ALCOHOL, DRUGS AND THE NATIONAL PASTIME*

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“I have never used steroids. Period.” - Raphael Palmeiro

“Wake up the echoes at the Hall of Fame and you will find that baseball’s immortals were a rowdy and raucous group of men who would climb down off their plaques and go rampaging through Cooperstown, taking spoils.” - Bill Veeck

We elevate professional athletes to the status of heroes, yet they are not immune from the normal temptations of life. Instead, we require these talented ballplayers to be the modest embodiment of All-American virtues. One of the classiest players of all time, Christy Mathewson, expressed the player’s perspective that it should be the game that counts and not a ballplayer’s off-field behavior: “I owe everything I have to [the fans] when I’m out there on the mound. But I owe the fans nothing and they owe me nothing when I am not pitching.” In fact, fans demand a great deal from ballplayers, and they have often been disappointed.

Baseball players suffer the pains of a long season. Their livelihoods depend upon their continued ability to perform at the highest level of athletic excellence, even if their bodies need rest and recuperation. Drugs offer a palliative. Tempted by alcohol, baseball players have displayed their human frailties. At times, they have sought help from a bottle, as have many other Americans. Alcohol and drug use in the national pastime tells us something about the temptations of American culture.

The use of performance-enhancing substances is not a purely modern phenomenon. It is said that in Ancient Greece, athletes would pulverize the testes of bulls, dogs and sheep and brew a tea that would improve their performance during the Olympic Games. Did Coroebus, the first Olympic sprint champion in 776 B.C., use “substances” to improve his performance? The historical record is unclear. We know that athletes who toured Greece ate strict protein diets to strengthen their muscle mass. Combining various potions with mushrooms and plant seeds, these fortified athletes provided athletic exhibitions much appreciated by the masses.

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* This is an excerpt from the author’s forthcoming book. A bibliography follows.
Nineteenth Century athletes were fortified by various pro swimmers in Amsterdam’s canal races in the 1860s, and cyclists later in the century were accused of using drugs to enhance their performance. French cyclists in 1879 were found to have used a simple caffeine stimulant, and a Belgian team used ether-laced sugar cubes. Sprint cyclists tried nitroglycerine. A British cyclist died in 1886 after using ephedrine. Athletes in various sports used concoctions to dull pain. For example, boxers used a potent combination of alcohol and strychnine to reduce pain during midday matches that would last for hours.

During the second half of the nineteenth century, athletes used a variety of psychoactive compounds, alcoholic and caffeinated beverages, tobacco, opiates, cannabis, coca, cocaine and strychnine to improve their performance. By the end of the century, Americans had become the greatest coffee drinkers in the world, importing forty percent of the world’s supply, and American athletes appreciated the stimulation that caffeine offered.

Some efforts at enhancing athletic performance around the turn of the twentieth century proved quite dangerous. In 1896, a cyclist from South Wales died from an overdose of trimethyl in the Bordeaux-Paris cycling race. At the first American Olympic Games in 1904 in St. Louis, American marathon runner Thomas Hicks collapsed after ingesting a mixture of strychnine, brandy and raw egg during the races. His handlers helped him across the finish line to win the long-distance event.

**Steroids in the Nineteenth Century**

Twenty-first century baseball players have been subjected to public scorn and media insult for using performance-enhancing substances, particularly anabolic steroids. Only a small handful of players have either admitted such use or tested positively for the drug, but goaded by congressional grandstanding and presidential interference, steroid use has caused a public fury. Use of performance-enhancing substances in baseball can be traced back to the nineteenth-century. In fact, at least one Hall of Fame pitcher of that era used a testosterone treatment to improve his performance.

In 1889, French-American physiologist Charles Brown-Séquard developed an extract derived from the testicles of a guinea pig and a dog. He injected himself with it to test its efficacy. Brown-Séquard developed the following formula: “Cut ... testicles into four or five slices, mix with one liter of glycerine, store for twenty-four hours turning frequently, wash in boiling water, pass the liquid through a paper filter, and then sterilize at 104 degrees.”

