

## The Saturday "News" Special Foreign Service.

### Baseball Fan Succeeds in Making England "Play Ball"

Nelson P. Cook of Mount Holly, Vt., has Spent Thirteen Years Trying to Introduce Baseball into Great Britain.

Special Correspondence.

LONDON, April 9.—Strange as it may seem, the greatest baseball fan in the world is not to be found among any of the supporters of the various American teams who through the sweltering summer days do their rooting from the front seats of the stand in New York, Chicago, Philadelphia or any of the other great baseball centers. The man who is best entitled to that distinction is an American, to be sure, but it is John Bull's tight little island, where he has lived for the last sixteen years, that he has made his claim good. For thirteen of those years he has been trying to make our English cousins "play ball," and it is the fact that he has at last succeeded which makes him the premier fan of the universe. His name is Nelson P. Cook and he is the founder and organizing secretary of the British Baseball association.

Before Cook appeared in England two

attempts to introduce the game in the British Isles, backed by an abundance of money, and in two of the instances supported by the best baseball talent of the United States, had miserably failed, yet this Yankee, starting with only three players and no grounds, but with unlimited enthusiasm and dogged perseverance, has built up an organization with two leagues and sixteen rivaling club clubs.

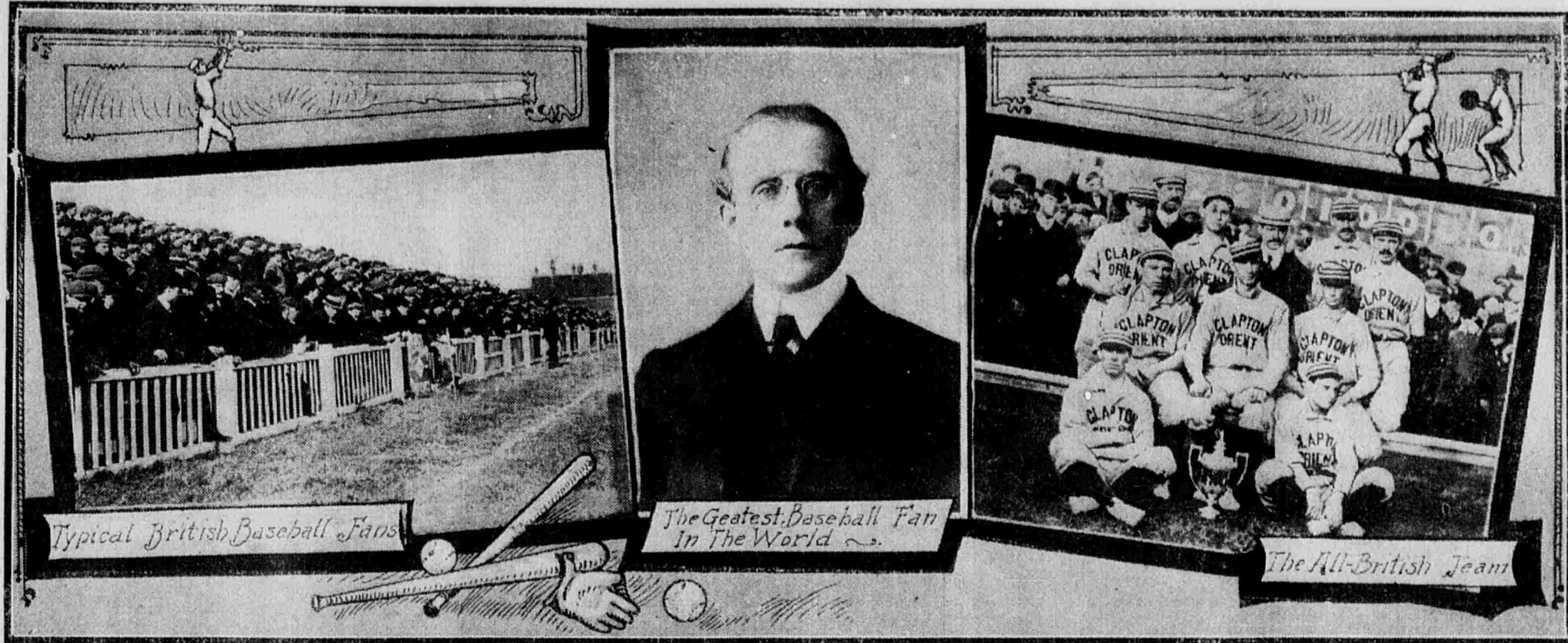
ROOTER PURE AND SIMPLE.

