

# The Cincinnati Red Stockings

The Team That Shaped Modern Baseball

By Chris Drew

The Cincinnati Baseball Club (or C.B.B.C.) was born July 23, 1866 in the law office of Tilden, Sherman & Moulton at 17 ½ West Third Street in downtown Cincinnati. Officers of the new organization were chosen on that date, and a suitable constitution and set of by-laws were agreed upon and adopted. The team's president was Alfred T. Goshorn and the vice president was Aaron B. Champion. Adopting the nickname "The Resolutes", the club was composed mostly of members of the bar, many of them Harvard and Yale graduates. The club secured the Live Oaks Grounds at the foot of Ninth Street in the Millcreek bottoms for its first home matches. On September 29, 1866 The Cincinnati Baseball Club played its first game, losing to the Cincinnati Buckeye Baseball Club 20-18. The club played only three more games that year, and finished the season with a record of 2-2.

For the 1867 season, the club relocated their home grounds to the one occupied by the Union Cricket Club. The Union Cricket Club had used a large field situated at the foot of Richmond Street, ideal for baseball matches. Because of the move by the baseball team, many of the cricket players showed a lot of interest in the new sport so they became baseball players themselves. On April 3, 1867, the Cincinnati Baseball Club decided to construct a large clubhouse on the grounds to accommodate the increasing membership. The clubhouse cost \$2,400, and erecting a more substantial fence along the grounds cost an additional \$1,350. The Club kicked off the baseball season on May 25, 1867 against the local rival Buckeye club and defeated them 53-40. The club played eighteen games that season, winning seventeen of them. The only loss was a July 15 match against the Washington Nationals, losing by the score of 53-10. In the September 2 game against the Holts of Newport, Kentucky, the Cincinnati Club registered thirty-one home runs and won 109-15.

By the end of the 1867 season, the Cincinnati Club formed a regularly used starting lineup, which at the time the term was known as "the first nine." It was composed of the following players:

Harry Wright - Pitcher  
Fred Waterman - Third Base  
Douglas Allison - Catcher  
Charles H. Gould - First Base  
Asa Brainard - Second Base  
J. William Johnson - Right Field  
Rufus King - Center Field  
John V.B Hatfield - Left Field  
John Con How - Shortstop  
Moses Grant - Substitute

That lineup feature five professional players: Wright, Waterman, Brainard, Allison and Hatfield. All were paid for the 1868 season.

The club had also moved from the grounds co-occupied by the Union Cricket Club sometime around the latter part of that 1867 season. The new grounds were situated in the back end of Lincoln Park. The move was made because it was more convenient for the horse cars, which at that time traveled in front of the park along Freeman Street. The grounds were leased annually at \$2,000. A grand stand was constructed, the clubhouse was moved and the surrounding fence was rebuilt for a cost around \$6,000.

Without a doubt, Harry Wright was the star of the team. Harry was a former bowler for the New York Cricket Club, earning \$12 per week with his club during the summer; during the winter, Harry worked at his trade as a jeweler. In August 1865, George Ellard offered Harry \$1,200 a year to play cricket with the Union Cricket Club in Cincinnati. Harry accepted the offer and moved to Cincinnati. On November 22, 1867, Harry agreed to terms to become paid by the Cincinnati Baseball Club for the same amount, and therefore dropped his commitment to continue with the Union Cricket Club.

When the 1868 season started, a noticeable on-field attraction caught the attention of all the cranks in the stands: new white uniforms, each complete with a crimson old-English "C" stitched onto the middle of the chest and, even more noticeable, the shocking bright red hosiery worn from ankle to knee. The

origin of the now-familiar uniforms remains unknown. In one account, the uniforms were credited to George B. Ellard who thought up the style during a meeting at Aaron B. Champion's office on 75 West Third Street. In another account, it was Harry Wright who invented the fashion. The red stockings had to be made to order for each player, and therefore they were quite expensive. After all, up until that time nobody had ever heard of or worn red stockings.

The newly dubbed Cincinnati "Red Stockings" played forty-eight games in 1868 and won forty-one of those contests. One of the games in late August pitted the Red Stockings in an exciting match against the Unions of Morrisania. The Cincinnati Club won that match 13-12. The Unions featured a very talented shortstop named George Wright, Harry Wright's younger brother.

A novelty attraction for the citizens of Cincinnati that 1868 season was the raquette game played on the grounds by Indians from the Northwest. The game was played among American Indians and resembled la crosse. The Indian players were dressed colorfully and played a very exciting game, and they were given the usage of the clubhouse in which to camp during their stay in the city. However, whether bigotry or factual account presides, it was noted that it took a month to deodorize the premises after the Indians had left.

