

Multnomah at the Bat: The Impact on Baseball in Australia of The Multnomah Amateur Athletic Club's 1929 Tour

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“More scientific than cricket – more speedy than football”¹ the posters around Sydney proclaimed. The comparison would have been difficult to avoid in August 1929 as one commuted throughout Sydney. Everywhere people were confronted with the question, splashed across posters: “Can Australia Beat Multnomah?”² Roughly £400—a sizeable figure for the time—had been spent advertising the tour of the Multnomah Amateur Athletic Club, where they would play a number of local teams and three international Tests (games)³ against Australia.⁴

By the 1920s baseball had a relatively long tradition in Australia. Introduced by American miners in the 1850s, there are reports it was played in the gold fields and mining towns of the Australian Gold Rush (Mitchell 1990). While that had been Australians' first introduction to baseball, it was not until Albert Goodwill Spalding's World Baseball Tour visited in 1888 that the locals became keen participants of the game. Shortly after, local leagues could be found in most of the Australian colonies and inter-colonial games were staged by 1898. In 1914, the Chicago White Sox and New York Giants visited during their world tour, further enhancing the profile of baseball in a sports-loving Australia. Baseball's popularity grew as a result, and regular matches between the now states in a federated Australia took place.

But visits by foreign teams for the express purpose of baseball did not occur again until the 1920s. During this decade, two amateur teams visited Australia at the invitation of local baseball authorities in an effort to promote the sport. Though largely successful in raising baseball's profile, the role of amateur visiting teams in the 1920s has not received much credit in the development of baseball in Australia. This article examines the second of these amateur tours—the visit of the Multnomah Amateur Athletic Club in August and September of 1929 (in 1928 Stanford University had completed a local tour). The contribution of the “Winged Ms”, as the Multnomah club was known, in the growth of Australian baseball deserves fresh attention. Their tour of 1929 helped propel

baseball in Australia to new levels of participation. But baseball was unable to fully capitalize on this growth and remained a second-tier sport in Australia. This, in part, is due to the fact that Multnomah's visit would be the last tour of a dedicated team from overseas to Australia for almost four decades.

Australian Baseball by the 1920s

In 1888, when Albert Goodwill Spalding's "Great Australian Baseball Tour"⁵ arrived in Australia, there was considerable suspicion and hostility to baseball. Where these sentiments existed it was primarily the result of the perceived threat that baseball might have posed to cricket. The press was particularly critical and much of the reporting in the day evidenced their concern that the tour was intended as a challenge to cricket (Mitchell 1990). During the 1880s cricket was developing an important place in the colony's perception of itself and how it understood its relationship to Mother England. By the 1920s, however, cricket's position as Australia's national sport was unassailable. Rather than threatened by baseball, cricket had been supportive of America's national pastime in Australia, particularly as it provided winter training to cricketers. In a true Down Under reversal, Australians preferred to play baseball in the winter, during the cricket off-season (winter baseball leagues are still common in Australia). This allowed participation by Australian cricketers in the baseball leagues, and many of Australia's best cricketers also played baseball, including Australian representatives such as Bill Ponsford of Victoria and Vic Richardson of South Australia. After the 1888 tour the next notable visit of American baseball occurred in 1914. The Hall of Famer John McGraw brought the New York Giants and Chicago White Sox to Australia as part of their world tour. Then in 1928 Stanford University played several games against local teams. By the time Multnomah would visit in 1929 newspapers were less concerned with protecting cricket, which was not in danger, and far more interested in promoting another sport at which a new nation could excel.

The express purpose of inviting Multnomah to tour Australia was to promote the sport locally. The previous year's tour by Stanford University had achieved considerable success. Participation in baseball in New South Wales was said to have doubled following that tour.⁶ It was noted that "the effect that visit had on baseball in Australia was an immediate boost to the game" reflected in both larger attendances at club fixtures and higher membership of the asso-

ciations in the different states.⁷ However, a tour in 1929 had not been widely expected and the news came as a surprise to many in local baseball circles. While Victoria had been supposed to host the 1929 interstate competition, they deferred to New South Wales so that it might be held in Sydney and coincide with the Multnomah tour. The expected visit generated significant interest and was highly anticipated following its announcement. It was covered by the major newspapers in the largest cities across the country, including in states who would not participate in the carnival. In the newspapers of the day the talent of the Multnomah players was expounded even before their arrival, noting that the team was composed of “a number of ex-collegiate stars”⁸ and that they were a “crack” (skillful) team.⁹ Indeed, it was expected that the Multnomah tour would provide a significant boost to the profile of baseball in Australia and “prove memorable in the history of the development of the game in Australia... the Multnomah invasion should now drive home the great stimulus given by the Stanford visit, and definitely place baseball high up in the curriculum of Australian sport”.¹⁰ The selection of Multnomah appears to have been the made by representatives of the Matson Navigation Company, whom Australian baseball officials had contacted in efforts to arrange a touring team.¹¹

Despite its growing popularity, baseball was still a novelty to many in Australia's sport obsessed public. An article published less than a week before the Multnomah team arrived provides an interesting picture of how baseball was viewed. Describing the chaos to be found amongst the various games played in the parklands of Adelaide, South Australia, baseball receives particular attention. Unlike the other athletes playing various sports around them “The baseball players in their sombre, loose-fitting uniform and queer, pointed caps, seem to be solely concerned with the business of annihilating each other from the face of the earth.”¹² A great deal of concern was expressed about the speed of the ball and the danger it must pose to both batter and catcher. Those interested in baseball were also considered to be different from the surrounding crowds: “Between the play, barrackers keep up a running fire of caustic comments that remind one of the cross-talk in a vaudeville turn, except for the fact that it is much more original. ‘Send the ball for a taxi ride,’ ‘drive it home to mammy,’ and ‘kiss that leather jacket goodbye for me,’ were some of the gems that caught our attention.”¹⁴ Baseball was also considered a more professional sport than many local alternatives like cricket or rugby league. One journalist,

writing just two days before Multnomah arrived, observed that young Australian athletes would be wiser financially to play baseball. While baseball was “only a game” it was also “one of the chief industries of the United States,” the paper claimed, and offered much better wages to its players.¹⁴