On June 1, 1889, Brown-Séquard presented a sensational report about
his work at the Société de Biologie in Paris, documenting his own rejuvenation after six injections of his potion. He claimed that he had "recovered at least all the force which I possessed a number of years ago," and had conquered his constipation and regained the intellectual vigor of his youth. He even claimed to the startled audience that he had lengthened the arc of his urine stream by twenty-five percent so he could blast cockroaches off le toilette wall. Brown-Séquard’s potion was the first known modern treatment containing testosterone.

Word of Brown-Séquard’s discovery spread rapidly and, reading the sensational headlines, the public was fascinated. Brown-Séquard was well-known in the American medical community, having practiced, researched and taught in New York and Boston for many years. Unlike the quack doctors who were ubiquitous in the nineteenth century, Brown-Séquard was a celebrated member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, the National Academy of Sciences, the Royal Society, and the Académie des Sciences. On July 4, 1889, the Boston Globe hailed his new substance “that would rejuvenate the old and make strong the feeble.”

Dr. Brown-Séquard explained that his elixir would build up the “nervous force” of ill patients by bolstering their strength and resistance. Former U.S. Surgeon General Dr. William Hammond, who practiced in Washington, reported that use of Brown-Séquard’s elixir reduced pain, improved cardiac function, and restored potency. The press was filled with testimonials in support of the treatment’s effectiveness. Colonel William B. Lowe reported to the Atlanta Constitution that a celebrated French fencer who had become debilitated from “locomotor ataxia” underwent the Brown-Séquard treatment and “regained his health and strength . . . and when I called upon him, he was teaching a class of six the sword exercise. He held all six at bay, and jumped all around the hall in his maneuvers with all the agility of a boy of sixteen.” The Washington Post suggested that this potion was “a most valuable and powerful stimulant.”

By the end of 1889, more than 12,000 physicians had administered the Brown-Séquard’s potion. The Boston Globe asked the most famous athlete of the day, heavyweight champion John L. Sullivan, about the Brown-Séquard elixir. He was well-acquainted with the treatment, but he was skeptical: “It may be some good, but I doubt it. You can never tell until you try.” “La Méthode Sequardienne,” the most celebrated stimulant of the era, was the precursor to modern anabolic steroids.

Given such glowing testimonials, it would not be surprising if some aging baseball players were tempted to try the fabulous elixir. The press did not ignore the potential usefulness of the elixir for baseball players. Within weeks after Brown-Sequard announced his discovery, the New Haven Register wrote: “The discovery of a true elixir of youth by which the aged can restore their vitality and renew their bodily vigor would be a
great thing for baseball nines. We hope the discovery . . . is of such a nature that it can be applied to rejuvenate provincial clubs.”

The Washington Post on August 14, 1889, included the following report of the use of Brown-Séquard’s potion as a performance-enhancing substance by a major league baseball player:

Galvin was one of the subjects at a test of the Brown-Séquard elixir at a medical college in Pittsburgh on Monday. If there still be doubting Thomases who concede no virtue in the elixir, they are respectfully referred to Galvin’s record in yesterday’s Boston-Pittsburgh game. It is the best proof yet furnished of the value of the discovery.

In the game following his treatment, Jimmy Galvin shut out the Bostons 9-0. The Washington Post called it one of the “best games of his life.” He was unusually prolific at bat. In the fourth inning, according to the Pittsburgh Commercial Gazette, “Galvin surprised the crowd by driving the ball into left field for two bases,” batting in two runs. In the fifth inning,

When the old man stepped to the plate, he was greeted with a salvo of cheers, and cries of “hit her for a home run, Jimmy” could be heard all over the grounds. Galvin raised his cap and waited patiently until he got a nice slow ball. He caught it right on the end of his bat, and the sphere went sailing down over Johnson’s head into the weeds in deep center field. When the crowd realized what he had done, they set up a shout, and the grandstands and bleachers fairly shook with the tremendous stamping of feet. When the ball was returned, Galvin was on third base, doffing his hat to the crowd, while Dunlop had scored another run.

