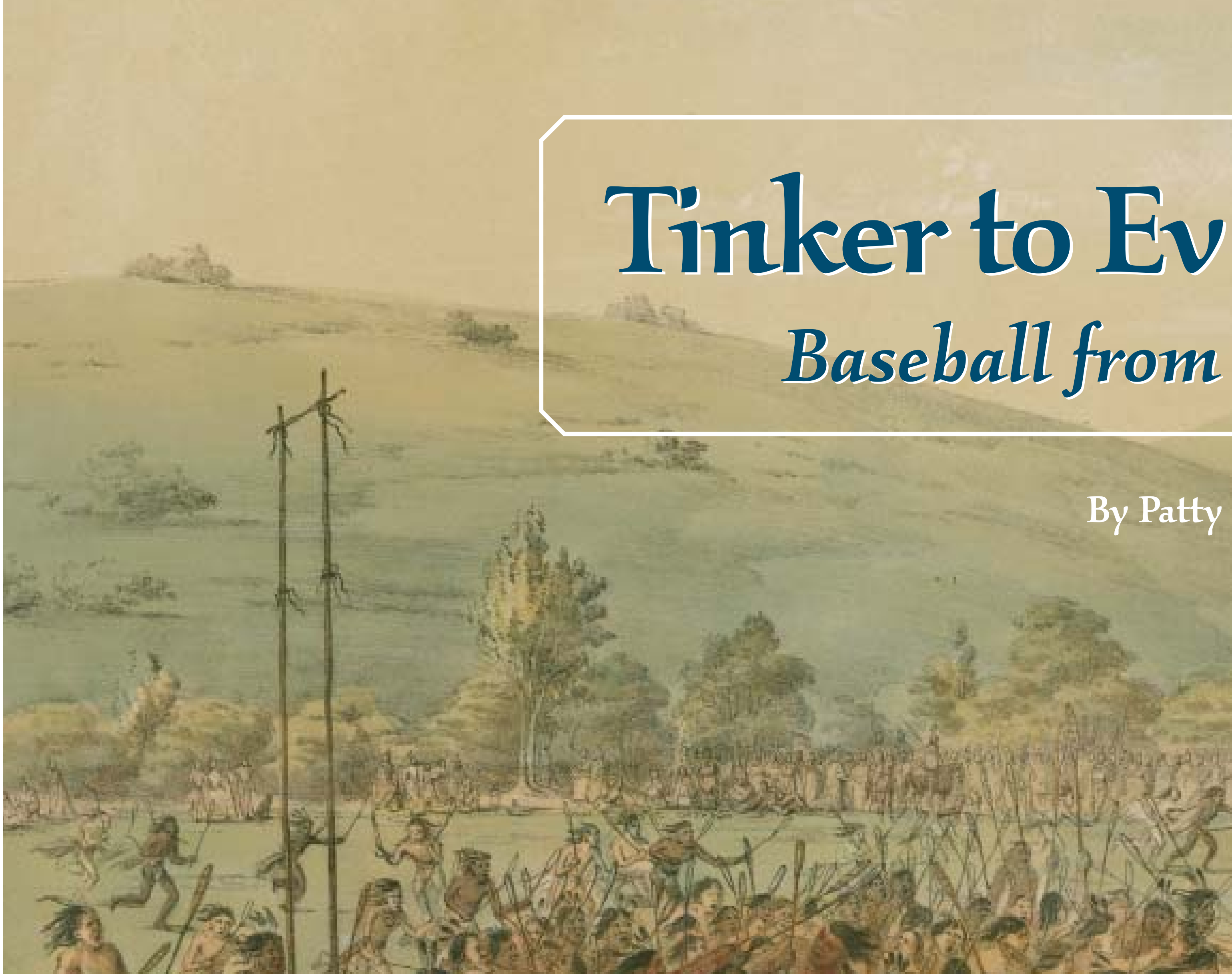
Tinker to Ev

Baseball from

By Patty



Artist George Catlin captured some of the fierceness of the typical lacrosse game. By the time Catlin made

ers to Chief

Indian Country

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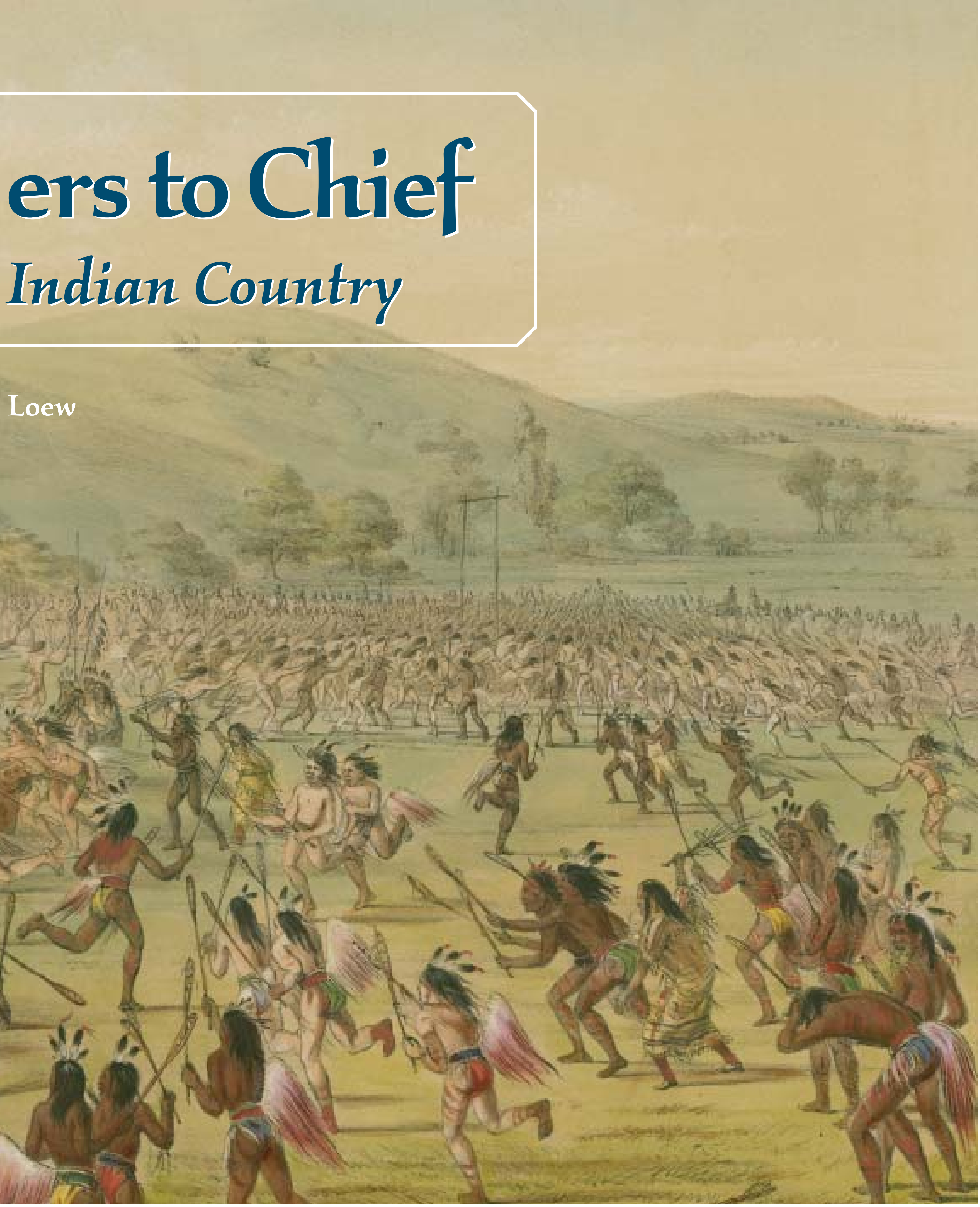