Better educating Australians about the virtues of baseball was a motivation in organizing the tour. One of the first scheduled games was to be held in Newcastle, a mining town just north of Sydney. Out of consideration for locals who might have been curious to attend their first baseball game but puzzled by the action, the Newcastle Sun saw fit to publish an entire article describing the play and rules of baseball.¹⁵ It was hoped that this would allow interested spectators with no familiarity of the game an improved understanding the sport. The City Mission Hall in Newcastle had also been booked so that the manager of the visiting team could give a public lecture about the sport as well.¹⁶ The baseball potential of Newcastle was the main reason for playing a game there, “because strong efforts are being made to bring about a revival of the sport in the northern districts.”¹⁷ It speaks to the popularity of baseball in Australia that authorities were not seeking to introduce the sport, but to revive it in locations where it had once been popular. It was also intended in the initial stages of planning to hold a game in Singleton, with a population of just over 3000, and to extend the tour to Goulburn, a town of 12000 at the time (Waites 1930), where it was hoped that baseball might be established. These fixtures did not take place, most likely due to a lack of funds.

There was keen interest in the impending arrival of the Multnomah team. Various newspapers speculated about the comparative skills with regards to local players and the visiting Stanford team of the previous year. Reports of individual players had already reached the press. Sportswriters discussed players such as Grayson of Oregon Agricultural College and Mimnaugh of the University of Oregon as considerable stars. No doubt interest in the visit was also spurred by the interstate competition taking place between New South Wales, South Australia and Victoria in the week before their arrival. Many journalists of the sports sections in Australia’s daily newspapers remarked upon the growing popularity of baseball. Six thousand spectators had turned out for a mid-week interstate game the week of the Multnomah’s arrival and it was thought that large crowds would come to see the tour games: “the visit of the Multnomah team from the States should attract large crowds who, though they come

to scoff, may remain to play.”¹⁸ Just why it might be suggested that spectators would attend to scoff is unclear, though this view does not appear elsewhere in the contemporary media coverage. It seems likely that it was a remnant from earlier attitudes that considered baseball a threat to cricket. A Mr. Asprey, who held an official position in Australia's governing baseball organization, had noted that it was not only Australian interest in baseball, but American interest in Australian baseball that had increased and a number of teams were enquiring about touring.¹⁹ Asprey was a key figure in organizing the two amateur tours of Australia, and his own downfall (discussed later) may have contributed to a failure to capitalize on the benefits that further tours may have generated for baseball in Australia.

The Winged M Over Sydney

On August 8, 1929 players and managers from the Multnomah Amateur Athletic Club arrived in Sydney on the *Sierra*. They had a formal reception at the Hotel Metropole on arrival (which had previously hosted Rudyard Kipling and Jack London). Australians were eager to get an early glimpse of the American players and many turned up to watch them train that afternoon. Newspapers described them as “young and keen” and anticipated that they would be even better than the Stanford team of the previous year.²⁰ The visitors would introduce Australian spectators to several novel aspects of the game. The spectacle of extensive warming up before a game on the playing field was unknown enough that many papers remarked upon it. Immediately before their first game against South Australia on Friday, August 9 1929, Multnomah were said to have thrilled the crowd with batting practice and their big hits into the outfield.²¹ South Australia, who would finish second in the interstate competition, played Multnomah at Redfern Oval, Sydney. In their first game, Multnomah showed “superior skill in all departments.”²² South Australia was said to have suffered from considerable stage fright for much of the game and suffered a whitewash, losing 10-0. In fact, the South Australians could not advance as far as second base until the seventh inning. Moore, pitching for Multnomah, allowed only six hits and struck out 10 batters. Four Multnomah players had multiple hits. Despite having arrived just the previous day, Multnomah were able to demonstrate the superiority of American over South Australian amateur baseball quite easily.

Multnomah, however, was at somewhat of a disadvantage in its second game. Baseball, as previously noted, was primarily a winter sport in Australia. This of course was the opposite of the summer game played in North America. In Newcastle on Saturday, August 10, conditions were quite poor, with constant rain and a sodden field. But because a crowd had turned out to see the game, officials and players were determined to put on a display. Multnomah were to face a “Metropolitan” side made up of the better players from the various Sydney clubs. On their way to the ground the Multnomah representatives made quite a stir with their fashion, so much so that “The striking variety of their hats, shoes, suits, overcoats and their kit-bags impressed all the people who met them.”²³ Of special interest to locals were a pair of black and white shoes and the players’ low-crown, blue-gray and fawn hats.

But baseball, not fashion, was the main drawcard and the Multnomah team did not disappoint. They got off to an early lead in the first, when a triple from the short stop Sherrett scored two runs. Then a steal from first to second drew a throw from the Australians allowing Helmcke to steal home. Multnomah added two more runs in the third and were leading five to nil when the Metropolitan team rallied in the fourth and scored four runs. A further run was added in the fifth and the game was called for darkness. The game attracted considerable local interest, “It being the first occasion an American baseball team had played in Newcastle.”²⁴ The conditions were not conducive to baseball and the wet weather was more of a disadvantage to the visiting than local team. As one newspaper reported: “The Americans are not used to playing in wet weather, and appeared to fade away in the final sessions, which did not yield them a single run, while they were debited with five errors.”²⁵ The final score allowed the local press to claim, both truthfully but rather optimistically, that the local players were “Equal to the Yanks!”²⁶ That the culture of baseball was still foreign to many local spectators is evident in the observation of the Newcastle Morning Herald that “the spectators were highly amused at the barracking for the pitchers and the heckling of the opposing batsmen by the Americans when on the field.”²⁷ This sodden encounter would be the closest that an Australian team would come to defeating Multnomah during the tour.

