

BASE RUNNING, THE LOST ART IN BASEBALL

Ned Hanlon and John Montgomery Ward Think Ball Players of To-Day Have More Speed on the Bases Than in the Days of Old—The Funniest Stolen Base on Record



John M. Ward

Quite hidden from observation in one corner of the grandstand of one of the most prominent baseball grounds in the National league sat "Ned" Hanlon and John Montgomery Ward one afternoon. It doesn't matter much which stand, or which grounds it happened to be, for these old baseball generals were out on a little baseball last night.

They had slipped quietly through the turnstile and had run away from all of their friends. They chose the most inconspicuous seats that they could find, and there they sat and revelled in the game of which they were such wonderful exponents and for which they retain such fond recollections.

Waited Too Long

Another player attempted to steal second and was thrown out by 10 feet. Hanlon flayed the player without mercy. "I'm tempted to agree with you, John," he remarked, turning to Ward. "Did you see what that fellow was trying to do? He had his eye on the pitcher for a moment to be sure that he pitched the ball, but he waited too long. He should have gone five feet. If he had been studying the man carefully he could have stolen the base by almost the distance by which he was thrown out. That pitcher had a motion which would have been good for three strides to a ball player like 'Mike' Kelly, yet the runner held back, waiting until he saw the ball go, when he could have been under way and almost at top speed. The pitcher wouldn't have dared to turn back to throw to first base because it would have been a balk without doubt."

"I'd like to get a ball team of my own again," said Ward, "and see if I couldn't teach the players a little something about base stealing which would help win a game or two for us."

"It's hard to get some of them to think," added Hanlon. "I've been in baseball since you have, and if I could get a team of fielders, infielders and outfielders of average speed as runners who would use the gray matter in their heads as well as they use their legs and arms, I'd put together a championship team that would beat anything that I've seen since the Giants of 1889, and I'm making mention of the Giants of 1889 because you were one of them, and they did use their brains. I believe that you licked us good."

are trying to steal bases or to make extra bases in a ball game, travel between 25 and 32 feet per second. Twenty-eight is possibly the maximum. Of course, the slower runners can not begin to go at that speed.

The Runner's Chance

Suppose that a base runner is about to steal second base from first. What is the problem in time and chance which confronts him? If he is only a fair base runner, so far as intelligence is concerned, although very fast in natural speed, let us suppose that he has a lead of five feet from first when the pitcher delivers the ball. That will cut the distance to be traveled by him from 90 feet to 85 feet. If he runs at the rate of 35 feet per second, which is a good average, he will accomplish the 85 feet in 2.43 seconds.

John Montgomery Ward who was talking above—Griffin of Brooklyn 75, and so on down the list. "Tom" Brown of the American association gathered 119 and Duffy of the Boston club was second with 83.

Ty Cobb, Base Runner

The best base runner of 1911 was "Ty" Cobb, who stole 82 bases for the Detroit club, and the second best was Bescher of the Cincinnati club of the National league, who stole 80 bases, and both were thought to have accomplished something out of the ordinary.

The best base runner who ever lived was Harry Stovey of the Athletics, who stole 146 bases in 1883. Every one of them was bona fide. There were no padded figures, no favoritism shown for he had to make the round of the circuit to obtain his record. He simply stole bases because he was a master hand at studying the different pitchers whom he met from day to day, a wonderfully fast runner, in his stride in one or two steps, and a splendid runner after he had started. And now he is a policeman, preventing larceny wherever he can, though with less speed in his legs than he had in the days when Philadelphia showed him with gifts and flattering applause.

What is there in the absence of base running, or the inability to run bases well, which induces students of baseball, men of brains like Ward and Hanlon, to decant upon the subject in a vein of pessimism? This is the answer: Aside from the artistic value of base running, which is considered to be one of the most attractive phases of the sport, the ability to run bases well and intelligently means results.

In any close and hard fought game, where all other things are equal, the odds are five to four that the better base running team will win. For five years records have been kept and compiled by the writer in a standard manner. How to school a man to make properly 25 feet a second while the ball is advancing toward him by a roundabout process at the rate of a little more than 37 feet a second, after having passed through a complex handling in which both the pitcher and the catcher participated.

