



The national game

By Alfred Henry Spink

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Originally published in 1910 (with a second, revised edition in 1911), *The National Game* by Alfred H. Spink is the first important history of baseball, predating Albert G. Spalding's better-known *America's National Game* by a year. Dedicating the first edition, Spink spells out his lofty goal: "I want this book to live forever, so that the names of those who helped to build up and make base ball the greatest of outdoor sports may never be forgotten." That goal was postponed, however, as Spink's *The National Game* has been out of print since 1911.

While Spalding comes down firmly on the side of the owners, telling how the courageous and honest magnates triumphed morally over greedy and crooked players, Spink celebrates the accomplishments of the great players who helped to bring the game into the prominence it enjoyed in the first decade of the twentieth century.

Spink provides a history of baseball before 1910; position-by-position biographies of every current major league player and of former players; sketches of managers, magnates, journalists, and umpires; the line-up of every championship team from 1871 to 1910; and a complete record of all games played for championships from 1884 to the 1910 World Series.

In his foreword, Steven P. Gietschier, director of historical records at the *Sporting News*, details Spink's career as a St. Louis journalist and as secretary and press agent for the St. Louis Browns until he left the team to start a weekly newspaper devoted entirely to sports: "The *Sporting News*, eight pages long, hit the streets for the first time on St. Patrick's Day, 1886."

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The national game By Alfred Henry Spink Bibliography

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- 410 pages

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Imagine opening a Tut's Tomb to baseball's ancient past. That's the operative metaphor for stepping into Alfred H. Spink's 1911 volume, *The National Game*, meticulously resurrected in facsimile form by Southern Illinois University's superb "Writing Baseball" series. Some of the artifacts it yields are simply stunning.

The founder of the venerable *Sporting News*, Spink set out at the beginning of the 20th century to write the game's first definitive "faithful and accurate" history and encyclopedia. He envisioned that his enormous accomplishment--published in 1910 and revised a year later--would be updated annually; instead, despite initial success, it virtually disappeared. Yet it remains a remarkably comprehensive treasure trove of records, statistics, early anecdotes, game reports, portraits, action photos, and short, though comprehensive, biographies of hundreds of players, executives, even sportswriters. Covering the bases, Spink includes tutorials on playing each position and how to keep score, and a brief list of the post-diamond careers of some notable old players: Hall of Fame pitcher Tim Keefe became a drummer, former batting champ Tip O'Neil could be found "lumbering" in Canada, and Billy Sunday, of course, turned into a fiery evangelist. In a report on former players who'd entered public life, Spink recalls that Lincoln, in the midst of a sandlot game in 1860, refused to meet with the delegation sent to inform him of his presidential nomination until he'd had another at-bat. The outcome of that at-bat--and its possible impact on the course of the republic--goes sadly unchronicled.

About the only other bit absent from *The National Game* is praise for Abner Doubleday. The then-recent claim that Doubleday had invented the national pastime in Cooperstown in 1839 was so preposterous to Spink--he actually traces the game back nine years earlier--that he dismisses Doubleday and the Cooperstown myth in about the space it would take to mark an error on a scorecard. It would take Spink's rival, Albert G. Spalding, the Barnum of early baseball, to resurrect the canard in *his* version of baseball history--*America's National Game*--published a year later. --Jeff Silverman

From Library Journal

While baseball histories are legion, this is one of the first. The book debuted in 1910, and Spink revised it in 1911, but it soon struck out and went out of print. This is essentially a facsimile of the last edition. The text covers the history of the game from its founding until 1911, with biographies and stats for all the players; in addition, there are roughly 200 monochrome pictures. More of a novelty item at this point, this will no doubt still be enjoyed by hardcore baseball nuts.

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About the Author

Alfred H. Spink left *The Sporting News* to write for the theater, achieving little success. In addition to *The National Game*, he wrote the three-volume *Spink Sport Stories: 1000 Big and Little Ones* in 1921.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Harry Oliver:

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