The Victorian state team was the next to play Multnomah. The game was held on Sunday, 11 August at Redfern Oval in better conditions than had greeted the teams in Newcastle the day before. The Victorians were outclassed and,

like South Australia, failed to register a single run against the visitors. "The Americans showed superiority in every department except perhaps fielding, and even their work there looked better than the Victorians."²⁸ Sax, on the mound for Multnomah, struck out seven Victorians without walking a single batter. He gave up only four hits. In contrast, Multnomah had eleven safe hits to score nine runs. But the game continued a streak of misfortune for the Americans when several bats, that were much prized by the Multnomah players, were stolen from the bag strapped to the back of their coach after the game.²⁹ As if to confirm whatever stereotypes might have existed about Australia and its convict heritage, this was the second such theft of the tour already—only four days old at this point. During the game against South Australia someone stole a glove worth £2 from the Multnomah manager. Mr. Dillon, Multnomah's manager, told the press that they had doubts whether the tour could continue if the thefts were repeated.³⁰ In what might seem peculiar to modern baseball fans, they were also concerned that a number of balls hit into the crowd or over the fence during games had not been returned. However, considering the cost of the balls were said to have been 10 shillings and six pence each—a reasonable sum for the time—this is perhaps not surprising.

Before their next game against New South Wales a civic reception at the Town Hall was held for the visiting team. It was attended by the civic commissioner and the Consul-General of the United States, Mr. Lawton. The Consul-General thought that the tour would benefit not only Australian baseball and its fans, but also the Multnomah players as it "would give them a more friendly feelings towards the British Empire."³² New South Wales played Multnomah for the first time on Wednesday, August 14 at Redfern Oval. Before 4000 spectators, Multnomah managed a close win, victors 4-3. The *Sydney Morning Herald* observed that the game "was brimful of sparkling incidents" and that the closely fought match was full of play that "was fast and keen throughout a strenuous tussle."³³ The game was neck and neck until the final inning when Multnomah batted in the winning run with a "great hit by Sherrett".³⁴ Sherrett was Multnomah's best performer on the day, having also batted in the tying run in the sixth inning. New South Wales' best player was Abigail, who hit two doubles and a single in four at bats. Multnomah finished with nine hits and was closely matched by New South Wales with eight.

Throughout that week newspapers had been in heated discussion about the upcoming first Test between Australia and Multnomah. The Sydney Sportsman questioned the wisdom of not selecting Bill Ponsford, captain of the Victorian team and an international cricketer for Australia.³⁵ It would, they claimed, result in fewer gate receipts as he was a draw for crowds all by himself. The selectors of the Australian team were also the target of criticism, which would continue throughout the tour. The Referee noted that the first Australian team to play Multnomah would be strong in fielding, but poor at hitting, and predicted that this would not bode well for Australia.³⁶ Multnomah's hitting power was widely praised in the press, which was "the most spectacular part of their display to date."³⁷ Local papers referred to Helmcke as the "Babe Ruth" of the Multnomah team, and in comparing him to the Australian Ponsford, concluded that he was by far the superior hitter.³⁸ In anticipation of the first Test one newspaper relied on "actual psychological tests" to claim that "the co-ordination of mind and muscle in the properly trained baseballer is more apparent than in even a fencer or boxer, and much more so than in a cricketer or footballer."³⁹

"Yanks Lick Australian in First `Ball Test" declared one of the headlines, "These Multnomah Bohunks Sure Can Play the Game."⁴⁰ Australia lost 4-1 in the first Test against Multnomah, played in front of 15000 enthusiastic spectators. Multnomah led off with a single in the first and had bases loaded until some quick defensive play by Australia ended the inning. Australia's fielding matched Multnomah's in the early parts of the game, but the standard slipped as the game progressed.⁴¹ By the end of the game the Australian's recorded seven errors to a single error by Multnomah. Australia's lack of coordination when fielding was evident and "exemplified when Williams ran out of position to take a fly that was Miller's and Helmcke scored on the error." The game had been close until the fifth innings when Helmcke pounded a triple into center field that scored Mimnaugh. At the conclusion of the game the Multnomah players were heard to have cheered "Ah! Ha! Australia!" repeatedly.⁴² Australia's lack of leadership received significant attention.⁴³ This would become a consistent theme in coverage throughout the tour, with the lack of strategy demonstrated by Australian ball players all too apparent.

