Task,” Scrapbook 33, Baseball Hall of Fame.

⁶⁹ Cobb with Stump, *My Life in Baseball*, 186.

The travelling life of an actor was likely more intense than that of a ballplayer at the time. Harold Seymour and Dorothy Seymour Mills asserted that major league teams traveled in first class conditions despite a persistent myth to the contrary.⁷⁰ Though they spent hours on trains playing poker in coach cars and sleeping in Pullmans, their schedule was fairly consistent as they typically spent several days at a time in a city before having to travel again.⁷¹ Actors and other performers did not necessarily have the luxury of such a consistent routine. While productions may play in one city for an extended run, most followed the pattern that Cobb experienced with Glaser's company performing in a new city every day or two. As Thomas Postlewait points out, travelling was an obligation for actors who had become stars and a requirement for those who had not. From combination companies touring a recent hit play from New York to variety entertainers making their own schedule of small vaudeville houses, everyone toured.⁷² While ballplayers were travelling between cities with considerable populations and amenities that were part of their league, actors visited theatres in even the smallest towns. Somewhat fittingly, because of the time of day that each profession worked – ballplayers in the afternoon and actors at night – one was often the other's entertainment while on the road. It is likely that talk of their frequent travels were a commonplace topic of conversation in the friendships between actors and ballplayers.

The transfer of Cobb's persona to the stage was somewhat more complicated than it was for Anson, Kelly or Mathewson. Unlike Anson or Mathewson, the play was not written with Cobb in mind, so it could not showcase certain elements of his persona while dismissing others.

⁷⁰ Seymour and Mills, *Golden Age*, 42.

⁷¹ Seymour and Mills, *Golden Age*, 100.

⁷² Thomas Postlewait, "The Hieroglyphic Stage: American Theatre and Society, Post-Civil War to 1945," in *The Cambridge History of American Theatre, volume 2: 1870-1945*, edited by Don B. Wilmeth and Christopher Bigsby (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999), 150-1.

Though Kelly's roles were in plays that had been previously produced, he was generally well-liked as a player and had developed a friendly relationship with the audiences he sought to entertain. While these players did not necessarily present an entirely positive image to audiences, they had also not actively courted the spectators' ill-will as Cobb had done. The Crazy Cobb persona Ty Cobb had brought from the ball field was not something audiences associated with a hero on stage. Glaser's production needed to use Cobb's persona to draw fans, but only select elements of that persona.

As touring productions entered various towns, the producers would send out informational blurbs or bits for use in the local newspapers to generate interest in the shows. Along with articles usually comprising of an interview done by local writers with the stars of the production, these previews, which were essentially puff pieces written by the producers, could help shape how an audience saw a particular production by stressing certain aspects of the production like new scenic elements for an old script. Bert Cowan, who served as a theatrical manager for Cobb throughout the tour, compiled a scrapbook of the articles written about Cobb and the production during its run. Many of the previews and the articles for *The College Widow* as it came into a town tried to stress the point that the person audiences were going to see on stage was not who he was perceived to be on the field.

One common tactic used early in the tour was to stress his status as an actor. As one newspaper noted, "an actor and a ballplayer are about as far removed as any two professions possibly could be," and Cobb was known to be a particularly disagreeable ballplayer in addition.⁷³ Before the production's performance in Norfolk, Virginia, very early in the tour, an article appeared in a local paper that contrasted Cobb's personality with the popular perception of him as a ballplayer. Noting that "he doesn't seem at all different from any other actor," the

⁷³ "'Ty' Cobb in College Widow," Scrapbook 33, Baseball Hall of Fame.

writer called him “an exceedingly agreeable sort of man.” Hardly mentioning the play at all, the article focused on how “pleasant” Cobb was. As if to over-emphasize the point, the article’s writer asserted “if he were a woman, he’s that type you would call loveable.”⁷⁴

Frequently just after referring to Cobb as a champion ballplayer, a great ballplayer, or the world’s greatest ballplayer, the previews and articles that advertised the play in each city recontextualized him in theatrical terms. Calling him “a real, first class, finished actor,” a preview for his appearance in Athens, Georgia, drew a direct contrast between his being a ballplayer and his stage appearance: “No he will not hit a home run over the center field wall, nor will he be seen stabbing a line drive while standing on his eyebrows – he will calmly and leisurely act his part in the play, the same as any other stage artist.”⁷⁵