The Red Stockings were considered purely Cincinnati. One patron once remarked, "It would have killed baseball to have brought players from other cities." Citizens of Cincinnati looked upon the club as a proud local institution. Bringing players or owners in from other cities, or even other states, was unthinkable. Many, no doubt, would have argued that under those conditions that the game could not survive for even a single season. Even the idea of paying the players seemed outrageous. It was feared that paying players could potentially water down the play of the game and make players less apt to play aggressively once a contract had been penned.

It was at this time, however, that Aaron B. Champion, now the club president, dreamed of developing a team that could compete with any of the top Eastern teams and was weighing one of Harry Wright's proposals from the 1868 season: hiring the best available skilled players throughout the country at every position. Club secretary John Joyce also agreed that a team of well-trained

professionals could be very competitive. Joyce knew that all the top Eastern clubs were paying their star players and persuaded club president Champion to pursue the idea or else Cincinnati would not be able to compete. Champion agreed, but insisted he would not permit under-the-table payouts. Instead, Champion said the club would openly pay all the players and, in return, the players would agree to abide by higher standards set both on the field and off. This meant that players would not throw games in an attempt to schedule rematches in order to earn even more money. Champion wanted no part of that dishonesty.

On September 9, 1868, at a meeting held at the law office of Tilden, Sherman and Moulton, it was decided by the Cincinnati Baseball Club that the amateur element of the club would be eliminated. Joyce and Champion's plan stated that all players, as it was agreed, shall be paid a salary for the upcoming 1869 season and that only the best talent wherever available should be recruited for the team. Champion appointed George Ellard, Alfred Goshorn and Harry Wright to scout and recruit players. Harry already knew who the country's best shortstop was, and he immediately wired his brother George to visit Cincinnati. To secure George's services, Harry and the other team officers agreed to pay George \$1,400 for the coming season, instantly making him the highest paid player on the squad. Not long after Harry recruited George to join the team, Harry insisted to the other club officers that he alone be permitted to recruit the remaining players. Ellard and Goshorn agreed, and let Harry manage the rest of the recruitment process.

When word got out across the country what the Cincinnati Baseball Club was up to, other clubs were quick to immediately slam the idea. The idea of paying players at a time when the sport was gaining popularity was appalling to most and was met with defiant head-on resistance. The outcry of luring top talent from other cities was consistent throughout the baseball world and was considered a low blow to the game's sportsmanship. Although many of the top Eastern teams were declaring themselves professional, none of them admitted paying all of their players. But Harry pressed on, undeterred by the sharp criticism while the other teams kept a very watchful eye on how this Cincinnati experiment would evolve.

Harry next lured second baseman Charlie Sweasy and left fielder Andy Leonard as well as outfielder William Richard "Dick" Hurley from the rival

Cincinnati Buckeye Baseball Club. It was a devastating blow to the Buckeyes. Both Sweasy and Leonard were the star players of the Buckeye team, and the Buckeyes knew they just couldn't compete with Harry Wright waving money at their players to come join the Red Stockings. The Buckeyes also worried about a possible decline in their attendance if the fans opted to watch the games of the more talented all-professional team across the city. But given the turn of events, the Buckeyes announced they would not taint their own team with players accepting filthy money to play baseball and that they would continue to promote their team as completely pure and amateur.

Harry then turned his attention toward a stocky piano maker from Iowa named Cal McVey. McVey had played in a game against the Red Stockings in September 1868 while a member of the Indianapolis Actives, and Harry took note of his exceptional play. Because McVey was only eighteen years old, Harry had to first obtain permission from McVey's father in order for him to join the Red Stockings. McVey was granted his father's permission, and he was off to Cincinnati.

In turn, Harry had let go some of the players from the Red Stockings from the 1868 season. One of the players let go was left fielder John Hatfield. Hatfield was gifted with a remarkable throwing arm and a good bat, but he was also a renegade player who was constantly at odds with ownership, teammates and Harry. Harry suspected Hatfield was involved with gamblers by attempting to throw an 1868 match against the Buckeyes. His attitude and behavior ultimately saw the club expel him, much to Harry's relief. Hatfield joined the New York Mutual Club after the Red Stockings expelled him.

The 1869 Red Stockings and salaries were as follows:

Harry Wright - Center Field \$ 1,200  
George Wright - Shortstop \$ 1,400  
Asa Brainard - Pitcher \$ 1,100  
Fred Waterman - Third Base \$ 1,000  
Doug Allison - Catcher \$ 800  
Charlie Gould - First Base \$ 800  
Charlie Sweasy - Second Base \$ 800  
Andy Leonard - Left Field \$ 800  
Cal McVey - Right Field \$ 800  
Dick Hurley - Substitute \$ 600

Other substitutes used by the Red Stockings that season included Oak Taylor, James Bradford, James Fowler and Dave Birdsall. All these players saw

game action at least once during the season and were each paid on a one-game or as-needed basis for their services.