Although teams had toured previously, and baseball had a somewhat popular following, it was evidently still different enough to generate some astonished news articles. A journalist from the Sunday Times gave an account of his con-

version to baseball during the game, thinking at first it was not much different to the children's sport of rounders,⁴⁴ before concluding that it was an excellent spectacle. Derogatory comparisons of baseball with rounders had been so common during Spalding's 1888 Tour that they became a conventional aspect of the media's coverage of the event (Mitchell 1990). Thirty years later the comparison was more likely to be humorous than serious. The game, it was said "gets you like a drug habit. You commence as sedate as the footman of a hearse, and end up by roaring like a typhoon."⁴⁵ The author was much impressed with the umpire's exhibition of acrobatics, completing "a dozen slides and half a dozen summersaults to show his agility in dodging contact between his brain-box and the ball."⁴⁶ The author would, so the article claimed, encourage all his friends to go and his enemies to stay home for "Why should a man give his enemies the chance to have an emotional banquet? As good Christians we have to love our enemies, but there is no reason why we should go out of our way to put them in the way of an outsize of pleasurable thrills." The article closed with the reflection that "the spilling of that tea in Boston Harbor was more than justified if that was the only way in which the world could be given baseball."⁴⁷

The game on the diamond was not the only new feature to be introduced to many in the crowd that day. Authorities had also installed loud speakers and amplifiers throughout the stadium to allow a running commentary of the game. The purpose was largely to describe the play, so that spectators could better understand the sport. The commentary was provided by Mr. Dillon, manager of the Multnomah team, and Mr. Alf Mould (who would pitch for both Australia and New South Wales during the tour). The Sydney Morning herald considered this quite the innovation.⁴⁸ During the game, Mr. Dillon was observed to be "hopping about like a cat on hot bricks."⁴⁹ The first game between Australia and Multnomah had been a success.

Loud speakers were not the only technology employed to promote baseball during the visit of the Multnomah team. An exhibition match between Multnomah and the local Paramount Studios followed the first Test. This was filmed so that highlights of the sport could be shown in theatres the following week.⁵⁰ Despite the fact that the contest "was not regarded in a serious vein,"⁵¹ it was still covered by newspapers across the country. The game was easily won by Multnomah, 12-2 and the Sydney Mail declared that week that

interest in baseball had been much revived by Multnomah's visit,⁵² though they had only been in town for a mere 13 days.

The second Australian team to play Multnomah was considerably different from the first. And although the game began in ominous and threatening weather, 7000 spectators had arrived to watch. Those lucky enough to attend saw the Multnomah pitcher, Sax, slug a home run in the fourth. By the end of the fifth innings Multnomah led four to nil. The second Test involved some controversy when an Australian, Miller, was hit by pitch in the sixth. He was awarded first base, loading the circuit despite Multnomah disputing the call. Australia ran in two during that innings and the game looked close until a four run rally by Multnomah in the seventh (contributed to by another home run, this time by Helmcke). Australia had their own complaints about the umpiring, as well, with a double play not credited. The crowds continued to be fascinated by the extensive warm-up undertaken by the Americans on the diamond before the game commenced.⁵³ That the Multnomah players outclassed the Australians was affirmed by the overwhelming majority of the sports writers. In particular "the lack of efficient coaching of the home side, and handling of the team in critical strategy, was never more apparent."⁵⁴ These concerns would plague Australia during the Multnomah tour and lead to one of the most significant conclusions for the improvement of Australian baseball at the tour's conclusion. The game was again explained during play by the provision of loud speakers among the stands at the Sydney Cricket Ground. The commentary was contributed by a Mr. Frank Roberts, who in addition to describing the play as it took place "worked the crowd up to a high pitch of excitement."⁵⁵ With Multnomah eventual winners 10-4, the headlines read "We're Still Learning! Yanks Win Second Test – Superior in All Departments."⁵⁶

Off the diamond the Multnomah players had a busy social schedule as well. They were guests at an official dinner, held at the Dungowan Café in Martin Place (in Sydney's central business district) on Wednesday, August 28. They had also been given special tours of the Lindeman's wine cellars and Tooth's brewery. Supposedly, the manager of the Multnomah team, Mr. Dillon, remarked that "If only we could manage to persuade prohibition leaders in America to visit Australia and sample some of these light, sparkling wines of Lindeman's! We would have the solution of both sly-grog and prohibitions problems."⁵⁷ The accuracy of the paper in reporting such statements by the

manager, including "A great prospect awaits Lindeman's in the States when prohibition laws are relaxed",⁵⁸ is questionable. But it would be surprising if Multnomah's players and officials had not taken advantage of the comparatively relaxed attitude to alcohol while on tour: alcohol could be served until 6 o'clock, leading to chaotic scenes in Sydney bars between 5pm and 6pm when customers attempted to fit in as much drinking as possible after work and before closing. It is no stretch to imagine that much of the hospitality afforded the visitors would have included liberal servings of local beers, wines and spirits.

Despite continued losses by the local teams, the media hype surrounding the games had not diminished, with many commenting on the controversy regarding selections for both the upcoming New South Wales and Australian fixtures against Multnomah. Why, the Sydney Morning Herald asked, would an Australian team almost exclusively manned by New South Welshmen, be considerably different to the New South Wales state team?⁵⁹ Meanwhile, the *Evening News* lamented that there were not a sufficient number of teams of the requisite caliber to match visiting teams like Multnomah: "The raking and gathering together of nondescript teams is not doing the sport much good."⁶⁰ It was also problematic, they claimed, that South Australia and Victoria could not afford to host teams on tour and so the financial burden fell squarely on the baseball authorities in New South Wales.

New South Wales struggled against Multnomah in the next match on Wednesday, August 28, which they lost 10-2. New South Wales was "outclassed in every department."⁶¹ But the impact of the tour was already starting to show. Melbourne's leading daily newspaper observed ahead of the third Test that increased numbers of clubs had sought to participate in the upcoming Victorian summer competition, necessitating an expansion of the league.⁶² The *Evening News* noted that "in the thirty years that baseball has been alive in Australia, it has never prospered so much as in the last few years, mainly due to the stimulus received from the of teams from America."⁶³ But there must have been concerns among Australian baseball officials that, with the three-game series already decided in favor of Multnomah, some further spectacle would have to be included to entice spectators for the third and final Test.