In portraying him as “a regular actor,” the previews often detailed how dedicated Cobb was in approaching his stage work. In Richmond, Virginia, at the second stop of the tour, Cobb was quoted as saying that he was “learning fast” and was enthusiastic about the work.⁷⁶ More than a month later, a blurb for his appearance in Toronto reminded readers that he “is very serious in everything he attempts.”⁷⁷ Making an implied connection to his notable preparedness on the ball field, the previews were using an association to his baseball success to predict his stage success. Before the November 16 performance in Jacksonville, Florida, it was written that “his ever present ambition to be the best at everything he attempts causes him a lot of extra work but it lands him the goal he seeks.”⁷⁸ Another piece previewing the Richmond performance

⁷⁴ “‘Ty’ Cobb a Modest Actor, Talks Baseball and Stage,” Scrapbook 33, Baseball Hall of Fame.

⁷⁵ “Mighty Tyrus is in the City,” Scrapbook 33, Baseball Hall of Fame.

⁷⁶ “Cobb Greeted by Women and Men,” Scrapbook 33, Baseball Hall of Fame.

⁷⁷ “Ty Cobb Arrives,” Scrapbook 33, Baseball Hall of Fame.

⁷⁸ “Cobb Making Good as a Star in College Widow,” Scrapbook 33, Baseball Hall of Fame.

details Cobb's record of being a star as a baseball player and a star as a writer about baseball. Recounting the qualities that made him a success in the other two fields, the article naturally concludes that "Mr. Cobb, therefore, has all the qualifications of a star actor."⁷⁹

Even the presentation of Cobb's name in the previews hinted that Cobb should be seen in a different way. Identification with the name "Ty Cobb" was important to draw interest, and his name appeared in that familiar fashion in many previews. However, several articles drew distinctions that relate to the underlying tension between the audience's recognition of the name and their possible repulsion from it. An article in Richmond began by reporting the name signed by the man on the hotel register was "T.R. Cobb, actor." The same article introduced another section with "Mr. Cobb – the mister was acquired along with stardom."⁸⁰ For many baseball fans, that formality would be as much a marker for difference in how they viewed Cobb as the addition of the word "actor" after his name would have been. This was not going to be "Ty Cobb" on their local stage. The phrasing of a preview used both in Atlanta, Georgia, and Toronto, Canada, implied this more clear distinction of Cobb's separate worlds. Both previews begin with "there are legions of baseball fans who have never seen the great Ty Cobb play ball and there are just as many theater-goers who have never seen Tyrus Raymond Cobb, of Augusta, Ga., on the stage" before providing details about the local production.⁸¹ Again using the formality of Cobb's full name, the previews suggest that the man appearing is a different one than the one that appears on the field.

Another way these previews communicated a difference between Cobb's on-field persona and the potential difference for his stage performances was through their selling of Cobb as an

⁷⁹ "Mighty Tyrus is in the City," Scrapbook 33, Baseball Hall of Fame.

⁸⁰ "Cobb Greeted by Women and Men," Scrapbook 33, Baseball Hall of Fame.

⁸¹ "Tyrus Cobb (at the Atlanta)" & "Ty Cobb in 'The Village Widow'," Scrapbook 33, Baseball Hall of Fame.

actor. While many reported positively on Cobb's "histrionic ability," it was frequently presented that the ability he showed was surprising. By placing Cobb's performance in these terms it not only assisted in legitimizing him as an actor, but also suggested the presence of a different side to Cobb than what was popularly known. An Atlanta preview stated that Cobb's ability "surprised even those who thought they knew him best."⁸² This suggestion that how Cobb would appear should not be presumed by anyone was taken even further to the extreme in a preview from Greenville, North Carolina, that wrote Cobb "far exceeded his own expectations."⁸³

Other elements of Cobb's persona were highlighted in different areas of the country to give a varying impression of him. Touring through the South for the first month, previews frequently mentioned his southern heritage. A Norfolk preview noted his "southern mannerisms," and one from Chattanooga, Tennessee, claimed he refused to distinguish a particular hometown for himself preferring to just say he was from Georgia.⁸⁴ An article in Richmond left a syllogism unfinished as a way to explain Cobb's charm among women: "Cobb is a Georgian, therefore a Southerner, and – well, but enough of this phase of the actor-ballplayer."⁸⁵ The mention of Cobb's heritage was sufficient to frame his persona in a way those audiences would both understand and appreciate.