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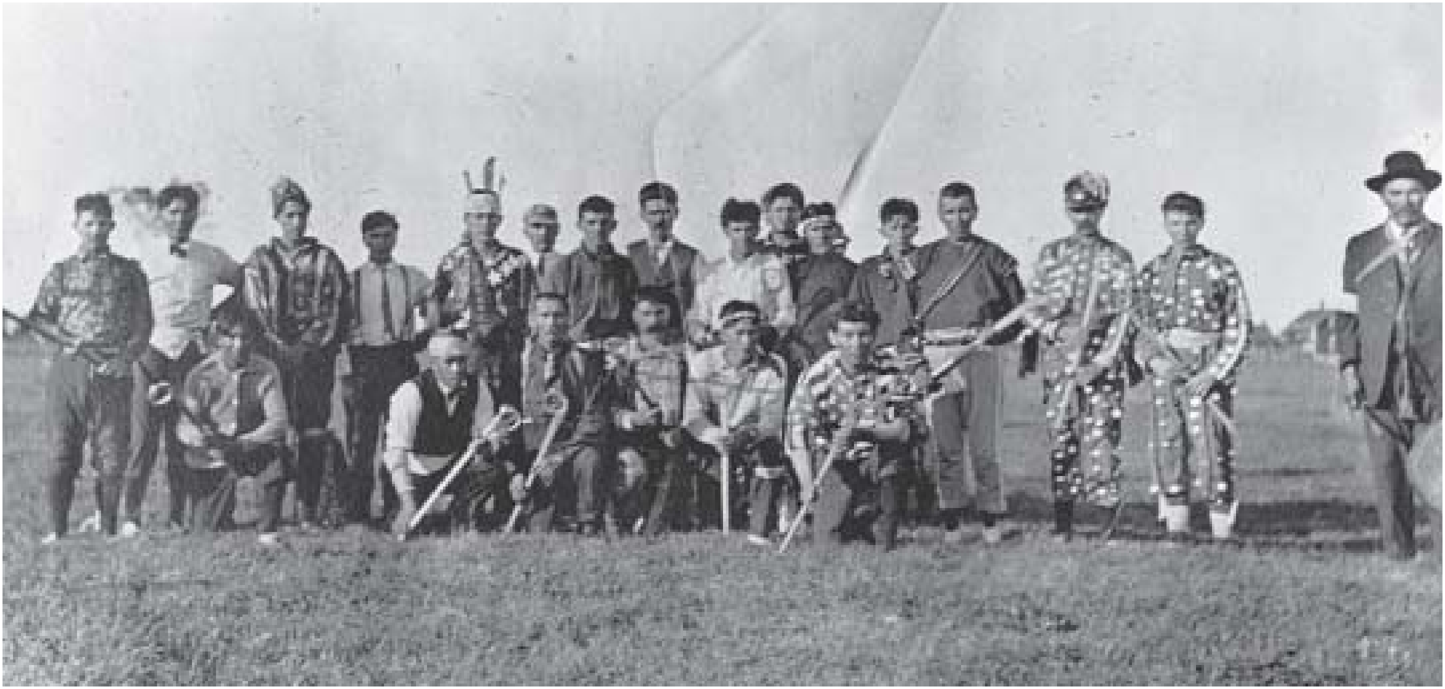
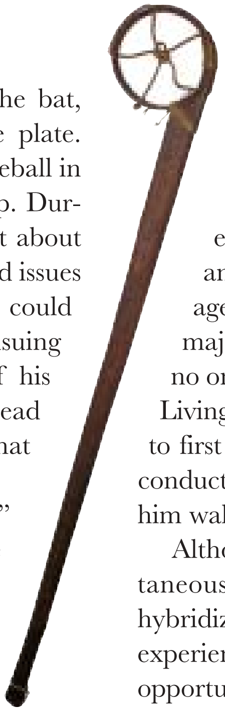
this sketch, around 1844, some native communities had a thousand-year tradition of playing lacrosse.



PH 1236

These Wisconsin lacrosse players, possibly Menominee, donned a mixture of traditional and modern garb, mirroring the hybridization of lacrosse with other sports, like baseball, that sometimes occurred in native communities.



WHS Museum
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Lacrosse racquets varied in size and shape from player to player, but most were made from hard woods like ash, with a basket woven from animal hide. The balls used in lacrosse also varied as some were constructed of leather and stuffed with animal hair while others were ornately carved from wood such as willow.

Thirteen-year-old Bobby Livingston gripped the bat, summoned his courage, and stepped to the plate. Forty-five feet away the pitcher placed the baseball in the basket of his lacrosse stick and started his wind up. During those next fateful seconds perhaps Bobby thought about how fast the ball would arrive. Or perhaps he pondered issues of trajectory and control. No one, least of all Bobby, could reconstruct much of anything that happened in the ensuing pandemonium. Later, after the concerned faces of his teammates came back into focus and the knot on his head began to subside, everyone agreed that the pitch that beaned Bobby Livingston was high and inside.