The solution was an athletics carnival before the game that would include several former Olympic champions and pit some of the Multnomah stars against locals. Nick Winter, a former Olympic champion for Australia, and a

member of the Marrickville Baseball Club in Sydney, performed an exhibition of the triple jump. Several women's athletic events were also staged, including current and former state women's and junior women's champions. Another ex-Olympian, Edie Robinson, also competed. R Grayson from Multnomah "went like a scalded cat" to win a 120 yard hurdle event.⁶⁴ His brother, M. Grayson, competed in a 100 yard dash in full regulation baseball uniform against local baseballers.

A crowd of 6000 turned up to watch the final Test, among them the US Consul Mr. Dayle C. McDonough.⁶⁵ Australia played their best game of the series, despite losing again 10-4. "The Americans had to fight harder this time, and for the first six innings, had little, if any, advantage over the home team."⁶⁶ Multnomah were first to score when Helmcke hit a triple to left field in the second, scoring M. Grayson. Then in the fourth several errors and a baulk by the Australian pitcher, Smith, gave Multnomah two more runs. Australia followed with two runs of their own after a solid hit by Kennett and a wild throw by Sherrett at short stop. Multnomah finished the game with 13 hits while Australia had eight. Tellingly, Multnomah made only two errors but Australia made seven. The *Truth* claimed in their headline "We're Baseball Babes – Yanks Can't be Touched."⁶⁷ Multnomah were "far too clever" for Australia, who are in their "swaddling baseball clothes."⁶⁸

Two final games were played after the international game. The first, against the local club Leichardt, began with a shock for Multnomah when the locals were ahead until the third innings. Leichardt's success was short-lived, however, and Multnomah easily won the game 11-3. After the game, the baseball glove stolen from the Multnomah manager was returned by a local enthusiast who had bought it from a boy for five shillings. When he had read in the newspaper that the manager had been relieved of a glove he determined to return it to the American. Leichardt, though, were victims of their own robbery that day with a thief pilfering money and clothes from the dressing room. One player was forced to wait in the club house until new pants could be brought back after the thieves took his clothes and left him nothing to wear.⁶⁹ The final game of the tour was another against New South Wales. The New South Welshmen struggled as "a want of proper coaching and understanding led the home team's base runners into traps, and often attempted foolhardy play."⁷⁰ This was perhaps best exemplified when, with New South Welshmen loading the bases,

Mould took off for second “for some unknown reason” and was easily tagged to end the innings and spoil a good scoring opportunity.⁷¹ The final score was 15-2.

With the departure of the Multnomah team on September 7 aboard the *Sonoma*, the Australian newspapers rued that they departed with the “baseball Ashes”:⁷² The Ashes are possibly the most prestigious sporting trophy in Australia, fought between Australia and England for supremacy in cricket. However, locals were impressed with the Multnomah visitors, lavishing significant praise on their sportsmanship. It was noted that “Unaccustomed to several rulings of local umpires, the Americans, even when such decisions went against them at critical stages had no kick coming, and played on in happy and enthusiastic vein.”⁷³ The final record of their tour in Australia had been 13 games, 12 wins and one draw.

Multnomah's Impact on Australian Baseball

By the end of the final game between Australia and Multnomah many deficiencies in the local game had become apparent. Australia's batters had developed a poor style in the batting box, often stepping away from pitches. On the mound Australian pitchers did not hide their pitches and it was easy for the more experienced Americans to learn their timing, allowing for a disproportionately higher number of Multnomah hits. Australian pitchers were also not studying the batters, and did not change their deliveries to suit the batter in the box. In the field, team work and coordinated defense were lacking, leading to unnecessary errors and costly delays in delivering the ball to the correct base. Australians were also in the habit of deriding their team mates following an error, a practice that the Multnomah manager strongly advised against, suggesting that it would only cause players to perform more poorly in a game.⁷⁴ Strategically the Australian game was also lacking. The newspapers often pointed out that Australia failed to substitute a pinch hitter when such a move may have been beneficial. They observed that American teams were far readier to adopt the tactic than their Australian counterparts. In these aspects the tour had been a valuable one for Australian baseball, as it was observed at the time that “much important knowledge of American methods has been gained by the Australian teams and followers of the game.”⁷⁵

The primary recommendation of the departing Americans was that Australian baseball had much raw talent, but desperately required the guidance of an American coach. The Multnomah manager was quick to point out that “the Australian teams suffered chiefly from the fact that the players had been ‘book taught’, and had picked up the game purely from their ability to adapt themselves to a sport without the necessary competent trainers.”⁷⁶ Reports by the visitors of their tour and the need for an American coach in Australia were quick to elicit offers from potential coaches in the United States. By the following February the Australian Baseball Council were considering an offer from a University of Oregon graduate who was keen to coach Australians in the finer points of the game.⁷⁷ But by 1931 an American coach had still not been secured to assist in the improvement of the sport locally.⁷⁸ The opportunity to play touring sides, though, had improved the performance of many local players. The Australian pitcher Mould was said to have improved considerably in the 1930 winter season following changed handling of the ball on the mound and a different wind up as a result of tips from the Multnomah pitcher, Ken Sax.⁷⁹ More broadly, the Multnomah tour was significant as “the experience gained by local players from the matches against the American teams will prove highly beneficial. It should have a strong influence in establishing the game on a more scientific basis, so ably demonstrated by the Multnomah combination.”⁸⁰