To Mount Holly, Vt., a little town that cannot boast, probably, of more than one team of players, belongs the honor of being the birthplace of this greatest of baseball rooters. Cook is a pure and simple Yankee, and the game is that of a spectator, for he never has played a match in his life. Thus it will be seen that he is unique, for it would be difficult to find any other American who never have swung a bat or "muffed" a fly. But he has been a constant and assiduous spectator, and in his little home town, when the team from the rival village town miles away paid its weekly visit, to encourage the home team with lungs and tongue. So it was that he developed into a full-fledged fan and acquired a stentorian voice and a vocabulary that was guaranteed to defeat the wildest team if it came to a tight pinch.

In common with all fans of abnormal development, Cook learned more of the game than he could take account of in a lifetime of playing; and in due course of time his knowledge became semi-public property to be meted out in large chunks to the various members of the team, who were the most trusted of him. He learned to play the whole game, and to coach the whole team, whether they wanted it or not. From the front row of the modest Mount Holly B. C. club grand stand, and one of the first bits of knowledge he acquired and one that he never forgot was how to umpire better than the chosen official.

CRICKET TOO SLOW.

Possessed of such a highly trained, strongly developed eye, it is not strange that this premier fan of the future should have brought with him to England 16 years ago a determination to make the game



Typical British Baseball Fans

The Greatest Baseball Fan in the World

The All-British Team

as popular in Great Britain as it was in his native country. He saw the game ready at hand, as a valve for his surplus enthusiasm, the English game of cricket. But who, having been brought up on whirlwind baseball such as they play in Mount Holly, ever could be satisfied with the slow and tedious national game of these isles, which generally takes three days to play, and, like as not, ends either in a runaway match or an unsatisfactory tie? Certainly not this red-hot Yankee, whose love for baseball bordered dangerously upon worship, and who would rather have stood at the top of the National league batting and fielding records than have been president of the United States.

When Cook landed in England the first literature that he consulted was not a Baedeker, but a short history of the two attempts that had been made to transplant baseball onto the English catalog of sports. He found that the first real attempt to popularize the game had been made in 1874, when the Bostonians and the Philadelphia Athletics, of the National league, toured the country.

FIRST CLUBS FORMED.

This effort was a failure, as was the one made 15 years later by A. G. Spalding, who brought over two teams, one representing Chicago and the other all-American. As a result of the latter attempt in the early nineties, professional baseball teams were formed at Preston, Stoke, Birmingham and Derby. These clubs were furnished with professional coaches from the United States and were backed by people in the same quarter of the globe. They lasted just as long as these backbones, and were content to send over a monthly check to make up the ever-increasing deficit. The deepest of pockets has a bottom, however, and the most attempts to make a limit, and in this case it was not very long before both were reached.

R. G. KNOWLES INTERESTED.

In the spring of 1892 there appeared on the scene a famous vaudeville star who, along with so many of his fellow professionals, was a baseball "crack." In 1893, however, R. G. Knowles was then and is today a comedian of the first rank, but there was nothing of the joke about his attempt to establish baseball in England. He went at it seriously

with the energy which is denied to all except the born enthusiast, and did some real wood work that was deserving of a more lasting success. But although the popular comedian had brought up on whirlwind baseball such as they play in Mount Holly, ever could be satisfied with the slow and tedious national game of these isles, which generally takes three days to play, and, like as not, ends either in a runaway match or an unsatisfactory tie? Certainly not this red-hot Yankee, whose love for baseball bordered dangerously upon worship, and who would rather have stood at the top of the National league batting and fielding records than have been president of the United States.