"That ball was just like an aspirin tablet coming in," Joe Rose remembered of the game that took place some time in the late 1930s or early 1940s on the Bad River Ojibwe Reservation. In this tribal community located on the south shore of Lake Superior near Ashland, he and his friends, including the unfortunate Bobby, often used lacrosse sticks to pitch batting practice and sometimes even used them in games. "Even a kid could throw 'em faster than major league pitching, you know. But you were pretty wild. It was dangerous." Rose estimated that a baseball hurled from a lacrosse stick probably traveled at a speed of 100 miles an hour or more, a statistic that hits home when recalling that Hall-of-Famer Nolan Ryan once delivered a fast ball that was clocked at 100.9 miles per hour, and that nowadays a good major league fast ball averages between 90 and 95 miles an hour. The clocking of major league pitches did not begin until 1930. Of course no one appreciated the speed of that ball better than Bobby Livingston. "Normally according to the rules you get to walk to first base when you get hit," Rose related in an interview conducted in 1997. "Everyone felt so sorry for him, they let him walk all around to home plate and score a run."[1]

Although few Ojibwe played lacrosse and baseball simultaneously, Bobby Livingston's misadventure in sports hybridization does nevertheless provide a window into the experiences of Indians in white sports. Baseball created opportunities, but it also produced losses and pain. Some Ojibwe ball players became symbols of success to other Indians and helped spread pan-Indianism by playing sports. However, even the most successful Indian athletes experienced the sting of racial stereotyping.

By 1912 baseball had replaced lacrosse in popularity—a transformation that serves more broadly as a metaphor for other changes that had been taking place in Indian Country. Since the Allotment Act of 1887, a federal law that supplanted collective ownership of Indian lands with individual possession, the Ojibwe had been evaluating white institutions and reevaluating their own traditions. What emerged was a new belief system—a system that preserved intact some tribal values and customs and reshaped or discarded others. It was a system that resisted some white institutions and embraced, sometimes innovating, others like baseball. In this way the Ojibwe survived, and some even prospered amid the changes. At the turn of the century Ojibwe culture was no less authentic than it was prior to white settlement. It was reconstructing itself. Challenging times required creativity, and the Ojibwe needed to put their own spin on the ball.

The Lake Superior Ojibwe had a rich tradition of ball sports that spanned centuries. The games included *cha ha,* played with two balls and a stick, as well as the hand-and-foot ball game—a game that might be described as a combination of hacky sack and soccer, in which a soft stuffed ball was "placed on the top of the foot partly on the toes" and bounced up and down.[2] The idea was to keep the ball from falling to the ground. The most popular traditional sport, however, was the ancient game of lacrosse, which anthropologist C. Wissler concluded (in 1922) that the Lake Superior Ojibwe had invented,[3] although this fact is challenged by the Six Nations (Iroquois) Indians who believe they first developed the game. Wissler estimated that Algonquin Indians had been playing lacrosse for a thousand years.

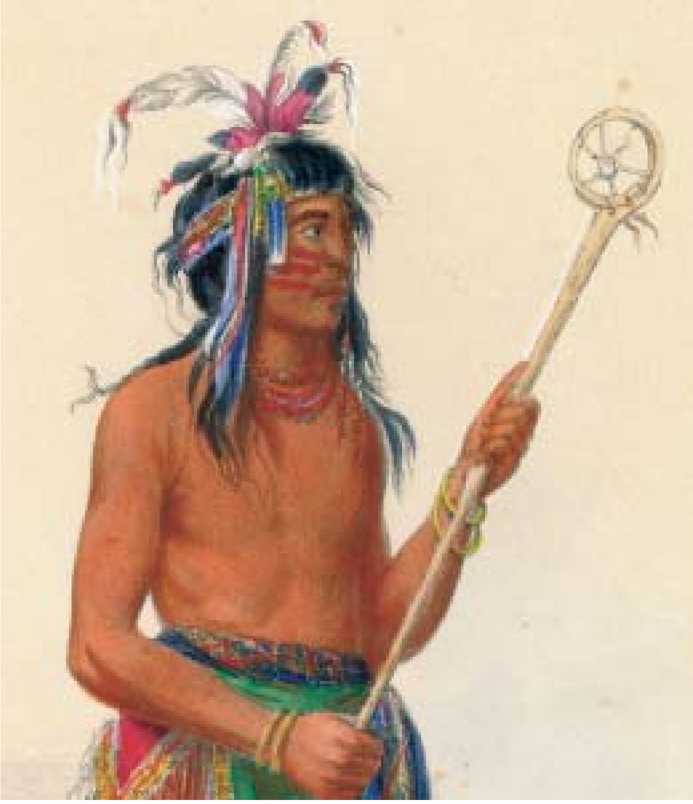
When the ethnologist Johann Kohl visited the Lake Superior Ojibwe in the summer of 1855 he saw entire villages playing against each other with hundreds of people in attendance.[4] The teams would often play from sunrise to sunset, with some matches occasionally lasting for weeks. Ethnomusicologist Thomas Vennum Jr.'s title for his study of the sport—*American Indian Lacrosse: Little Brother of War*—is particularly well chosen. Ojibwe lacrosse sticks closely resemble traditional war clubs, with baskets that are much smaller than those associated with tribes such as the Iroquois.[5] A chronicle from 1796 reveals a fierce competitiveness on the part of the Lake Superior inhabitants:

> *They [the Ojibwe] play with so much vehemence that they frequently wound each other, and sometimes a bone is broken; but notwithstanding these accidents there never appears to be any spite or wanton exertions of strength to affect them, nor do any disputes ever happen between the parties.*[6]

Compared to lacrosse, baseball must have seemed staid to the Ojibwe. Still, it was culturally consistent with the games with which they were familiar: it was a team sport, played outside, with a stick and a ball. One significant difference between baseball and the traditional games the Ojibwe played was the limited acceptance of female athletes. While Ojibwe women regularly participated in games like cha ha, organized baseball was not as inclusive. Although women's teams at Vassar College formed as early as 1876, teams of "Bloomer Girls" barnstormed the country in the early twentieth century, and World War II allowed for the formation of the now famed All-American Girls Professional Baseball League, team owners and officials of men's professional baseball resisted the idea of women playing alongside men.[7]

Some said the Ojibwe appreciated baseball more than other groups because they had to wait longer to play it. Spring arrived on the shores of Lake Superior much later than in other places. The winds howled and the snow fell often until the beginning of May. The annual field clearing ritual began in June, when the prairie grasses were already a few feet high. "It'd take us several days with side blades just to clear a field so we could play ball," Rose recounted. "And then we'd get shovels and get posts and put posts in there and put chicken wire in there for our backstop." Gunnysacks filled with sand served as bases.