In Toronto, two separate previews specified that Vaughn Glaser had gone to great lengths to secure actors who were "fitted physically" and that had athletic backgrounds for roles of the athletes in the play.⁸⁶ The articles also noted that each member of the cast, including Cobb, had

⁸² "Ty Cobb Next at Bat," Scrapbook 33, Baseball Hall of Fame.

⁸³ "The College Widow," Scrapbook 33, Baseball Hall of Fame.

⁸⁴ "Ty Cobb a Modest Actor, Talks Baseball and Stage" & "Just from 'Georgia'," Scrapbook 33, Baseball Hall of Fame.

⁸⁵ "Cobb Greeted by Women and Men," Scrapbook 33, Baseball Hall of Fame.

attended college. While these assertions attempted to enhance the authenticity of the production, particularly for a Toronto audience, Cobb had actually never matriculated. Yet, as seen in Christy Mathewson's persona, the association with college gave a player a perception of respectability that people north of the Mason-Dixon Line did not naturally associate with the player.

For the most part, Cobb was sold on only his positive features with many of his negative traits being effectively removed. However, the story of Cobb's Central Park encounter was actually used to advertise the play when it arrived in Pittsburgh in the first week of December to begin the northern portion of the tour.⁸⁷ Though the account resurfaces in Toronto, the use of the story that shows Cobb in a potentially unfavorable light may have had real value in Pittsburgh.⁸⁸ Though Pittsburgh's ballclub was a member of the National League and not a city Cobb visited frequently as a player, Cobb's Tigers had faced the Pirates just two years earlier in the 1909 World Series. The series went the full seven games and though the Pirates emerged victorious, it was likely that the city's baseball fans still viewed Cobb as an enemy.

Friend and producer Vaughan Glaser may have persuaded Cobb to remain just long enough to be able to recoup his investment and return to play in his own hometown of Cleveland.⁸⁹ Losing its only notable feature, the production disbanded after only 10 weeks of an intended 16 week schedule having only made a slight profit. The reviews of the production largely focused on Cobb, who was the attraction, with brief remarks on some of the other actors

⁸⁶ "Ty Cobb with 'The College Widow'" & "Ty Cobb and 'The College Widow'," Scrapbook 33, Baseball Hall of Fame.

⁸⁷ "Cobb was Taken in by a Motion Picture Man," Scrapbook 33, Baseball Hall of Fame.

⁸⁸ "When Cobb was Pinched," Scrapbook 33, Baseball Hall of Fame.

⁸⁹ According to details in the *New York Clipper*, Glaser mounted a production of David Belasco's *The Girl of the Golden West* in the city just two weeks after *the College Widow*'s end.

or the plot of the already familiar show itself. As was written in a Nashville newspaper, other than Cobb there “was nothing in the performance which the people of Nashville have not seen and reseen.”⁹⁰ Of course, the reviews could not ignore why Cobb was in the production: “the only reason he is playing the part is not because he is an actor, but because he is the brightest star in the national game.”⁹¹ Audiences realized, too, that “Cobb was the whole show.”⁹²

Despite whatever positioning the previews and articles may have done, comparisons between Cobb’s acting and his ball playing were inevitable in the reviews of the plays. Trying to describe his performances, reviews made frequent use of the word “hit” with its concurrent meanings for theater and baseball.⁹³ An Atlanta newspaper stated they gave the reviewing assignment to their sporting editor rather than their dramatic critic, and the entire review was written in baseball slang.⁹⁴ Given his history of having high batting averages, a Chattanooga review believed that Cobb hit only “about .230 in the theatrical league” while a Jacksonville comment claimed “he is not destined to hit in the .300 class in the ‘theatrical league.’”⁹⁵ It was clear to the reviewer in Ashville, North Carolina, that Cobb would “win more shekels on the diamond than he will on the Thespian boards.”⁹⁶ The Richmond review feared that Cobb was essentially risking all of his greatness by even attempting to act on stage, and his greatness on the

⁹⁰ “Vendome,” Scrapbook 33, Baseball Hall of Fame.