Beyond an increase in skills, there was also an immediate increase in interest in the sport. The New South Wales summer league immediately following the tour was the biggest on record to that point. The influx of teams had left authorities scrambling to find enough fields to host the games.⁸¹ It also led to an acute shortage of umpires.⁸² The winter league in the following year had 72 teams, up from 56 the year before.⁸³ This only included games that were sanctioned by the New South Wales Baseball Association and did not count junior teams. The influence of the Multnomah visit (and Stanford’s a year earlier) was “clearly evident in the big increase in the number of players seen in action on Saturday for the opening of the season in Sydney.”⁸⁴ The Victorian winter competition in 1930 increased by 12 teams to a total of 78, now playing in seven different grades.⁸⁵ In Adelaide, South Australia—the third most popular location for baseball in the country at the time—a further 6 teams had been added to the local competition.⁸⁶ These increases in participation were recorded the following year as well, when a then record of 83 teams participated in the Victorian

league.⁸⁷ In the Annual Report of the New South Wales Baseball Association in 1930 it was noted that the sport had its strongest growth to date.⁸⁸

Yet the presentation of the Annual Report from the New South Wales Baseball Association was met with some controversy. A representative from the St. George club questioned the financial figures and accused the Baseball Association of secrecy with the finances during the meeting.⁸⁹ Though the sport had improved in quality and participation, concerns regarding the financial health of the sport were raised.⁹⁰ It appears those concerns were not widespread at the time, and the auditor's reports of the Association were passed at the meeting. In retrospect they likely had some basis in fact. Despite the urgent need for an American coach as observed by the Multnomah team, the local press, and the local baseball authorities, it could not be afforded two years later and beyond.⁹¹ The Australian Baseball Council official who had been instrumental in arranging the tour of Multnomah (and Stanford the preceding year), Cecil Joseph Asprey, would shortly be imprisoned and charged with fraud.⁹² Asprey, in his role as a law clerk, had used money from the accounts of clients to fund both tours. After the Stanford tour had lost £200 he suggested to the New South Wales Baseball Association, of which he was chairman of the Executive Committee at the time, that they invite a second touring team, that he hoped would recoup his losses. He first took money in order to reimburse the shipping company who demanded payment for the transport of the Stanford team. The New South Wales Baseball Association had been unaware of the fraud.⁹³ It is quite likely that Asprey was motivated not by financial interests but a genuine concern for promoting the sport in Australia—an attitude that reflects earlier reports of his conduct in promoting the sport.

Conclusion

Multnomah's tour was beneficial to Australian baseball in two important ways. It contributed to an immediate increase in interest in the sport, both in participants and spectators. It also provided a much-needed lesson in the finer points of the game, which had progressed at an understandably slower pace in Australia than North America. Further tours of American teams were rumored in the subsequent years, including Oregon State University,⁹⁴ and a tour of teams from each of the American and National major leagues.⁹⁵ Those tours did not eventuate. In 1933 the Australian Baseball Council disbanded, leaving

organization of the sport up to state associations until a national body formed again later that decade (Clark 2003). Baseball continued to be a popular sport in Australia, but was still largely considered a winter competition and never seriously challenged the supremacy of cricket as a summer sport. The next major tour would not take place again until 1968 when the Fuji Iron and Steel Company baseball team arrived from Japan.

It is open to speculation, but it is likely that additional tours by American teams in the 1930s would have raised local interest in baseball to further heights. Sport, and especially international sport, performed an increasingly important social function in Australia during the Depression. Australian sporting contests and athletes from the period are still firmly engrained on the cultural memory of the country. Had baseball authorities been able to organize other visiting teams during this period the growth of the sport in Australia may have been even more pronounced. Despite the potential of Australian baseball, though, it was never likely to eclipse more traditional winter sports of rugby or Australian football, or move to a summer season and spoil the popularity of cricket. But that does not appear to have been the intention for the tour. Australian baseball authorities would have been fully aware of the supremacy of cricket and, unlike 30 years before, the media did not feel that baseball threatened a developing idea of what it was to be Australian (as understood through the lens of sport). Cricket's support of baseball in Australia was a significant foundation for the sport locally. By 1929 Australia was far more secure in its sporting identity than it had been in 1888. In Australia's insatiable appetite for sport, baseball was a complement to cricket at which Australians also wanted to excel.

The Multnomah tour was a success, measured both in increased interest and participation in baseball in Australia. While other factors, such as broader trends in sports participation, no doubt contributed to the growth of baseball in Australia during this period, the tour was a valuable boost for the sport locally. The Multnomah Amateur Athletic Club therefore played an important role in the early development of baseball in Australia. The tour demonstrated that the Australian public were eager spectators and prepared to watch baseball even when conditions were less than ideal. Had Australian teams enjoyed more success against the visitors it is likely that crowds would have been bigger still. Significant credit has been afforded the efforts of American professional baseball in popularizing the sport in Australia—notably Spalding's tour

of 1888, the visit of the Giants and White Sox in 1914, and financial support from the Majors for professional Australian leagues in Australia. But the role of American amateurs, and particularly the amateur Multnomah club, should not be overlooked. The tour of the Multnomah Amateur Athletic Club helped propel baseball to new heights of popularity in Australia and was an important contribution to the development of the game there.

NOTES

¹In Australia, "football" is shorthand for a different sport depending on the location. In New South Wales, it would most commonly refer to Rugby League (though in limited circles it might refer to Rugby Union and in modern times to Australian rules football as well).

²"Baseball – Big `Ball – First Test on Saturday," *Sydney Sportsman*, August 13, 1929, 12.

³The use of "Test" to describe the games played between Multnomah and Australia would be controversial. A Test match is traditionally played in cricket or rugby union and usually refers to matches between two international teams (Oxford English Dictionary). The use of "Test" to describe the games would be a deliberate effort to raise the profile of baseball and generate additional interest in the games.

⁴"Baseball – Stormy Annual Meeting – Trouble at Turnstiles," *Sydney Morning Herald*, March 20, 1930, 15.

