

What was the use of "the national game" to El Paso Boosters?

Baseball in Early El Paso, 1881 to 1905

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Introduction

From the 1881 arrival of rail connections onward, El Paso's boosters worked to promote and make a "clean" name for the booming city, uncharitably known as a "Border Monte Carlo." This project analyzes baseball as a part of this story since, as the sport expanded, it mirrored the city. The El Paso Browns and the El Paso Base Ball Association, which backed them, consisted of El Paso elites. How did they use baseball? Was it all just for fun?

Important Figures

Juan Siqueiros Hart: Borderlands Aristocrat, Times Editor, Engineer, 2nd Baseman, and Captain

Reporting on a baseball battle in Albuquerque: "The long agony is over. We have met the enemy and—we are their'n." (1885)

Charles F. "Give-a-Dam" Jones: Carpenter, Politician(?), and Manager

On an "overcharge" in dog tax: "Such games may be worked on the representatives of the Effete East, but not on the denizens of the Woolly West." (1896)

Waters Davis: Lawyer, Politician, and 1st Baseman

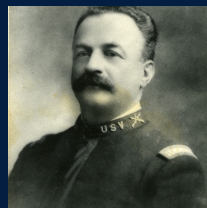
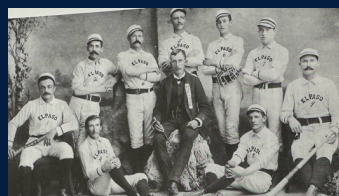
On gambling in El Paso: "Bury or cremate? Do both!" (1903)

Research

Rex Strickland, Conrey Bryson, and John Middagh Papers at C.L. Sonnichsen Special Collections Department. The University of Texas at El Paso Library.

Newspapers: *El Paso Times*, *El Paso Herald*

Highlighted secondary accounts: Bryson, *Down Went McGinty* (1977) Ingram, *Browns to Diablos* (1991); Middagh, *Frontier Newspaper* (1958); Sonnichsen, *Pass of the North* (1968);



"We, the undersigned members of the El Paso Base Ball Club, in justice to the citizens of El Paso and the city which we represented at Santa Fe, hereby unqualifiedly deny, by subscribing our names hereto, that any member of the El Paso Base Ball Club was under the influence or in the least affected by liquor at either of the games played, or while in the city of Santa Fe."

"Waters Davis, Henry Beneke Jr., J. M. Kelly, Thomas Rose, E. F. Holliday, C.F. Jones, E. D. Howly, Geo. G. Cook, Geo. A. Speck, umpire, Juan S. Hart, J. F. Spencer." (El Paso Times, September 20, 1887)

OUR NATIONAL GAME.

Its Patrons in El Paso will Place a Nine in the Field at Once.

After the heat of June and July, and the plentiful and refreshing rains of August and September, the very favorable conditions of temperature and ground seem to have stirred up a very lively interest in out-door sports among the wide-awake and active element of our young city.

N. B. [1] Merchants subscribing will be entitled to 25 feet of inside surface of fence (for advertising) for every ten dollars paid.

[2] An annual pass for self or, if preferred, for all minor members of family will be given to each subscriber in the sum of \$25.

A. B. Hodge	25 00
Juan S. Hart	25 00
W. H. Tuttle	25 00
State National Bank	25 00
Charles Merrick	25 00
First National Bank	25 00
El Paso National Bank	25 00
El Paso Water company	25 00
Waters Davis	25 00
The Bacchus	25 00
Lightbody & James	25 00
Charles Davis	25 00
S. J. Freudenthal	12 50
E. B. Hawley	10 00
Will J. Fewel	10 00
Phil Smith	10 00
Berla & Co.	10 00
E. C. Pew	10 00
E. V. Berrien	10 00
Times Publishing company	10 00
Mexican Ore company	10 00
E. C. Roberts	5 00
A. A. Kline	5 00
Cash	5 00
Si Ryan	5 00
F. H. Moore	2 00
J. R. Easburn	2 00
Total	\$421 50

COME IN, NEW MEXICO.

EL PASO DON'T NEED YOU—YOU CAN COME ALL THE SAME.

A Chance to Calculate Where the Science of Base Ball Can be Best Applied.

FATS VS. LEANS.

Sunday, September 20,

BENEFIT OF

MANAGER C. F. JONES.

SIoux HAVE THE STUFF IN THEM

INDIANS WALK AWAY WITH THE BROWNS TWICE.

"Not everybody believes that gentlemen's clubs and golf courses are true measures of civilization, but in our case, they have special significance. They measure our departure from frontier ways and standards."- C. L. Sonnichsen (1968)

Observations

Baseball Grounds: From Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps, 1883 (L), 1888 (R)



Murky Relationship with anti-gambling and temperance:

The 1888 Baseball ground was located beside El Paso's "Tenderloin district" on South Utah Street. The Association banned drinking, profanity, and gambling in the stands. However, gambling establishments offered betting pools on Browns games and rival saloons (see below) played each other to raise money for the Base Ball Association. Jones and Hart enjoyed imbibing as well, pointing to moral crusades as being about the class and reputational concerns rather than "debaucherous" actions themselves.

The Bacchus has challenged the Gem to play a game of base ball next Friday for \$100 a side, the proceeds of the game to go the base ball association.

Spectacle for profit (or avoid debt):

An 1888 subscription list (to the left) indicated the set of financial supporters of the El Paso Base Ball Association interested in boosting both their city's reputation and business prospects. Fence advertising funds supported the construction of a new grounds and paying players to compete against regional rivals who had full rosters of "professionals."

Conclusion

The El Paso Browns were branded as an opposition to "unhealthy" recreations. However, they toed the line between the "healthy" and "unhealthy," as do modern sports in general. They performed a spectacle of mostly upper-class, amateur players presenting modern gentlemanliness and national/regional pride to paying audiences. The Sioux Indian Baseball club's visit in 1905 represented a new era, as a team of racialized ballers performed a minstrel-like positionality, but also sporting proficiency, against the local team.

Image Information and Credits

From top left: El Paso Browns 1887 Team (Hart far left, Jones in suit center, Davis standing center) (Ingram, *Browns to Diablos*, 8); Juan S. Hart (Courtesy of El Paso History Museum); "Our National Game," *El Paso Times* October 15, 1884; "Base Ball Booming," *El Paso Times* (El Paso, Texas), June 15, 1888; "Fats vs. Leans," *El Paso Times*, September 20, 1891; "Come in, New Mexico," *El Paso Times*, October 4, 1887; "Sioux Have the Stuff in Them," *El Paso Herald*, July 17, 1905; Bacchus game, *El Paso Times* (El Paso, Texas), July 29, 1888.