For Edward DeNomie, who in interviews conduct-



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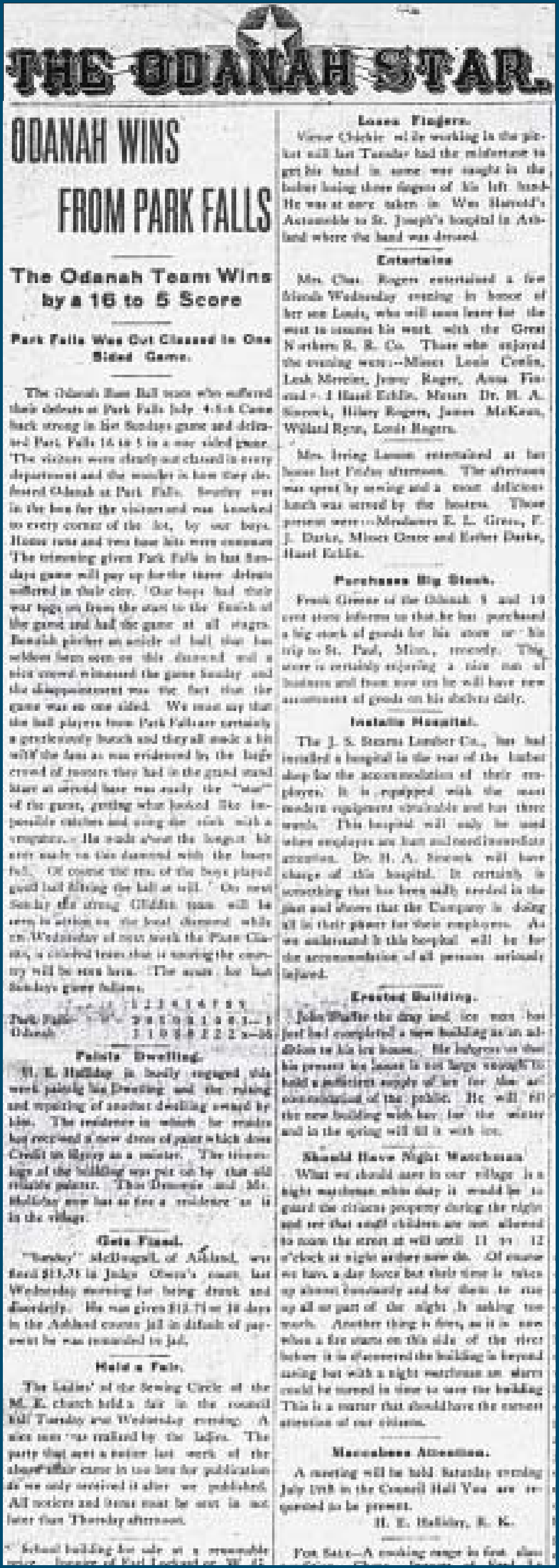
When drawing individual lacrosse players in traditional dress, George Catlin posed them holding the carefully fashioned racquets used to play the game. The beauty of the equipment indicated how much they valued the sport.


THE ODANAH STAR.

ODANAH WINS FROM PARK FALLS

The Odanah Team Wins by a 16 to 5 Score

Park Falls Was Out Classed in One Sided Game.

Loses Fingers.

Entertains

Purchases Big Stock.

Installs Hospital.

Erected Building.

Paints Dwelling.

Gets Fined.

Held a Fair.

Should Have Night Watchman

Maccabees Attention.

WHS Microfilm, P70-2918

Baseball was a hot topic in the July 18, 1913, issue of the Odanah Star *as the lead story told of the Odanah Braves' victory over Park Falls. Various forms of media including newspapers, radio, telegraph and the nascent motion picture industry helped spread baseball's popularity by publicizing feats of professional and amateur ball clubs.*

ed in 1979 and 1980 remembered playing baseball on the Keweenaw Bay Ojibwe Reservation in Michigan's Upper Peninsula, batting and fielding skills were secondary to the ability to scrounge equipment. Luckily, opportunity presented itself once a week when the reservation team hosted a team like the Baraga Lumber Company. "Yeah, we used to watch when the big teams played," DeNomie remembered. "When they broke their bats, we used to go and fight for 'em. If it was long enough, we'd saw it off and use it ourselves." Baseballs were also recycled. Reservation children eagerly claimed torn, discarded balls and took them home where their mothers would double fishing line and tightly sew the covers back in place. Really desperate sluggers might fashion their own spheres—using a walnut for the core, yarn for the middle wrap, and leather recycled from old boots for the cover.

A generation later, Ojibwe kids were still scrounging equipment. Joe Rose was bat boy for his reservation team, the Odanah Braves, in the late 1930s. Like DeNomie, Rose spent much of his summer recycling the team's broken bats. "Guys cracked 'em and we'd repair 'em, tape 'em up and we'd cut 'em a little shorter so us kids could use 'em." Ripped baseballs were stitched up "good as new." Gloves, because there were never enough to go around, were shared, and occasionally the Braves provided a second-hand glove or two for their young protégés. Baseball occupied nearly every waking moment until the school bells rang in the fall.

The Catholics who ran day and boarding schools on both DeNomie's and Rose's reservations considered baseball "a wholesome diversion from naughtier pursuits."[8] They believed it was a civilized sport—a game that kept young Indian men away from pool halls and other sinful activities. They encouraged it wholeheartedly, much as the urban business community promoted it among their workers in the city. At first, business owners feared that baseball would distract workers from their duties. However, they soon realized baseball was not only compatible with business, it was a *lot like* business. It reinforced a set of ideals that had risen with capitalism: division of labor, specialization, and production. Company-sponsored teams emerged and corporate America issued its "full-fledged acceptance of baseball as part of the industrial recreation programs of the Progressive Era."[9] Furthermore, it was "the thinking man's sport"—rational and scientific, very much in keeping with late nineteenth-century notions about progress.

By the turn of the century, improved communication and transportation networks had given the country a sense of national cohesiveness. Advances in telegraphy efficiently connected newspaper offices around the country. The incorporation of the Associated Press in 1900 and United Press International in 1907 provided editors with an ever increasing number of sports stories and baseball scores. Transportation was enjoying a similar boom with railroad expansion and the increased popularity of automobiles and street cars. Assembly lines provided a dizzying array of sports equipment and mass-produced baseball uniforms. On the Bad River Reservation, however, the resident tailor, George Cloud, made his team's uniforms one by one. "And they ordered a bunch of this pillow ticking that had the stripes on it," Joe Rose recalled. "And he made the uniforms for the whole team—even put the numbers on."