The Pittsburgh Commercial Gazette confirmed that three physicians in the city—Dr. Chevalier Q. Jackson, Dr. H.A. Page and Dr. W.C. Byers—had been “experimenting with the animal injection.” Dr. Page had injected three persons with the Brown-Séquard treatment on the day Galvin received his treatment. The Western Pennsylvania Medical College (likely the medical college referred to by the Post, as it was the only such institution in Pittsburgh) had opened three years earlier on Brereton Avenue, about two miles from the ballpark where the National League club, then called the “Alleghanys,” played their games.

James Francis “Pud” Galvin began his professional baseball career in 1875. By 1889 when he tried the potion, the “rotund twirler” of the Pittsburgh Alleghanys was thirty-two years old and his best playing days were over. The 1889 season was the last year he would be among the league’s premier “twirlers.” It was no wonder that he would try the elixir of life, but it did not help him in the long run. Galvin aged quickly. The following year, the Chicago Tribune wrote: “Jimmy Galvin says he is only
33 years old. Jimmy must have gone to 40 and then started back in the count." He pitched a few more years and retired in 1892. Galvin umpired for a while and tended bar in Pittsburgh. He died penniless in 1902 at age forty-seven, and his friends raised money to cover his funeral expenses. Galvin, the first major league baseball player to accumulate 300 wins and the first known to use a steroid-like substance to enhance his performance, ranks second all-time in complete games pitched and was voted into the Baseball Hall of Fame by the Veterans Committee in 1965.

The Battle Against Alcohol

Baseball's early entrepreneurs recognized the problematic relationship between the commercial entertainment they offered the public and the provision of alcohol. They were concerned from the start that, like gambling and game-fixing, alcohol could kill their enterprise: it would attract the wrong kind of customers. They also knew that in some cities, the absence of alcohol would likely cost the enterprise many patrons. Baseball addressed the same issue America faced: should it be "wet" or "dry?"

Alcohol was ubiquitous in nineteenth-century America. New towns and old were filled with saloons. Many grocery stores, as well as department stores in the latter part of the century, carried alcohol and little else. At times, making money was more important than a respectable reputation. The evils of drink were well known, as was its temptation. Even at its inception in the 1840s, amateur baseball seemed to be simply a good excuse to have a lavish dinner with plenty of drinks after the contest.

Colonial Americans drank copious amounts of alcohol, perhaps three times as much as modern Americans. In fact, a diary kept aboard the Mayflower notes that the Pilgrims landed earlier than planned, "[their] victuals being much spent, especially our beer." Rightfully concerned about the purity of their water or milk, colonists found alcohol to be a safe substitute when consumed in moderation and at home. They enjoyed a daily portion of hard cider and whisky. History records little concern about colonial drinking, although Virginia in 1671 did attempt to stop public drunkenness. For the most part, overuse was socially controlled, and it rarely contaminated the public spaces. The Puritan minister Increase Mather even called alcohol the "good creature of God."

In the decades following Independence, misbehavior occasioned by excessive consumption of alcohol in public became the object of public regulation. Dr. Benjamin Rush, a signer of the Declaration of Independence, suggested that alcohol abuse was a disease. Those who were "drunkards," the term commonly used, should receive medical treatment and should not be punished. The only cure available was total
abstinence. Furthermore, the only way one could stay clear of the seduction of spirits was through religious devotion.

In the nineteenth century, as America mechanized and then industrialized, drink became an object of solace for many workers, rather than a mere accompaniment for social interaction. As members of the middle and upper classes decreased their consumption, alcohol misuse became a badge of the lower classes. By the middle decades of the nineteenth century, waves of European immigrants brought their drinking habits with them to America. German immigrants, including Miller, Schlitz, Anheuser and Busch, brought their families and their recipes for beer to America. Irish immigrants, escaping from the famine in their homeland, came to America in the 1850s and brought with them a taste for hard liquor.

Alcohol use in the nineteenth century reflected the three major strains of the changing American landscape: immigration, religious fervor and the dramatic dysfunctions brought about by reformed work patterns. Proper society associated its fear of immigrants with the overuse of alcohol. Nativist sentiment focused on “demon rum” and high-potency beer. Alcohol came to be seen in Calvinist America as an “attractive vice” and a significant source of societal dysfunction. As mechanization and industrialization offered workers some leisure time, those with any income were likely to drink away their earnings.