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DARK OUTLOOK.

There were a few, however, who,

while acknowledging that they had viewed something that mightily resembled a funeral, were sure that baseball was only in a comatose condition, and were for opening the grave and taking a peep at the condition in those days, the careful observer might have noticed also, behind the scenes, so to speak, the debut of the subject of the sketch. It was Nelson P. Cook who did all the "donkey" work, as he would express it, in connection with this attempt to establish baseball on this side of the blue Atlantic. It was he who chased all over the English metropolis looking for possible baseball material and who worked upon the smoldering enthusiasm of the players and made possible the temporary but all too short survival of the game.

WORKED ALL AVENUES.

Despite this disappointment, Cook had gathered from his experience. In London that the game of baseball, if given half a chance, would work its way to a soft spot next to the heart of the English people. He determined that at some opportune time, not then far distant, he would have another try at making the British public "swallow" the American game. But man proposes and the pursuit of the elusive dollar disposes. And he was left with four new teams, and a permanent success was in sight for the organizers. Unfortunately they ran up against a very serious obstacle. Only one ground was available and that in a very isolated part of London. It was found impossible to remedy this during the season and the result was that at the final baseball week about as popular in London as the standard oil in Kansas, and the attendance at the various matches as numerous as the hairs on John D's head. Thus the season, which opened with a blaze of glorious promise, closed in a gloom that was ominous. Whereas at the beginning there were four centers of baseball in England—Derby, Middleborough, Newcastle and London—at the end it was hard work to get a baker's dozen of enthusiasts onto the field in any one of these cities.

When the hours to the remains of the baseball boom of the preceding years fell together in the spring of 1897, they had the greatest difficulty in discerning a glimmer of hope. It was to admit that the game had any life in it. On the other hand, there were many who were willing to testify that they had been present at the burial of the poor old cripple the fall previous.

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would be amazed could he see the throngs that follow a first class football match in London or any of the other great centers of the game. Eighty or ninety thousand spectators are considered merely a "good gate," and 110,000 people have paid admission to see a cup-tie match at the Crystal Palace. In metropolitan London alone there are no fewer than 11 professional football organizations, each one a member of one or other of the three big English leagues.

The football season lasts from Sept. 1 to April 30. From the latter date until the following Aug. 31 the big grounds of these organizations lie idle. In this fact Cook saw his opportunity. He did a little missionary work among the governing bodies of these clubs, and before long had the good will of six of them in his pocket. They were to provide the grounds and Cook was to raise and coach the teams. The latter were to pay their own expenses from the start, and, strange to say, they did pay from the very beginning.

STARTED TWO YEARS AGO.

Thus it was that the British Baseball association was started in April, 1906. By indefatigable labor 23 men, in addition to the trio which already had been discovered, who had played the game of baseball before and were willing to play again if given the opportunity, were unearthed in London. Most of these men were British-born, having learned to play during visits to America.

With them the six clubs were formed, each being taken to a certain number in each organization to instruct the green men who were necessary to make up the nine. The clubs took the names of the football organizations that fathered them, and were the Clapton, Orient, Leyton, Fulham, Tottenham, Hotsprings and Woolwich Arsenal. In addition to these five, an independent club was formed called the Nondescripts, who used the grounds of the Hford Football club, a prominent London amateur organization.

WALKOVER FOR RHODES MEN.

Invitations were sent broadcast to all who wanted to try the new game, and the first games were played during April and May on the various grounds. In this way the green material was whittled into some kind of presentable form, for the purpose of giving the general public a taste of what was

about to be served up by the new league, an exhibition game was played between the Rhodes scholars of Oxford University and a team representing all-England at the Woolwich Arsenal grounds. The Rhodes scholars had a walkover, winning by 16 to 7.