The 1869 season started April 17 against a picked nine team that the Red Stockings beat 24-15. Another game played against another picked nine team on April 24 resulted in a 50-7 victory. The club now felt it was ready to take on heavier teams after winning these two "practice" games. The first official game on May 4, 1869 witnessed the Red Stockings defeating the Great Westerns of Cincinnati 45-9. The team kept winning as the season rolled on. The Red Stockings traveled to the East Coast and defeated the top talented teams there with relative ease. In a game against the Mutuals of New York, John Hatfield's team, the Red Stockings won in a close one by a low score of 4-2. While in playing against teams in Washington D.C., President Ulysses S. Grant invited the Cincinnati team to the White House as guests of honor. In August, the highly touted Haymakers of Troy, New York visited Cincinnati for a game and left the field in the 5th inning on a disputed call with the score tied 17-17. Because the team refused to retake the field, the umpire awarded the game to the Red Stockings as a forfeit. The team traveled to the West Coast, playing teams as far away as San Francisco, and winning them all. When the season concluded November 5, 1869 in a 17-8 victory against the New York Mutuals, the Cincinnati Red Stockings remained undefeated. Officially, their record from 1869 stood at 57-0, but they did play (and win) more games that season. Without a single defeat, Joyce and Champion's experiment had worked; the all-professional team from Cincinnati had knocked off all their opponents, mostly in convincingly invincible fashion. The club was so well known across the nation that other cities were clamoring for their local clubs to follow Cincinnati's lead and recruit top talented players.

In 1870, the Red Stockings released the services of Dick Hurley and recruited Edward P. Atwater as their paid substitute. Harry Dean was also used as a substitute player on occasion. But the team continued rolling from where it left all from the season before. The season started April 18 against a picked nine, which the Red Stockings won 34-5. The season officially kicked off against the Eagle Club of Louisville, which the Red Stockings won 94-7. The club then traveled to the South, knocking off teams from New Orleans and Memphis. By mid-June, the winning streak had officially reached 84 games. The Red Stockings met the Atlantics in Brooklyn, and finally lost their first game 8-7 in 11

innings. Cincinnati fans were deflated. Many continued going to the games that season, but the enthusiasm for the team suffered a setback from the Brooklyn loss.

On August 2, club president Aaron B. Champion, vice president Thomas G. Smith, and club secretary John P. Joyce all resigned from their offices. Two weeks later, the club announced A.P.C. Bonte was appointed as the new club president. The Red Stockings lost five more contests that season. Because the Chicago White Stockings had defeated the team twice, they were declared national champions although Cincinnati maintained a much better win-loss record. The Red Stockings played their last game on November 5 at home against the Forest Citys of Cleveland, winning 28-5. The team officially finished the season at 86-6-1.

The gate receipts from the 1870 season suffered. With each loss, Red Stockings fans' interest waned more and more. At the same time, other teams sensed the club's financial turmoil and approached Red Stockings players with offers to join their teams for the 1871 season. With financial burdens everywhere, club president Bonte released the following circular on November 21, 1870:

"...we have arrived at the conclusion that to employ a nine for the coming season, at the enormous salaries now demanded by professional players, would plunge our club deeply into debt at the end of the year... We believe that there will be a development of the amateur talent of our club, such as has not been displayed since we employed professionals, and that we will still enjoy the pleasure of witnessing many exciting contests on our grounds."

In late November, Harry Wright traveled east to meet with Isaac W. Adams and the other organizers of the new Boston team. On November 30, 1870, Harry announced that he had accepted Adams' offer to become the new manager, captain and secretary of the new Boston club for a salary of \$2,500 a year. Less than two months later, it was announced that George Wright would join his brother Harry in Boston. Adams consulted Harry about other Cincinnati potentials, and soon Charlie Gould and Cal McVey were on their way to Boston as well. Along with these few players, Harry also took along to Boston the Red Stockings team name, the uniforms and the equipment. Harry did not pursue the services of Waterman, Brainard, Sweasy, or

Allison, preferring to leave these more difficult to manage teammates find another team for themselves instead. These other four players ended up going to the Olympic baseball club in Washington D.C. Andy Leonard also went to the Washington club, but a year later he joined Harry and the others in Boston. The Wrights' departure from the Queen City sounded the death knell for any chance or hope of maintaining a professional baseball club in Cincinnati. Cincinnati's Red Stockings were indeed gone.

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