The temperance movement in America formally began in 1826 with the establishment of the American Temperance Society. Millions took the pledge not to imbibe, and the daily press joined the temperance chorus. In 1852, the New York Times railed against the 500-600 “grog shops and barrooms” which, in violation of the law, were open on the Sabbath: “These nurseries of dissipation, licentiousness and crime thrive even more prosperously on Sunday than during the rest of the week.” A saloon was a den of iniquity, “too unrespectable to tolerate.” If it was closed on Sunday, the “weak-minded,” who labored the other six days, “would be saved.” As it was, especially on New York’s Third Avenue, “horse-racing, fighting, drinking, and insulting peaceably-disposed citizens are the order of the day.” The “three-penny poison” raised serious questions as to state of the democracy, according to the Times.

On the other hand, the immigrant community saw prohibitionists as nativists in church clothing. They sternly rejected being “uplifted” by Protestant fanatics. The debate mirrored the ethnic and religious fault lines of a changing America. Resisting forced socialization and assimilation, European immigrants saw alcohol consumption in a social setting as a matter of personal liberty. Wasn’t that what America was about?

A mass meeting of thousands of immigrants in New York in 1855 heard from ex-alderman (and not yet Boss) Tweed and other spokesmen
appealing to the new American crowd. They denounced the effort to ban the sale of alcoholic beverages as “tyrannical.” Men had a “natural right” to drink as they pleased. They likened prohibition to enforced prayer and compelled haircuts. “Abstract morality urged on by fanatical zeal would do great injury to humanity.” Saloons played a critical social role in American life. In a saloon, Charles Loring Brace wrote, a man “can find jolly companions, a lighted and warmed room, a newspaper, and, above all, a draught which can change poverty into riches, and drive care and labor and the thought of all his burdens and annoyances far away.” At stake in the prohibition battle was both personal self-esteem in a harsh world and a way of life for new arrivals on American shores. This war over alcohol, sin and tyranny would rage for the next sixty-five years until the Prohibitionists ultimately prevailed through the enactment of a constitutional amendment.

On the eve of the Civil War, a census showed that there was one saloon in New York City for every fifteen families. Only one percent of the established saloons carried the required city license. In addition to “tippling,” these establishments also offered “the dance, comic songs, concerts, billiards and roulette tables.” The result of these temptations was apparent: “[I]t is wasteful of money and health, it engenders pauperism, it causes crime, promotes lawlessness, and it tends to irreligion and infidelity.” New York’s Sabbath Committee proposed a series of interesting “remedies,” including a change in payday to Monday or Wednesday, the provision of alternative “innocent and healthful popular recreation,” and the “establishment of public fountains, where laborers could slake their thirst [on water] without being driven to the dram-shop.”

After the Civil War, the nation’s “gross wickedness” continued unabated. Dominant social and economic groups intensified their battle on alcohol consumption. The Women's Christian Temperance Union, formed in Indianapolis on March 3, 1874, led the charge against this socially and morally deviant behavior. The National Anti-Saloon League joined the battle in 1895, focusing first on the sale of intoxicated beverages to minors. This “red-hot fight,” the Washington Post reported on April 16, 1895, “would meet with the heartfelt approval of citizens and generally win the league the recognition to which its numbers entitle it.”

The battle against demon rum was rooted deeply in the nation’s religiosity. America had always been a Protestant nation. Contrary to popular myth, religious dissenters in America were shunned, avoided, and, at times, persecuted. The First Amendment to the Constitution only assured the various Protestant sects that one denomination would not be made officially predominant over the others, but no one thought that Catholics, Jews and people of other faiths would achieve social and political acceptability, let alone prominence. Intolerance of religious differences
had been the norm throughout the nation's history.

Protestant ministers used their pulpits to scold those groups, normally Catholics, who would not take the pledge against alcohol use. Temperance and the religious revival spurred public action. The Chicago Tribune reported on February 21, 1899 that 250 ministers from Presbyterian, Baptist, Congregational and Methodist denominations had joined forces in this battle for prohibition. That summer, Reverend J.Q.A. Henry told his Chicago congregants: "The twentieth century will see the triumph either of the Christian church or of the saloon."