⁵What would later become a world tour was initially conceived as a promotional tour of Australia, which was considered the most likely country to adopt baseball enthusiastically (Mitchell 1990). It was only later while on tour in Australia that Spalding decided to take the teams to Asia and Europe before returning to the United States.

⁶"Baseball Boom," *Referee*, July 31, 1929, 16.

⁷"Baseball Boom," *Referee*, July 31, 1929, 16.

⁸"American Baseball Team on Way to Sydney," *Observer*, August 3, 1929, 41.

⁹"Baseball Boom," *Referee*, July 31, 1929, 16.

¹⁰"Baseball Boom," *Referee*, July 31, 1929, 16.

¹¹Bert Gooding, "Tour in South Seas Rumored for Club Nine," *The Winged M*, July 12, 1929, 1.

¹²"Adelaide Encircled by Amphitheatre of Sport," *Mail*, August 3, 1929, 28.

¹³"Adelaide Encircled by Amphitheatre of Sport," *Mail*, August 3, 1929, 28.

¹⁴"Play `Ball," *Sydney Sportsman*, August 6, 1929, 8.

¹⁵"Baseball – How the Game is Played," *Newcastle Sun*, August 6, 1929, 8.

¹⁶"Americans for Newcastle," *Sydney Morning Herald*, August 2, 1929, 15.

¹⁷"Baseball – Team From America – Match at Newcastle," *Newcastle Morning Herald and Miner's Advocate*, July 29, 1929, 3.

¹⁸"Play `Ball," *Sydney Sportsman*, August 6, 1929, 8.

¹⁹"Baseball Interstate Series," *Sydney Morning Herald*, August 3, 1929, 19.

²⁰"Baseball – The American Team," *Advertiser*, August 9, 1929, 31. "Americans Arrive – Big Baseball Carnival Begins," *Arrow*, August 9, 1929, 15.

²¹"Baseball – International Game," *Sun*, August 9, 1929, 14.

²²"Americans Successful," *Examiner*, August 10, 1929, 12.

- 23³“Made a Hit – United States Baseballer’s New Fashions,” *Newcastle Sun*, August 10, 1929, 5.
- 24⁴“Drawn Game – American Baseballers Checked,” *Sunday Times*, August 11, 1929, 9.
- 25⁵“Equal to the Yanks,” *Truth*, August 11, 1929, 7.
- 26⁶“Equal to the Yanks,” *Truth*, August 11, 1929, 7.
- 27⁷“American Team in Newcastle – Draw With Metropolis,” *Newcastle Morning Herald and Miner’s Advocate*, August 12, 1929, 8.
- 28⁸“Another Win for American,” *Telegraph*, August 13, 1929, 7.
- 29⁹“Losses of Baseballers – Thefts From Americans,” *Telegraph*, August 13, 1929, 3.
- 30⁰“Losses of Baseballers – Thefts From Americans,” *Telegraph*, August 13, 1929, 3.
- 31¹“Americans Robbed – Visiting Baseballers Lose Material,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, August 13, 1929, 12.
- 32²“Visiting Baseball Team,” *Argus*, August 14, 1929, 20.
- 33³“Multnomah Again Defeats State Team,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, August 15, 1929, 15.
- 34⁴“Multnomah Again Defeats State Team,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, August 15, 1929, 15.
- 35⁵“Big `Ball,” *Sydney Sportsman*, August 13, 1929, 12.
- 36⁶“Another Milestone in Baseball,” *Referee*, August 14, 1929, 16.
- 37⁷“Baseball Test – Thrilling Game Expected – Can Australia Beat Multnomah At Showground Tomorrow?,” *Arrow*, August 16, 1929, 15.
- 38⁸“Baseball Test – Thrilling Game Expected – Can Australia Beat Multnomah At Showground Tomorrow?,” *Arrow*, August 16, 1929, 15.
- 39⁹“Baseball Test – Thrilling Game Expected – Can Australia Beat Multnomah At Showground Tomorrow?,” *Arrow*, August 16, 1929, 15.
- 40⁰“Yanks Lick Australia in First Test – 15,000 See Baseball Test Match – These Multnomah Bohunks Sure Can Play the Game,” *Truth*, August 18, 1929, 8.
- 41¹“Americans Win First Ball Test,” *Sun*, August 18, 1929, 11.
- 42²“Yanks Lick Australia in First Test – 15,000 See Baseball Test Match – These Multnomah Bohunks Sure Can Play the Game,” *Truth*, August 18, 1929, 8.
- 43³“First Test Match – Win For Americans,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, August 19, 1929, 15.
- 44⁴Rounders is: “An outdoor ball game played between two sides on a field of (usually four) bases, in which each player attempts to strike an underarm delivery of the ball with a cylindrical bat (formerly occas. one of flatter design) and score a run or point by completing a circuit of the field... *Rounders* is one of a family of closely related bat-and-ball games that arose in England in the 18th cent. under the name base ball. The modern American game *baseball* is also a member of this family” (Oxford English Dictionary). Rounders’ superficial similarity to baseball should be readily apparent. By the end of the 19th century rounders was a children’s game in England and Australia, with boys progressing to the more “sophisticated” sport of cricket.
- 45⁵“The Ball Game – One of the Uninitiated Looks it Over,” *Sunday Times*, August 18, 1929, 2.
- 46⁶“The Ball Game – One of the Uninitiated Looks it Over,” *Sunday Times*, August 18, 1929, 2.
- 47⁷“The Ball Game – One of the Uninitiated Looks it Over,” *Sunday Times*, August 18, 1929, 2.
- 48⁸“First Test Match – Win For Americans,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, August 19, 1929, 15.
- 49⁹“First Test – Australia’s Weakness,” *Sydney Sportsman*, August 20, 1929, 12.
- 50⁰“Multnomah v. Paramount,” *Sun*, August 20, 1929, 12.
- 51¹“Visiting Baseballers – Practice Match in Sydney,” *Telegraph*, August 21, 1929, 15.
- 52²“Baseball: Multnomah Wins First Test,” *Sydney Mail*, August 21, 1929, 12.