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that Stovey would try for second on the first opportunity.

Playing back and forth, always far enough to take quick advantage of the pitcher if there was an opportunity, but seldom so far that he could not recover himself if the pitcher undertook to catch him napping. Stovey never took his attention from the man in the box. Base runners nowadays devote some of their time trying to lo-

hands, but study closely the body. When you see it assume a certain position the pitcher must either send the ball up to the batter or make a balk, and it doesn't make a bit of difference to you because you are going to get second base in either event."

It was away back in the days of the old American association when he made that statement, and there seem to be no runners who have improved on him since then and there are few who can do approximately as well.

Pitchers Not Faster

In the same class as Stovey were "Buck" Ewing and "Mike" Kelly. Neither of them was a sprinter, and both were of the highest type of base runners because they studied the pitcher and based their work on their ability to get a start. They were willing to take a chance that they could beat the ball at the odds between them and the catcher if they could get into their stride in time.

What is the trouble with the "latter day runner," conceded to be faster than the old fellows, yet so feeble by comparison in their records? Is it that the pitchers are better and that they watch the bases more carefully than they did in the past?

No. The pitchers of today are not a bit better in guarding their positions

Pitcher Fielding a Bunt and Beating Runner to First

Meanwhile, the pitcher must throw the ball to the plate, and to a distance at least five feet behind the plate, when the catcher stands. That is 65.5 feet. The catcher must go through the process of catching the ball, and must return it to the second baseman, or shortstop, whichever covers the base, a distance of 124.13 feet plus five feet, the point from which he caught the ball behind the bat, a total in all of 194.63 feet. The total distance traveled by the ball from the time that it left the pitcher to the catcher and then to the second baseman is 194.63 feet. If the ball travels at the rate of the base runner who is trying to beat it, for every second in which the runner covers 25 feet the ball will be going 57.24 feet. If the ball is to beat the base runner, it is obvious of course that its speed must be increased sufficiently to make its carrying power a trifle better, for the worst accident which can happen to the base runner will be to fall down. All other things being equal he will be sure to make the base unless the ball gets there in advance of him.

So there is the problem in base running. How to school a man to make properly 25 feet a second while the ball is advancing toward him by a roundabout process at the rate of a little more than 37 feet a second, after having passed through a complex handling in which both the pitcher and the catcher participated.

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If there be such a difference in the ability of ball players as there is purported to be there must be a reason. Lobert of the Philadelphia club went around the bases as fast as "Billy" Sunday, yet Sunday was one of the "ghosts of the diamond" when he preferred the bat to the pulpit. He was not the champion base runner of his day. There were men heavier and slower who could steal more bases away from the pitcher than he.

ter. Stealing third base on a left hand pitcher was his greatest delight and he would straighten up convulsed with laughter whenever he succeeded.

Once the question was asked of Stovey how it was that he read so well the intention of the pitcher to deliver the ball to the batter. "It's in the movement of the body," said he. "I can't tell you just how I know myself, but there is not a pitcher but will show his intent to let the ball go to the batter by the swing of his body. Never mind the arm. They're likely to fool you with that. Pay no attention to the

first man received a base on balls. The next player was retired. With two strikes on the third batter the man on first, who was one of the best runners in the club, and one of the best in the league, assayed to steal second. The pitcher felt that he would try, and so did the catcher. A perfect throw was made to catch him, but for the reason that he had observed the pitcher so carefully that he was able to obtain a flying start, he reached second in safety. The batter was out. With two out and a player on second, the next batter hit for base and the man who had stolen second scored a run and won for the home team by one to nothing. But that was the kind of a game in which Charley Comiskey would say that the winning team won by 90 feet and not by one run. That is his method of characterizing good work on the bases. Many such games arise throughout a league season. Not all one to nothing scores, by any means, but games in which the base running play is the play that wins and not the base hit, for without the stolen base the base hit would have been worthless in that particular contest of one to nothing.



Caught Between Third and Home

John J. McGraw is another. The latter has succeeded in developing more base running ability than any manager for 25 years, but he admits candidly that he had the speed with which to begin.