Employers in the Gilded Age railed against the evils of alcoholism and its disruptive influence on employee attendance and performance in the workplace. An employee who, in his off-duty hours, engaged in drunkenness and debauchery (its "natural consequence") could not be counted on to fulfill the obligations of his job. Alcoholism plagued employers and employees alike, and liquor was everywhere.

The ultimate success of the movement was nation-wide Prohibition through the Eighteenth Amendment of the Constitution; however, this would not be achieved until 1920. In the interim, those who sought to cleanse society of the curse of drink would be challenged by public persons who freely imbibed, like the beloved Civil War hero Ulysses Grant, folklorist Mark Twain and, as we shall see, many baseball players and fans.

Evangelist Billy Sunday, a major league ballplayer during the nineteenth century who drank his share during his nine-year career on the diamond, achieved national prominence for his "dry" oratory and inspired preaching. In Detroit in the fall of 1916, Sunday ignited the crowd with his "muscularity" and his abundant adjectives, attacking the hog-jowled, weasel-eyed, sponge-columned, mushy-fisted, jelly-spined, pussy-footing, four-flushing, charlotte russe Christians. Lord save us from off-handed, flabby-cheeked, brittle-boned, weak-kneed, thin-skinned, pliable, plastic, spineless, effeminate, ossified, three-karat Christianity . . . . Help me, Jesus, to lasso and corral the young man on his way to hell. Help me save the young girl merchandising her womanhood. Help me, Jesus, help me save all in Detroit who are rushing to hell so fast that you can't see them for the dust.

On the eve of Prohibition and ultimate victory, Reverend Sunday regaled a huge crowd and a radio audience, telling them that "[t]he reign of tears is over. The slums will soon be a memory. We will turn our prisons into factories and our jails into storehouses and corncribs. Men will walk upright now, women will smile and the children will laugh. Hell will be forever rent."

That did not happen, although during the thirteen years of Prohibition there was a reduction in alcohol-related diseases. It did result in shutting
saloons, but liquor was easily available for those with money. Fundamental habits did not change easily in a consumer society.

Prohibition did not outlaw the consumption of alcohol. Rather, it prohibited "the manufacture, sale or transportation of intoxicating liquors." Even so, during the Prohibition era, minor league ballplayers in the Quebec-Ontario-Vermont League smuggled spirits across the border into the United States. Federal prohibition of alcohol was built on a weak political consensus, and the clash of cultures, evidenced over a century of struggle, doomed the national interdiction and led to its repeal in 1933 with the enactment of the Twenty-First Amendment to the Constitution.

Baseball and Alcohol

Spectators of early baseball games were not separated from the field of play. Lubricated by hard liquor, onlookers would run onto the field to object to an umpire's call. Some would even grab a bat and seek to aid their favored club by participating in the game when the need arose.

The National League decided at its formation in 1876 to ban the sale of alcohol at all baseball grounds, and promised a "new and very severe penalty for drunkenness." It also banned play on Sunday as an appeal to the religious sensibilities of America. Some states and cities had enacted Blue Laws as early as the eighteenth century to preserve tranquility on the Lord's Day. The League's Sunday ban also had the benefit of excluding most lower-class laborers from the ballparks, because they only could attend on Sunday, their one day off from work. The Sunday prohibition lasted well into the twentieth century in many major league cities. Philadelphia became the last city to allow Sunday baseball in 1934.

The National League owners voted in 1878 to expel any club from the League that sold beer. The resolution was really directed at the Cincinnati franchise, which ignored the edict, sold beer and rented its field for Sunday play. When that club refused to sign to a "no-beer" pledge, the owners dropped it from the League in 1881. The Chicago Tribune had explained in 1880 the true benefits of eliminating "beer-jerking" and Sunday play. Games on the Sabbath were contrary to "sound business policy:"

[Baseball] is supported by a class of people by whom these practices are regarded as an abomination—a class of people whose patronage is of infinite greater value in dollars and cents, let along respectability, than that of the element of people for whom beer is an attraction and a necessity.