- ⁵³"Americans Again," *Sunday Times*, August 25, 1929, 10.
- ⁵⁴"Americans Again," *Sunday Times*, August 25, 1929, 10.
- ⁵⁵"We're Still Learning," *Truth*, August 25, 1929, 8.
- ⁵⁶"We're Still Learning," *Truth*, August 25, 1929, 8.
- ⁵⁷"Sparkling `Ball and Hock," *Sunday Times*, August 25, 1929, 3.
- ⁵⁸"Sparkling `Ball and Hock," *Sunday Times*, August 25, 1929, 3.
- ⁵⁹"N.S.W. v Multnomah," *Sydney Morning Herald*, August 27, 1929, 16.
- ⁶⁰"The Final Test – Men of Multnomah – Those Early Games," *Evening News*, August 28, 1929, 2.
- ⁶¹"Multnomah Beat N.S.W.," *Sydney Morning Herald*, August 29, 1929, 16.
- ⁶²"Summer League," *Age*, August 30, 1929, 5.
- ⁶³"American Stars – Multnomah Form – Previous Visitors," *Evening News*, August 31, 1929, 2.
- ⁶⁴"Nearly Made a Hash of It," *Truth*, September 1, 1929, 8.
- ⁶⁵"Third Test Match – Americans Still Unbeaten," *Sydney Morning Herald*, September 2, 1929, 15.
- ⁶⁶"Multnomah Wins All Three `Ball Tests," *Sun*, September 1, 1929, 13.
- ⁶⁷"We're Baseball Babes – Yanks Can't be Touched," *Truth*, September 1, 1929, 8.
- ⁶⁸"We're Baseball Babes – Yanks Can't be Touched," *Truth*, September 1, 1929, 8.
- ⁶⁹"Baseballers Robbed," *Sydney Morning Herald*, September 4, 1929, 19. "An Heirloom," *Sun*, September 5, 1929, 14.
- ⁷⁰"Americans Unbeaten," *Sydney Morning Herald*, September 6, 1929, 20.
- ⁷¹"Americans Unbeaten," *Sydney Morning Herald*, September 6, 1929, 20.
- ⁷²"Multnomah Departs – Take Baseball 'Ashes': Brilliant Record of Successes," *Arrow*, September 6, 1929, 14.
- ⁷³"Multnomah Departs – Take Baseball 'Ashes': Brilliant Record of Successes," *Arrow*, September 6, 1929, 14.
- ⁷⁴"American's Impressions," *Sydney Morning Herald*, September 14, 1929, 22.
- ⁷⁵"Record of Multnomah More Impressive Than Stanford," *Referee*, September 4, 1929, 18.
- ⁷⁶"American's Impressions," *Sydney Morning Herald*, September 14, 1929, 22.
- ⁷⁷"American Coach," *Sydney Morning Herald*, February 22, 1930, 21.
- ⁷⁸"Australian Baseballers Need Intensive Coaching," *Referee*, April 1, 1931, 17.
- ⁷⁹"Ball Thriller – Premiers Clash with Waverley," *Arrow*, May 16, 1930, 16.
- ⁸⁰"Records Eclipsed," *Sydney Morning Herald*, March 26, 1930, 20.
- ⁸¹"All Ready – Summer Baseball Clubs – Growth of League," *Sun*, October 9, 1929, 8. "Opening of Summer Season," *Sydney Morning Herald*, October 9, 1929, 23.
- ⁸²"Records Eclipsed," *Sydney Morning Herald*, March 26, 1930, 20.
- ⁸³"Records Eclipsed," *Sydney Morning Herald*, March 26, 1930, 20.
- ⁸⁴"Baseball Premiers Improved," *Referee*, May 7, 1930, 17.
- ⁸⁵"Opening of Season," *Australasian*, May 3, 1930, 28.
- ⁸⁶"Opening of Season," *Australasian*, May 3, 1930, 28.
- ⁸⁷"Australian Baseballers Need Intensive Coaching," *Referee*, April 1, 1931, 17.
- ⁸⁸"Records Eclipsed," *Sydney Morning Herald*, March 26, 1930, 20.
- ⁸⁹"Stormy Annual Meeting – Trouble at Turnstiles," *Sydney Morning Herald*, March 20, 1930, 15.

⁹⁰“Stormy Annual Meeting – Trouble at Turnstiles,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, March 20, 1930, 15.

⁹¹“Australian Baseballers Need Intensive Coaching,” *Referee*, April 1, 1931, 17.

⁹²“Finance Tours – Baseball Teams – Law Clerk’s Defalcations,” *Brisbane Courier*, July 15, 1932, 21.

⁹³“Finance Tours – Baseball Teams – Law Clerk’s Defalcations,” *Brisbane Courier*, July 15, 1932, 21.

⁹⁴“Teach Us ‘How’ – Baseball Ideas – Suggestions From U.S.A.,” Sun, March 26, 1930, 7.

⁹⁵“Visit of Professional Baseball Teams,” *Australian Worker*, April 30, 1930, 12. “Coach Them? Austn. Baseballers American’s Visit,” Sun, May 8, 1930, 10. “Team to Play Americans,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, May 9, 1930, 16.