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# Major League Baseball at 150

For the first game, on April 22, 1876, the Boston Red Stockings visited Philadelphia.

By **Randy Maniloff**

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On April 22, 1876, the Boston Red Stockings defeated the Philadelphia Athletics 6-5. It was the first contest of the newly created National League and stands as Major League Baseball's inaugural game.

Several newspapers covered the occasion, leaving a historical record that John Thorn, MLB's official historian, used to piece together a play-by-play published along with some sights and sounds of the day.

More than 3,000 people were in attendance at the Jefferson Street Grounds, in Philadelphia's northern section, on a late Saturday afternoon. The Philadelphia Inquirer reported that "betting was about even." An opportunistic theater troupe handed out 3,000 score sheets.

The ballgame was tied 4-4 headed into the ninth inning. With runners on first and third, Boston right fielder Jack Manning hit a ball that Athletics second baseman Bill Fouser couldn't handle. The ball went into the outfield and two runs scored.

The Athletics got one back in the bottom of the inning and had two men on base with two outs. But MLB's first game wouldn't end in a walk-off. Third baseman Ezra Sutton hit a dribbler to pitcher Joe Borden, who threw to first base for the out. The home team didn't win. It was a shame.

The game is an embarrassment of riches for trivia buffs. Borden is the league's first winning pitcher. The leadoff hitter for the Red Stockings, shortstop George Wright, is MLB's first player. Wright would later be inducted into the National Baseball Hall of Fame.

Another future Hall of Famer, Boston center fielder Jim O'Rourke, made the league's first hit, a single in the top of the first. Nicknamed "Orator Jim" for his propensity for lengthy comments, O'Rourke would go on to earn a law degree from Yale University and practice law in Connecticut.

The lone umpire in Philadelphia that day was Billy McLean, a former boxer who Mr. Thorn has written "had no trouble standing up to players in a dignified fashion." According to the historian, "so great was McLean's judgment, temperament, and fair-mindedness" that National League officials agreed to his demand to be paid \$5 a game—unheard of at the time.

Today the site of this celebrated game is the city-owned Athletic Recreation Center, named for the team that long ago called its fields home. Inside the building, a life-size painting depicting Wes Fislser, the Athletics' first baseman that day, commemorates the event. The Athletics didn't make it to the 1877 season, but the Red Stockings are now known as the Atlanta Braves.

The sesquicentennial of MLB's first game comes on the heels of several rule changes designed to address the sport's glacial pace. MLB's first outing was in the books in just two hours and five minutes. Surely there were no complaints that it took too long.

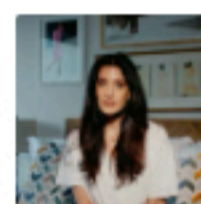
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