GAME "CAUGHT ON."

The league games began early in June and, from the first, "caught on." The attendance grew from a mere handful of 200 half-interested spectators to 2,000 wildly enthusiastic rooters, exhibiting all the earmarks of the real, genuine, American original. The final game of the British cup—one of the two trophies—between the Tottenham Hotspurs and the Nondescripts, was witnessed by upward of 4,000 spectators, and it was evident that baseball had made a lasting place for itself in English sport. To be sure, its public was still very limited, but a start had been made, and in those days Cook wore a smile that wouldn't and hasn't come off.

GOOD RAW MATERIAL.

In the course of the same summer—that of 1906—in addition to the major league, various junior clubs were formed and knocked into playing form, and the season of 1907 opened with clubs in existence. And while the clubs were increasing and the attendance growing to their players were adding considerably to the skill, Cook regards the English material as being of a very good quality in the whole world and the results he has obtained seem to bear him out. The feature of the season of 1907 was a game between an all-American team made up of men who had played the game in the United States and an all-British team made up of men who, with four exceptions, had never seen a baseball game before the season opened. And the all-British team won in a rather tight match. The natural supposition is that the all-American team was a lot of dubs at the game, but such is not the fact, for they were a very snappy bunch of ball tossers.

LABOR OF LOVE.

The casual reader can have very little idea of the difficulties that have been surmounted by Nelson Cook in planting baseball in England. His has been in the best sense of the word a labor of love, for the organizations that have been brought into existence

Unlimited Enthusiasm and Perseverance Win Where Money and Talent Had Failed Miserably.

by his efforts are strictly amateur. He gets no pay for his work as organizing secretary, and he expects none. If the truth must be known, he has expended out of his own pocket more than \$3,000 to forward the cause of his sport. When he first started people said he was in it for money. When that impression cleared away some said he was a millionaire with a hobby. Later it was rumored that he longed to back in the blaze of the limelight; but he kept steadily in the background, and in time this idea went the way of its predecessors. Gradually it is beginning to dawn upon everybody that Cook is doing it because he cannot help it; in short, because he is the greatest baseball fan in the world.

COOK IS TOO MODEST.

I have told this story myself because Cook himself refused to tell it. He has a sense of modesty that covers him like the hide of an elephant. A 20-mile team would not draw a personal tale like this from him. But he did tell me some of his experiences in introducing the game over here that will illustrate, better than anything I can say, the enthusiasm of the man.

THOUGHT HIM A "CON" MAN.

"One day," he said, "I received word from the president of one of the teams that three of his men would not be able to play on the coming Saturday afternoon and that the scheduled game would have to be abandoned. I called the captain up on the phone and said, 'Go ahead with the match; I will see that you have three men that can play the game.' Now, of course, all the other league teams would play on the same day, so I could hope for no help in that direction. London had been exhausted of men who could play the game when we made up the teams, so I was utterly at a loss. I knew I was best to do until a bright idea struck me. The following morning I went down to the Strand and took up a position in front of the Piccadilly Circus. I knew I was pretty certain to meet some Americans, and sure enough, it was not long before a couple of them came along. You know you can spot them a mile away. I immediately stepped up to them and said, 'Excuse me, but would you like to play a game of baseball?' One of the men was tall and the other short. The former grabbed his companion tightly by the arm, and turning his back upon me, marched him quickly across the street. Then the two of them turned and regarded me with reproaching glances. 'That's a nice story in the world where the petty con man is so numerous as in the Strand, and I did not blame the two men. I suppose they had been warned before they left home. I immediately stepped up to them and said, 'Excuse me, but would you like to play a game of baseball?' One of the men was tall and the other short. The former grabbed his companion tightly by the arm, and turning his back upon me, marched him quickly across the street. Then the two of them turned and regarded me with reproaching glances. 'That's a nice story in the world where the petty con man is so numerous as in the Strand, and I did not blame the two men. 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