⁹¹ “Large Audience sees Cobb in College Play,” Scrapbook 33, Baseball Hall of Fame.

⁹² “Vendome,” Scrapbook 33, Baseball Hall of Fame.

⁹³ The Oxford English Dictionary shows that these multiple meanings of “hit” had been in popular use since the mid-nineteenth century.

⁹⁴ “Ty Cobb Scores a Home Run in Ade’s College Widow,” Scrapbook 33, Baseball Hall of Fame.

⁹⁵ “Large Audience sees Cobb in College Play” & Kiddo, “Sport Comment,” Scrapbook 33, Baseball Hall of Fame.

⁹⁶ “‘The College Widow’ Seen at Auditorium,” Scrapbook 33, Baseball Hall of Fame.

field prompted comparisons to stage greats from years past.⁹⁷ Intended more as praise than criticism, reviews invoked the names of Booth, Skinner, Irving, Jefferson, and Sothern among others that Cobb could not claim to be. It was stated, however, that it had never been assumed that he would be an equal to any of them.

Despite the lofty comparisons, expectations for Cobb's ability on the stage were understandably low. Remarketed upon by several reviewers, Cobb knew all of his lines, spoke clearly, and did not overtly exhibit any symptoms of stage fright.⁹⁸ Though he had some issues including what to do with his hands, by most accounts Cobb was considered to be a fairly competent actor. Reviewers in Norfolk and Toronto interpreted any awkwardness on Cobb's part to be appropriate imitation of real life, but most understood its origins to stem from a lack of formal training.⁹⁹ Several reviewers believed that should Cobb's eyesight fail him or should he otherwise leave baseball, the stage would be a suitable option for him if he received a little formal guidance.¹⁰⁰ Most importantly to the crowd, in the estimation of the reviewer from Jacksonville, was that Cobb "looked just like his pictures."¹⁰¹

A Charlotte review acknowledged the impossibility "to disassociate Cobb the actor from Cobb the player, and to judge how a similar interpretation by a nonentity would be received."¹⁰² This gets at one of the central issues in how a ballplayer's stage work was evaluated. Because what a critic or audience saw a player do on stage was viewed through the lens of the player's

⁹⁷ "Ty Cobb Has a Pleasing Voice," Scrapbook 33, Baseball Hall of Fame.

⁹⁸ "Ty Cobb Scores Hit," "The Lyceum," & "The College Widow – Duval," Scrapbook 33, Baseball Hall of Fame.

⁹⁹ "Tyurus Raymond Cobb No Slouch as Thespian," "At the Grand: Ty Cobb with 'The College Widow,'" & "Ty Cobb at the Grand," Scrapbook 33, Baseball Hall of Fame.

¹⁰⁰ "Ty Cobb Whole Show By Himself," & "Large Audience Sees Cobb in College Play," Scrapbook 33, Baseball Hall of Fame.

¹⁰¹ "The College Widow – Duval," Scrapbook 33, Baseball Hall of Fame.

¹⁰² "Amusements," Scrapbook 33, Baseball Hall of Fame.

persona, it was noticeably tinted. The idea that this was a baseball player and not a trained actor was foregrounded in the performance. Reviewers could focus on a lack of technique or a triumph over stage fright to reflect whether they liked the performance, but in a large part, criticism was rendered meaningless. The ballplayer simply could not be judged in the same terms as other actors. In Cobb's case, he could not be seen as any other actor because he was not any other actor and never could be just another actor. Aesthetic criticism of the player could not dissuade audiences from attending. As the reviewer in Athens stated, "the people went ... to see a ballplayer, not an actor, and were satisfied."¹⁰³

At the heart of a review from Birmingham, Alabama was that Cobb "never, for a moment, seems to forget that he is Ty Cobb 'playing' at hero."¹⁰⁴ Being a hero for an extended period of time might have precisely been Cobb's intention. While Cobb had stated explicitly he was only concerned with the money from the tour, the performance offered him a chance to experience a new field while remaining a star. As someone who was then concerned with how people saw him and later in life obsessed with his legacy, the role on stage was a chance for Cobb to play a hero in no uncertain terms. In the play, he got to have experiences that eluded him in his regular life. Unlike on the field, his teammates in the play loved him and not just because he won them the big game. Moreover, as a player used to always travelling into hostile locations, the production's tour through the southern states saw him return to his home region and receive a hero's welcome in each new city. As the tour turned northward, the celebrations faded away except for in his professional home city of Detroit. While his physical conditioning surely must have suffered, and provided a legitimate reason for him to stop performing, he was also facing a schedule that had no more "homes" on the tour when he announced he was leaving.