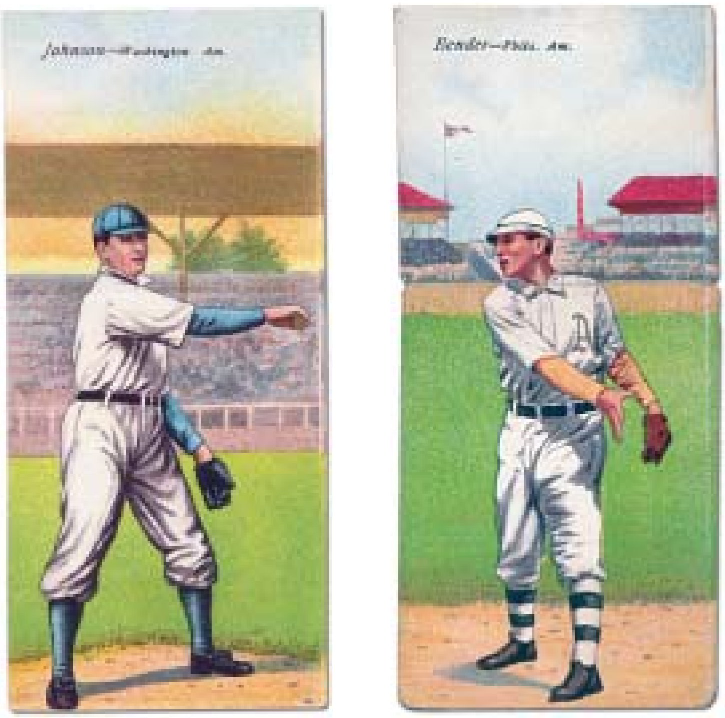
For the Ojibwe, there was a certain coherence about baseball, even without matching uniforms. They had always been a people who united in common purpose, but whose egalitarianism allowed for and celebrated individual feats of distinction and heroism. As warfare and subsistence hunting and fishing gave way to wage labor and day work, however, Ojibwe men found fewer and fewer opportunities to distinguish themselves. Furthermore, their lives increasingly were controlled by Indian agents and outsiders. On the baseball diamond, those who played controlled their own destiny. Like tribalism, baseball provided a unity of spirit, and for individual team members, a chance to shine.

On the Bad River Reservation, the *Odanah Star* existed to celebrate the exploits of the local heroes. During the summer of 1913 nearly every issue carried a front-page story about the reservation team, the Odanah Braves. The story "Gets Bad Drubbing" about the Braves' win against the "much tooted [*sic*] union club of Ashland" on June 20, was typical. "The fans were promised a good game and as far as the locals were concerned they played gilt edge ball from start to finish making only one error in the whole nine innings," the *Star* gushed, "and the boys were pleased to see the large attendance at the game and wish to thank the fans for their support." A week later, the *Star* found it difficult to be charitable toward Glidden, the visiting team, even though the Braves won. In an article titled simply "Odanah Reds," the paper sniffed that Glidden's first score came on a Braves' error and the second was equally unearned: "The ball was hit in the raspberry bushes on the edge of the diamond and was lost, giving Glidden its second score on a lost ball."

In addition to playing teams from neighboring communities such as Ashland, Washburn, and Bessemer, Michigan, the Braves also played against semi-professional teams from around the Midwest. In another front-page story that June 20, the *Odanah Star* reported that Braves manager, A.G. Starr, had gone to Milwaukee to line up games during the State Fair. "The Indians will be pitted against the best semi-professional ball teams obtaining [*sic*] during that week. Some time after the 4th of July the 'Red Skins' will be playing a three game series in Chicago Ill., on the White Sox's ground."

That Chicago series was one of the last ones "crack pitcher," Charles Boniosh, played with the Odanah Braves. The White Sox invited Boniosh to join its organization in Duluth—an honor savored by the entire community. "The boys hated to see 'Bonny' go," the *Star* reported on July 25, "but would not for a moment consider his remaining with a chance of that kind given him."

In July the Braves were scheduled to play nine games, including one against the "Pulo Colored team of French Lick, Ind." on July 23 and a series against an unnamed "colored team" from Chicago during the Indian Fall Fair in Odanah. The series, along with an "aeroplane ride" was intended to boost attendance.


Johnson—Washington Am.
Bender—Phila. Am.

PH 3503

Charles Bender was one of a handful of Indians who played professional baseball and left their mark on the game. Bender played for the Philadelphia Athletics for twelve seasons and invented a pitch called the "nickel curve," known today as the slider. He was routinely at his best in the big games and stands among the great players whose ranks included Washington Senators pitcher and baseball legend Walter Johnson.

The summer of 1913 was good to the Odanah Braves. Baseball was a needed diversion for the community that saw the ousting of its corrupt Indian agent, Samuel Campbell, with whom it had been in conflict for many years. The scandal that netted Campbell also threatened the "Octopus"—the Stearns Lumber Company, which was the company contracted by Campbell to harvest Ojibwe lumber and reap a questionable level of profit. No doubt the Ojibwe took some pride in pasting teams from such timber towns as Washburn, 37 to 2, and Ironwood, Michigan, 24 to 0. The Ojibwe may have been losing their timber to unscrupu-

Charles Bender, ready to pitch at Comiskey Park in 1913, his tenth year playing for the Philadelphia Athletics. The lean, six-foot, two-inch, 180-pound Bender won twenty-one games that year, the second and final time he would win over twenty games in a season.

Chicago Historical Society SDN-058734

Chicago Historical Society SDN-008088

Bender prepares to wind up for a pitch at Chicago's South Side Park in 1909. Baseball did not always provide a secure source of income in the early days, as Bender was once offered five dollars for a game but received only $3.20. The manager promised he would give Bender the remaining $1.80 "the next time I see you." Forty years later, after Bender related the story at a banquet, the "Chief" finally got a bag full of pennies and dimes totaling $1.80 .

lous whites, but they were winning on baseball diamonds across northern Wisconsin and Michigan.

Some of their timber might well have become bleacher sections, press boxes, and dugouts in the boom of major league ballpark construction. The boom began in 1909, fueled largely by the increasing popularity of the American League and optimism about the upstart Federal League. Some of the new stadiums accommodated thirty thousand spectators. By 1910 an estimated ten million people were going to major league games annually.

