

Random Thoughts 93

Baseball

Baseball is the oldest and one of the most popular sports played in America. Many believe that it originated in America, but recent discoveries suggest that it actually is derived from similar bat-and-ball games played centuries earlier in England.

The first such game was called stoolball, which dates back at least to the 15th century and originated in Sussex, England. It is sometimes called “cricket in the air”. Traditionally it was played by milkmaids, girls or women who milked cows, who used their milking stools as “wickets”. In cricket these are the three stumps placed at either end of the pitch. They used the bittle, or milk bowl, as a bat. It is said that cricket originated from this game as did another popular game called rounders which was very popular in Great Britain and Ireland.

The earliest known reference to baseball is in a 1744 British publication. The game as it was played then was thought to have been brought to Canada by British immigrants. By the early 1830s rules were developed and codified for the sport as its popularity spread throughout North America. The first officially recorded baseball game played on the North American continent was played in Beachville, Ontario, Canada on June 4, 1838. The first recorded baseball game in the United States was played in Hoboken, New Jersey on June 19, 1846.

The popularity of the sport rapidly spread so that by 1856 it was being called the “national pastime”. The sport’s governing body, the National Association of Base Ball Players, was formed a year later. In 1867 African Americans were barred from playing the sport, so professional Negro Leagues were formed, but quickly folded. The National League was founded in 1876. The American League was founded in 1893 and by that time virtually all of the modern baseball rules were in place by then.

In 1903 a formal agreement between the two leagues formalized relations between the two leagues and the first World Series was held in that year.

The unwritten rules of segregation began to be cracked when Jackie Robinson was signed by the Brooklyn Dodgers in 1947. From about 1951 onwards there was a steady increase in the number of Latin American players.

Baseball was introduced to Japan as a school sport in 1872 by American Horace Wilson, and English professor at Kaisei Academy in Tokyo. The first organized adult baseball team, called the Shimbashi Athletic Club, was established in 1878.