¹⁰³ "Capacity House to Hear Ty Cobb in College Widow," Scrapbook 33, Baseball Hall of Fame.

¹⁰⁴ "At the theatres," *Birmingham News* December 1, 1911.

As a Jacksonville review pointed out, “everyone went expecting to see just Ty Cobb,” and that is what they got. “Cobb is Cobb all the time and doesn’t attempt to be anything else.”¹⁰⁵ He was not playing an idealized and softened version of himself like Anson had fifteen years earlier. Nor was the character being played close enough to his own persona that audiences could believe that they were seeing him essentially under a different name as they could have with Mike Kelly. But Cobb had created such a celebrity, and a villainous one at that, that it could not be subsumed into a role that did not share many of the traits of his popular public persona.

Cobb clearly understood what was happening on stage despite stating to Toronto reporters that “I lost myself in my part.”¹⁰⁶ He told a Birmingham, Alabama newspaper before departing the city: “I have a baseball individuality and I can’t lose it in the role of actor. What is worse, the public can’t lose sight of my identity as a ball player and no matter how good I might ever hope to be as an interpreter of parts, there will be a portion of my audience that will only see me as they have heard of me or thought of me on the diamond.”¹⁰⁷ Cobb had performed his baseball persona so well on the field that nothing he could do would ever make people forget it. His acting essentially failed because he had been such a great “interpreter” of the Ty Cobb part that no one could believe he could be anything else. No matter the venue, whether it was on the field or on the stage, in the newspaper or in the streets, he was always performing a version of Ty Cobb that people had come to expect of him.

For most of the run of *The College Widow*, the Cobb that people expected him to perform was played out off stage.¹⁰⁸ While in Birmingham, another publicity stunt had been arranged so

¹⁰⁵ “The College Widow, with Ty Cobb,” Scrapbook 33, Baseball Hall of Fame.

¹⁰⁶ “Great Ty Cobb in Town,” Scrapbook 33, Baseball Hall of Fame.

¹⁰⁷ “Ty Don’t Believe in this Acting Business,” Scrapbook 33, Baseball Hall of Fame.

that Cobb would take over as the sports editor for the city's newspaper for a day. Upset by the attitude Cobb displayed toward the task, the paper's managing editor informed his drama critic, and the paper's regular sports editor, that he was to give an honest review of that night's production and of Cobb.¹⁰⁹ The reviews from previous stops along the way were largely forgiving of Cobb's theatrical ability even if they damned the production itself with faint praise. Told to hold nothing back, critic Allen Johnson did not. He wrote that the task of criticizing Cobb as an actor could not be done since "there is no actor there" and that Cobb himself was well aware of that fact. Johnson wrote Cobb was stiff as a stick and "actually embarrassed throughout the performance." Calling his efforts "pitiful," Johnson noted Cobb's inability to look his stage sweetheart in the eye and that he played scenes with her like he would handle a bat which was "hard and strong" because he "didn't try any moderation, gentleness or sentiment." The review ends with Johnson wishing Cobb luck, but also proclaiming that Cobb "has hardly a right to foist himself upon the people as an actor."¹¹⁰

Upon receiving note of the review nearly a month later while the production was in Detroit, Cobb wrote Johnson a letter in response though he specified that Johnson's criticism was beneath his notice. He enclosed several much more favorable reviews as he invited Johnson to see what "real critics" had to say about his work. Ending his letter with what was essentially a summary of his feelings toward most people, Cobb wrote "I am a better actor than you are, a better sports editor than you are, a better dramatic critic than you are, I make more money than

¹⁰⁸ The villainous traits that had been scrubbed from the stage did eventually emerge elsewhere in the course of the production. When a stagehand was being questioned by Glaser and the production staff during a performance about some missing sweaters, the confrontation became heated. Previously uninvolved in the conversation, Cobb walked over to the stagehand and knocked him down with a punch to the head. Cobb then proceeded to walk onto the stage for his scene. Ron Thomas, "Toronto Man Recalls Ty Cobb as an Actor," *Toronto Daily Star*, July 19, 1961. Baseball Hall of Fame Player File.