This popularity surely was tied to baseball's increasing exposure. "Even the fledgling motion picture industry got into the act," according to sports historian Paul Adomites, "paying baseball $500 in 1910 for the rights to film and show the World Series."[10] The next year it paid $3,500. By 1913 each major league team was receiving more than $17,000 a year from Western Union for the telegraph rights. The deal provided newspapers like the *Star* with stories tailor-made for a Ojibwe audience. One of their own figured prominently in the 1913 World Series. "Chief Bender pitched the entire game for the [Philadelphia] Athletics, and while the redskin failed to show his marvelous delivery of former world series, he nevertheless was in great condition," the dispatch read. "During the game he struck out three of the [New York] Giants, while the Giant pitchers were able to secure only one scalp each from the Philadelphians."[11]

There is no evidence that Charles Albert Bender used a lacrosse stick to polish his fast ball, but it is clear that the pitching ace from the White Earth Reservation in Minnesota did not need one. In the early decades of the twentieth century, Bender had one of the most formidable fast balls in major league baseball, winning American League pitching honors in 1910, 1911, and 1914.[12] He is credited with inventing the slider, and he was 6–4 in five World Series. He also has the dubious distinction of facing twenty-seven consecutive batters in nine innings, none of whom had a hit, yet *not* pitching a perfect game. He could have been remembered for any one of those achievements. Instead, "Chief" Bender is remembered mostly for being an Indian.

Baseball writers found his Ojibwe background exotic. One described him as sporting "the characteristic bronzed features of the classic early American," while sports writers in general clearly enjoyed the imagery and promoted the stereotype. "Bender, the much feared brave from the Carlisle reservation," one wrote, "sought to repeat his scalping bee of Tuesday." Press accounts of the day usually referred to him as a "full-blooded Indian," even though his father, Albertus Bliss Bender, was a German homesteader. His mother, Pay shaw de o quay, was a member of the White Earth Band of Ojibwe. She and Albertus raised their thirteen children, including Charles Albert, in Crow Wing County, Minnesota.[13]

In 1890 at the age of seven, Bender left his reservation to pitch hay as a farm hand. Ironically, eleven years later he would be "discovered" by semi-professional baseball scouts pitching hay again—this time during an outing from the Carlisle Indian School in Pennsylvania. Bender was working for a white family when he was recruited by the Dillsburg, Pennsylvania, community team. In his first game, Bender "struck out 21 batters, hit a home run with the bases loaded—but lost the game." His next semi-professional stop was in Harrisburg, where, playing under the name Charles Albert, he distinguished himself as a hurler for the local athletic club by beating the Chicago Cubs three to one in an exhibition game. The legendary manager, Connie Mack, was in the stands that day and offered the "Chief" $1,800 to play for the Philadelphia Athletics.[14]

What heredity could not provide to the Ojibwe right-hander—namely a chieftainship—Philadelphia fans obligingly bestowed. It was an appellation all Indian ball players lived with until the 1950s. Along with "Chief" Bender, there was "Chief" Meyers, the brilliant catcher for the New York Giants, and "Chief" Sockelexis for whom the Cleveland Indians were named.[15]

The baseball diamond was one of the few places Indian "chiefs" were, if not welcomed, then tolerated. However, they were expected to put up with verbal abuse that went far beyond the usual dugout chatter. Bender often responded to derisive chants and war whoops from fans by doffing his cap and sarcastically calling them "foreigners." During a New York Highlander game in 1903, Bender nearly cracked under a barrage of racial insults from Highlander pitcher-manager Clark Griffith. It was only after Bender threatened Griffith with physical violence that the New Yorker agreed to hold his tongue. Bender never talked publicly about his sobriquet, but there are indications that he may have been uncomfortable with it. For example, he never signed his autographs "Chief," but instead used his real name, "Charles Albert."

Cumberland County Historical Society

Girls baseball team of Camp Sells, Pennsylvania, 1913. Camp Sells was a summer camp associated with the Carlisle School, which counted among its attendees the likes of Odanah Braves star Charles Boniosh and Charles Bender.

Indians were not the only players of color who were signing autographs in the major leagues. In 1911, the same year Bender led his team to another World Series championship, the Cincinnati Reds signed two Cuban players—Rafael Almeida and Armando Marsans. By the end of the decade, three more Cubans and a Canary Islander were playing in the big leagues. Ethnic minorities, including Jews, were also finding success on the diamond, although quite a few found it easier to change their names to ones that reflected WASPish origins. One historian pointed out that at least seven Cohens had disguised themselves to avoid discrimination.[16]

Students of baseball history know that baseball owners went to extraordinary measures to exclude African-Americans. Less well known, however, is that baseball managers sometimes tried to present, or "pass," black players as Indians. In 1901, for example, Baltimore Orioles manager John McGraw signed Charlie Grant, a second-baseman for the Columbia Giants, a Chicago Negro team. "On this map there's a creek called Tokohama," McGraw told Grant. "That's going to be your name from now on, Charlie Tokohama, and you're a full-blooded Cherokee."[17] Grant, however, never got the opportunity to play—mostly because of attitudes like the one expressed by Chicago White Sox owner Charles Comiskey:

Philadelphia Athletics manager Connie Mack, seated in the visitors' dugout of Comiskey Park in 1913, was Bender's manager from 1903 until 1914 when Bender left to play for the Federal League. Connie Mack, whose given name was Cornelius McGillicuddy, never referred to Bender by the nickname "Chief," instead calling him by his middle name, Albert.

Chicago Historical Society SDN-058624

> *I'm not going to stand for McGraw ringing in an Indian on the Baltimore team. If Muggsy really keeps this Indian, I will get a Chinaman of my acquaintance and put him on third. Somebody told me that the Cherokee of McGraw's is really Grant, the crack Negro second baseman from Cincinnati, fixed up with war paint and a bunch of feathers.*[18]

Comiskey's "Chinamen" were also personae non grata in the major leagues. In 1915 the Pacific Coast league turned away two Asian-American ball players because of the objections of fans and other players. Hispanics presented a special challenge to racial purists, who relied more on outward appearance than ethnic origin. Light-skinned Cubans and other Hispanics were invited to the majors, while dark-skinned Latinos were ushered to the Negro leagues, which was itself not immune to race blurring. One of the earliest Negro teams, for example, was called the Cuban Giants.

The ironies and inconsistencies of major league baseball's misguided race-based policies were obvious. Less chronicled, however, were the opportunities for Indians who were able to play the game at the highest level. Professional baseball was an important means by which they could improve their social status. Charles Guyon, an Ojibwe from the White Earth reservation parlayed his professional baseball career in the P.O.M. (Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Maryland) League into a job with the Spaulding Sporting Goods Company as branch manager of its Atlanta, Georgia office.[19] Other Chippewa, including Bender, found prominence as coaches and scouts in baseball's professional and college ranks.