Mack says that he has tried to get all of the speed that he could and has found some, but remarked last autumn after the world's series was over that if baseball, as it is played now, suffered by comparison with that which was played when he stood behind the bat for the Washington club, and for the Pittsburgh club, it seemed to him as if it were in the matter of base running.

"I don't know why it is," said he, "but the ball players of our day appear to lack the intuition of those who played 25 years ago. Sometimes I am inclined to believe that it is partly the fault of the managers. You see, we have such a well regulated and well enforced system of discipline that the players get in the habit of depending too much upon the manager. They don't think enough for themselves. Some of them burst out with thoughts now and then when you wish they hadn't, but as voluntary thinkers and as voluntary students of baseball they are passive. Men of the old days were compelled to do their own thinking if they wished to succeed, and clever men like Ewing, Kelly, Ward, Tebeau, Comiskey and others, who graduated into the managerial class, found that it paid them to think for themselves. Their reader wits brought them more money."

If base running is so desirable, what is its actual value in a game?

Value of Base Running

There is the gist of all of the argument and the computation of odds which has preceded. An instance will be cited, in which the value of base running will be illustrated, and an instance of that character right in the season win a championship, and with it the privilege to play for gate receipts of thousands of dollars, in which the team with the clever base runner would be a principal beneficiary.

The score was nothing to nothing between two of the principal teams of the National league, and they were about to begin their ninth inning. The first half of the ninth was played, and a poor base runner was sent as a last resort to second to try to make the base. Had he done so he might have scored, for a base hit followed. His side was out without a run.

The home team came to bat. The



Second and First Basemen Trap a Runner Who Is Trying to Steal on the Pitcher. The Ball Is in the Air Between the Base-

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Stovey Great Base Stealer

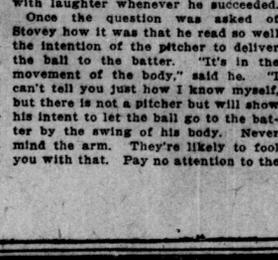
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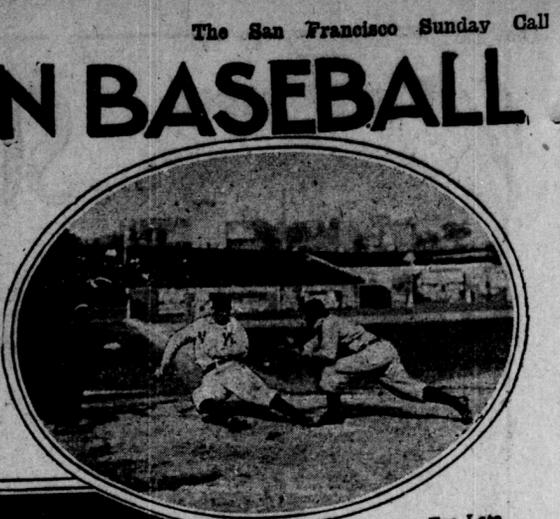
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The funniest stolen base on record, eliminating those which "Mike" Kelly was accustomed to "cut" every now and then when he ran from first to third across the diamond, if the umpire's back happened to be turned, took place on the Cleveland club when McGarr was Cleveland's third baseman.

McGarr was an excitable player, tremendously eager to succeed, for fortune had not always been kind to him. He attempted to steal third in a very close game in Cleveland. The catcher made an overthrow.

As McGarr slid into the base it tore loose from its moorings. Instead of picking himself up and running for home, as the coach advised him to do, McGarr remained prostrate on the ground, making motions like a man swimming. At first the crowd roared in maddened excitement, for the run meant the game. Then the spectators doubled up with laughter at the contortions of the player, but they couldn't imagine what ailed him. Tebeau, manager of the Cleveland club, rushed in and grabbed McGarr, and half lifted him to his feet and started him for the plate. Then it was seen that as the runner had hit the base, and it had torn loose, he had also torn the front of his blouse and the sawdust bag was half inside his uniform. He was trying to get rid of it when he went swimming on the diamond. The bag season win a championship, and with it the privilege to play for gate receipts of thousands of dollars, in which the team with the clever base runner would be a principal beneficiary.

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