¹⁰⁹ "Ty Cobb, Poor Actor, Good Ballplayer," *New York Times* June 13, 1915.

¹¹⁰ "At the theatres," *Birmingham News* December 1, 1911.

you do, and I know I am a better ball player – so why should inferiors criticize superiors?”¹¹¹

“Ty Cobb” was inferior to no one.

¹¹¹ “Ty Cobb, Poor Actor, Good Ballplayer,” *New York Times* June 13, 1915.

CONCLUSION

One observation about baseball notes that a batter who fails six of every ten times to get a hit at the plate over his career would be considered the best batter of all time. Failure is integral to the game that A. Bartlett Giamatti described as “designed to break your heart.” It is fitting then that the experience of professional baseball players in multi-act dramas in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was largely one of failure – at least from a theatrical perspective. As actors, the players generally failed to adhere to the accepted aesthetic of contemporary performance. The productions with which they were involved were often considered failures both aesthetically and financially with runs that ended before they were scheduled. The sense of failure extended beyond the players as well. For playwrights like Rida Johnson Young and Charles Hale Hoyt, the plays they wrote about baseball were considered their largest failures in their careers.¹

Yet for the players themselves as well as baseball as an industry, these diversions into theatre were profitable in ways beyond their financial compensation. Each player examined here used their stage performances to create or maintain the persona they were known for from what they had done on the field before appearing on the stage. Appearing as himself on stage, Anson was presented as a man worth of respect by Hoyt in *A Runaway Colt*, which highlighted a duality that existed in the man of which the general public was unaware – he was both baseball player and gentleman. Anson’s limited ability to perform in an aesthetically pleasing way actually helped to foreground his presence in the theatre as a baseball player, and it served to show that ballplayers could be respectable.

¹ Despite many attempts, a scripted drama centering on baseball would not actually become a hit in the theatre until *Damn Yankees* in 1955. Likely among the reasons for its success was that the ball playing in the musical did not have the expectation by the audience of being portrayed realistically.

While Anson's presence on stage required that audiences see him as a baseball player, Kelly's presence transcended being seen as only a baseball player. An exception to the standard player's persona of just being a celebrated player, he was seen as an embodiment of wealth and success. His participation in multi-act dramas capitalized on that perception. Kelly was a celebrity in popular culture and an excellent showman. He had a reciprocal relationship between his two performance venues. Just as theatrical audiences were still aware that he was a baseball player, Kelly performed as much during ball games as he did on the stage, frequently alluding to his theatrical work while on the field. As his success on the field began to wane, he was able to maintain his public association with success while on the stage in vaudeville houses with frequent references to his value and wealth. For audiences, Kelly's appeal was that he could be conflicting things at once: success and failure, extraordinary and everyday.

Rather than appearing on stage himself, the play that Mathewson co-wrote, *The Girl and the Pennant*, featured a proxy of his baseball persona within a thinly veiled representation of current baseball events. Fitting the social type of a hero in American culture in an ideal way, Mathewson's persona easily transferred to a hero in the melodramatic mode. Using that melodramatic hero based on Mathewson's persona, the play showed how baseball could be reformed amidst persistent corruption and how the game could safely embrace the ever-encroaching feminine influence on American society. Mathewson's absence from the stage put the focus of the production on the content, but may have also doomed it to only twenty performances.

Cobb's involvement with a tour of *The College Widow* was faced with the issue about how to effectively re-package a player's persona to diminish some of the negative qualities he had acquired through his on- and off-field activities. By creating a persona that would intimidate

the other players on the field, Cobb was viewed by some as a prime example of a villainous social type. The production tried to contextualize the player by reinforcing traits that had helped to build his stardom and made an effort to distance the player from the “Ty Cobb” persona he had built. The efforts were somewhat for naught as, though he was playing a football hero on stage, Cobb’s created baseball persona had become so dominant that neither he nor the audience could ever forget who he was.