Major league baseball may have offered Indians the opportunity to assimilate, but it also promoted ethnic pride and pan-Indianism. When teams played away games, fans often gathered outside newspapers offices to watch the game on telegraph boards. "In October 1913," Harold Seymour wrote, "a band of Indians in blankets traveled 150 miles to join a crowd watching the progress of one of the Series games on a scoreboard because Bender was pitching—a clear-cut case of identification." (If newspaper offices lacked such telegraph boards, they sometimes hired a man to monitor the telegraph and shout play-by-plays through a megaphone to the crowd.) Indians of all nations, it seemed, enjoyed Bender's success and basked in his achievements.[20]

It could be argued that sports—especially baseball—also contributed to the American Indian persona. Jim Thorpe's legendary performance at the 1912 Olympics in Stockholm and his brilliant professional football career did much to stereotype *all* Indian men as highly skilled athletes. The ties that bound Charles Albert Bender to baseball were racially coded. In every sports story and biographical sketch, and on every baseball card, he was (and still is) referred to first and foremost as an Indian.[21] Baseball writers, so fascinated with his Indian ancestry, however, appeared to be oblivious to one of the great ironies of the 1890s. No one seemed to find it ironic that Bender began his semi-professional career a year after the Wounded Knee Massacre. The dawn of baseball's golden age for Indians followed one of the darkest moments in the American Indian experience.

The "Chief's" brilliant career with the Athletics lasted twelve years from 1903 until 1914. A year later he moved to Baltimore to play in the upstart Federal League before returning to Philadelphia to play with the National League Phillies during the 1916–17 seasons. As a coach for the Chicago White Sox, he pitched one inning of relief in 1925.

Along the way to becoming "one of the greatest pitchers of the era of great pitchers,"[22] Bender won a total of 212 games and lost 127, dueling the likes of Cy Young, Walter Johnson, and Christy Matthewson. He faced down such immortals as Babe Ruth and Ty Cobb, who called him the "brainiest" pitcher he had ever faced. Frustrated batters agreed that Bender's best pitch—his "nickel curve," as it was called then,—"came in fast and dropped." Later writers and players would dub it the "slider," a pitch Bender invented and taught to succeeding generations of moundsmen. That pitch helped him to become the first hurler in the history of the sport to win six World Series games. Altogether he appeared in five World Series classics, winning one game in each of the 1905 and 1910 contests and two games in the 1911 and 1913 series. "If everything depended on one game," Mack once said, "I just used Albert." He always called the "Chief" by his middle name.[23]

Chicago Historical Society SDN-057463

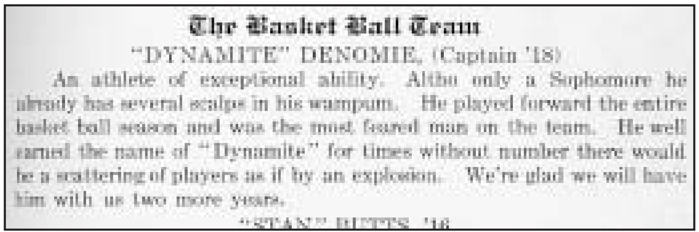
Bender, at right, and John Meyers, both of whom were fitted with the nickname "Chief" due to their Indian ancestry, played against each other during the 1911 World Series. Bender won two games of the series and his Athletics squad came out on top, winning the series four games to two. Another "Chief," Louis Sockelexis, a Penobscot, is generally regarded as the first Indian to play major league baseball. Sockelexis played for the Cleveland Spiders from 1897 to 1899. Although hometown spectators often hurled racial taunts at Sockelexis, after his death fans voted to rename the club "Indians" in honor of their star outfielder.

Bender's greatest game—and his only no-hitter—occurred on May 12, 1910, at Shibe Field in Philadelphia. One by one Bender retired the Cleveland players. Only a walk to Terry Turner in the fourth inning marred an otherwise flawless performance. Two pitches later, catcher Ira Thomas called for a pitchout and was able to pick off Turner as he tried to steal second base. Thus, Bender faced twenty-seven batters in nine innings for what might have been—but for a walk—a perfect game. Baseball historians have called Bender's 4–0 victory one of the greatest no-hitters in the annals of the sport.

If sports had brought national prominence to the likes of Bender and Thorpe, it had been a ticket out of poverty for Edward DeNomie, growing up Keweenaw Bay. In 1910 DeNomie graduated from the mission school run by Catholic nuns and asked his parents to send him to the government boarding school in Wisconsin at Tomah. "I wanted to leave because I realized there was nothing there, no place for me to go," he later commented.[24] DeNomie played football and basketball while completing four grades in two years at the Tomah Indian School. During that time he caught the eye of the principal of the public high school in town. The two teams regularly played against each other and the Indians "used to pummel 'em," as DeNomie put it. After they graduated from the Indian school, DeNomie, a forward, and George Wolf, a center, offered to play basketball for the public school in exchange for a tuition waiver. (As non-residents of the school district, they would have been required to pay for their education.) The principal agreed, much to the disappointment of his twin brother who was principal at the rival school in Sparta. "We fixed 'em up good," DeNomie recalled. The second year, however, the principal gave the two young men bad news: "I think, Ed, you'll have to pay tuition." And I said, "Mr. Bray, I says, I can't do that. I have no way to make money," DeNomie said. "If that's the case, I says, I'll have to go to Sparta." From that day on there was no more talk of tuition and "Dynamite DeNomie" remained at Tomah along with Wolf, earning his explosive nickname by winning on the court and on the baseball field.

It may seem odd that leaders in industry and the reformers who followed in their wake would meet on that same field, both championing baseball for Indian men in the early twentieth century. Reformers saw the sport as a means to socialize their charges to the vicissitudes of life in the twentieth century. Industrial capitalism required "team" players and, in order to be successful, depended upon specialization, division of labor, and production—ideals associated with baseball. If Indians wished to become more "civilized," baseball could help get them there. The game, however, was not the tool of assimilation they intended it to be.

Baseball promoted heroes, like Bender, by identifying him first and foremost as an Indian, thus negating the larger message of assimilation. Indeed the level of racism that Bender and other Indian players had to tolerate was a version of the country's continuing racial divide. Although major league owners welcomed Indians, light-skinned Hispanics, Jews, and immigrants, they excluded Blacks, dark-skinned Hispanics, and Asian-Americans. At a time when rapid advances in technology and communications helped to unite the country geographically, the national sport they spawned would be decades away from racial integration.


The Basket Ball Team

"DYNAMITE" DENOMIE, (Captain '18)

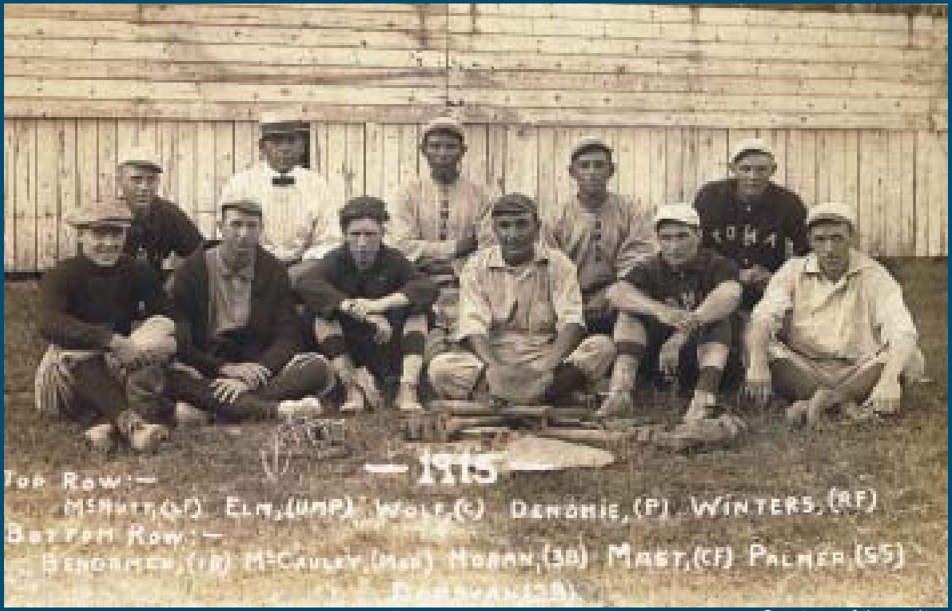
An athlete of exceptional ability. Altho only a Sophomore he already has several scalps in his wampum. He played forward the entire basket ball season and was the most feared man on the team. He well earned the name of "Dynamite" for times without number there would be a scattering of players as if by an explosion. We're glad we will have him with us two more years.

"STAN" BUTTS '16

Courtesy of the author

"Dynamite" DeNomie received recognition in the pages of the 1916 Tomah annual for his explosive skill on the basketball court.

Before that turmoil of a later generation, however, the success of tribal members who played professional sports helped spread pan-Indianism. Indians of all nations enjoyed the accomplishments of their "chiefs" on reservation teams and in the major leagues. With their rich tradition of ball sports, including cha ha and lacrosse, the Ojibwe embraced baseball with a passion. Youngsters played pick-up games on diamonds cleared with their own hands; young men and occasionally even women played it in organized clubs on the reservations; and some, like "Chief" Bender, played it at the highest level. By making it to "the show," the majors, Charles Albert Bender fulfilled an American dream, and other Ojibwe players, at whatever level of professional athletic success, lived a part of that dream as well.


—1915—
Top Row:—
McNutt,(LF) Elm,(Ump) Wolf,(C) Denomie,(P) Winters,(RF)
Bottom Row:—
McCauley,(Mgr) Moran,(3B) Mast,(CF) Palmer,(SS)

Courtesy of the author

In 1915 Edward DeNomie honed his athletic skills on Tomah's school baseball team. DeNomie, the pitcher, is shown here in the back row, second from right.

Courtesy of the author

Like other Lake Superior Ojibwe, DeNomie discovered an opportunity to advance his education by competing in sports such as baseball and basketball for the local school district. DeNomie attended the public high school at Tomah, pictured here in 1915.

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John Meyers, pictured here talking to a boy in the dugout in 1909, was another notable Indian who played major league ball during Bender's era. Meyers played catcher for the New York Giants from 1909 to 1915.

Notes

[1] *The Guinness Book of Records* (Sterling: New York, 1990) p.335.

[2] William Nelson, "Homelife," *Carlisle Arrow,* January 3, 1908, p. 4.

[3] C. Wissler, *The American Indian* 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1922), from Joseph B. Oxendine's *American Indian Sports Heritage* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1988), p. 37.

[4] Johann Georg Kohl, *Kitchi-gami* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1985), p. 89. It was originally printed in 1860 by Chapman and Hall, London.

[5] Thomas Vennum Jr., *American Indian Lacrosse: Little Brother of War,* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994), p.xiii.

[6] J. Carver, *Travels through the Interior Parts of North America,* original work published in 1796, quoted in Oxendine, p. 47.

[7] Amy Ellis Nutt, "Swinging for the Fences" in *Nike is a Goddess,* ed. Lissa Smith (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1988).

[8] Harold Seymour, *Baseball: The People's Game* (New York: Oxford University Press), p. 63.

[9] Steven M. Gelber, "Their Hands Are All Out Playing: Business and Amateur Baseball, 1845–1917," *Journal of Sports History* 11, no. 1 (Spring, 1984), p. 6.

[10] Paul D. Adomites, "Baseball on the Air," from *Total Baseball,* eds. John Thorn and Peter Palmer (New York: Warner Books, 1989), p. 671.

[11] "Giants Humbled by Athletics," *Odanah Star,* October 10, 1913, p. 4.

[12] "Chief" Bender Plaque at the National Baseball Hall of Fame, Cooperstown, New York.

[13] Baseball Padre, *The Mackmen: Reflections on a Baseball Team* (Upper Darby, PA: Mackmen, 1979), p. 18; Earl Scenic Miers, edited introduction, with drawings by Nicholas Solovioff, America At Ease (Philadelphia: Spiral Press for the Curtis Paper Company, 1962), p. 31.

[14] "A Long-Delayed Feather for the Chief" by J. G. Taylor Spink, *The Sporting News,* December 30, 1953, p. 4.

[15] John Bowman and Joel Zoss, *Diamonds in the Rough* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1989), p. 127.

[16] Ibid., p. 123.

[17] Robert Peterson, *Only the Ball Was White* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall Inc., 1970), p. 54.

[18] Ibid., p. 56.

[19] "Baseball," by Joe Twin, *Carlisle Arrow,* May 14, 1907, p. 1.

[20] Seymour, p. 82.

[21] Library of Congress, "American Memory: Historical Collections for the National Digital Library," Baseball Cards, 1887–1914, http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/bbhtml/bbhome.html (accessed December 3, 2003).

[22] Marion E. Gridley, *Indians of Today* (Chicago: Sponsored by the Indian Council Fire), p.15.

[23] "Chief Bender, Hall of Fame Pitcher, Dies," *New York Herald Tribune,* May 24, 1954, p. 18.

[24] DeNomie interview, 1979.

About the Author

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