Baseball itself was the de facto partner that each of these players performed with on stage. The theatrical work of both Anson and Mathewson were concerned with baseball’s respectability at different points in the game’s history. Anson’s presence in the theatre gave a body and voice to a baseball player whose profession had not been seen in a favorable light before the turn of the century. More than a decade later, baseball had become enough of an establishment that it faced the danger of losing some of the ground it had gained. The light comedy fantasy written by Mathewson and embodied by his proxy on stage showed how the industry could make gains instead of losses in the face of looming social threats. How baseball remained tied to the players’ personalities that it had made into stars evolved as the professional game grew beyond its nineteenth century beginnings. While Kelly’s persona oscillating from the stage to the field illustrated how baseball could propel a person upward in society in the late nineteenth century, Cobb’s inability to be seen as anything else showed how prominent baseball celebrities had become in American culture after the turn of the century.

In many ways, baseball’s utilization of the social types of heroes and villains as seen with the personas of Mathewson and Cobb paved the way for the industry to profit from the American theatre’s transition away from melodramas to social realistic dramas beginning in the 1910s. Given clear heroes for which to cheer (the home team) and clear villains to boo (the visitors), the

game became an opportunity for audiences to emotionally invest in the contest on the field as they had traditionally emotionally invested in the trials and tribulations of melodramatic characters on the American stage. As content in the theatres began to slowly change to more nuanced portrayals of protagonists and antagonists that caused audiences to consider their own relationship to the world around them, many patrons preferred to keep their worldview in black and white rather than shades of gray. Well versed in the narrative tropes of melodrama, fans could impose a dramatic narrative that had meaning specifically to them onto the events on the field. Baseball fans today still emotionally invest in the melodramatic mode in the heroes on the hometown team the way fans did approximately one hundred years ago.

Many areas remain available for investigation that were outside the scope of this study. As baseball and theatre transitioned into a new era where Babe Ruth became an American icon, what role, if any, did theatrical presence play in distributing his celebrity? Vaudevillian Joe Laurie, Jr. wrote that Ruth, at the height of his popularity in baseball, was not proving to be a very good draw in the vaudeville circuits he toured. He offered that “showmen explained this by saying that people could see Babe Ruth at any time for a quarter or 50 cents.”² While the implication was that he could be seen on the field where he was known for swatting home runs, Ruth was also much more available to audiences at that price or lower through the rising number of motion pictures being produced. Did presence in the theatre operate for Ruth and those who reached stardom after him the same way as before or was their auratic presence changed in, to use Walter Benjamin’s phrasing, “an age of mechanical reproduction?” Further, does the role of presence operate in the same way for the modern public performances of athletes? While appearances in traditionally theatrical setting are rare, a comparison can be made to athletes that

² Laurie, *Vaudeville*, 126.

have appeared as hosts on NBC's *Saturday Night Live* wherein they perform for a live audience that is also broadcast.

Regarding the other limitations of this particular study, questions arise that include what other performative professions transferred stardom from their particular arena to the stage as well as whether such transfers worked in a similar fashion to how baseball players' did. By limiting the study to Hall of Fame players and multi-act dramas, players who had appeared on stage during the pre-Ruth era but did not otherwise meet the qualification criteria were excluded. These players include the aforementioned "Turkey" Mike Donlin, Rube Marquard and Arlie Latham as well as Larry Doyle, Rabbit Maranville, Bugs Raymond, Germany Schaefer, Joe Tinker, Rube Waddell and many others. Due to these exclusions, appropriate examples of baseball players fitting Orrin Klapp's remaining social type, the fool, were excluded from the study and analysis of the transfer of that particular baseball persona to the stage may prove fruitful.

Beyond just the involvement of players in theatre, other business, logistic and cultural intersections remain unexplored between the two industries during the pre-Ruth era as well as through the present day. Ballparks were frequently used by actors to advertise upcoming shows. Games between theatrical companies would be occasionally organized with well known players acting as umpires. Baseball made use of theatrical techniques to advertise their own games. Interactions between theatre companies and ball clubs could have been much more organized since ownership of major league franchises were occasionally held by theatrical producers. The possibilities are rich for further examination of how these two industries reacted and interacted with each other.

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