A rival circuit, the American Association, formed late in 1881, and was scorned by National League magnates as the "Beer and Whiskey League." The Association fielded six clubs, including the Cincinnati Red Stockings, exiled by the National League, who won the first Association
pennant in 1882. The Association sought out a working class audience, allowing both the sale of alcohol and Sunday play, and at half the price charged by the National League.

It was no coincidence that four club owners in the American Association owned breweries. Chris Von der Ahe, the exuberant "Millionaire Sportsman" who owned the St. Louis Browns, knew nothing about the game of baseball. He did know, however, that baseball would be profitable for his saloon located near the baseball grounds. He bought Sportsman's Park and later added a covered grandstand and beer stands. Von der Ahe would become one of the game's great promoters. When the American Association folded in 1891, Von der Ahe bought the National League franchise in St. Louis, adding a dance hall to Sportsman's Park, amusement park rides, a racetrack and an all-female cornet band. Later he promoted attendance at the "Coney Island of the West" by offering a doubleheader for four bits: a game of baseball followed by Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show.

The National League's magnates continued to present an image of propriety in appealing to its target audience. In 1882, the league blacklisted players for "gross acts of insubordination or intemperance." Throughout the 1880s, the owners gave the league president unprecedented power to discipline players, managers and umpires for being drunk and for fighting in public. The league president could fine, suspend or blacklist any participant who "in any manner brought disgrace upon the profession of base ball playing by his open conduct."

That did not stop players from drinking. They continued to pursue libation before and after the game, both in and away from the ballpark. Perhaps the greatest power hitter of his day, Hall of Famer Ed Delahanty, was often drunk on and off the field, and, as a result, his behavior was often "pugnacious and obstreperous." Ed, who played major league ball in the nineteenth century, was the best of the five Delahanty brothers. His ability to play the game made him a hero to many. On July 13, 1896, he hit four consecutive inside-the-park home runs, but alcohol would finally be his demise.

In his sixteenth year in the major leagues, Delahanty continued to hit with authority for the Washington Senators of the new American League. His club suspended him from play after he missed a game in Cleveland because he was drunk. Despondent, Delahanty traveled east on the Michigan Central No. 6 from Detroit to New York City, drinking the whole way. After he threatened fellow passengers with a straight razor, the train conductor ordered him off the train at Bridgeburg, on the Canadian side of the Niagara River, right on the International Bridge. Delahanty "stagger[ed] along the railroad tracks in the dark . . . fell through an open drawbridge and was swept over [Niagara Falls] to his death." Searchers
found his mangled body a week later. 

Spalding's Baseball Guide and Official League Book for 1895 blamed the widespread alcohol use on the players' new-found riches:

The rapid increase in the compensation of ball players soon opened up another avenue of trouble for the League, which needed and received prompt attention. This was flagrant and open dissipation in the ranks at home and abroad. While this was confined comparatively to a few men, the innocent suffered largely from it, and the National League was brought into disrepute. Heroic measures were again adopted, and several players were indefinitely suspended, with excellent effect.

Apparently, the "heroic measures" were to cut player salaries. The Guide promoted total abstinence, but an island of temperance could never exist in an urban culture where alcohol was an important part of daily social life.

Concerned about excessive alcohol use by their players, baseball clubs hired detectives to follow their players and catch them in the "great elbow act" at the bar. The going rate to hire these Pinkerton men was five dollars a day for "shadowing" and six dollars for "investigating." The rather-obvious Pinkertons often ended up on the short end of saloon brawls. Management's practice of hiring private detectives to spy on baseball players continued well into the twentieth century.

Using the alternative of positive reinforcement, some owners offered players bonuses for good behavior. In the 1880s, the Cincinnati club gave its catcher Kid Baldwin forty dollars for his exemplary conduct. Although short-lived, the league's Brush Classification Plan of 1889 ranked a player's salary in part based on their "habits, earnestness and special qualifications." Sobriety was given a monetary value.

Players who could not break their alcohol addiction and disruptive behavior might be banned for life by the league. In 1911, longtime Pittsburgh Pirates owner Barney Dreyfuss included a provision in every one of his players' contracts that mandated abstinence from alcohol. However, Pittsburgh's Hall of Fame manager, Fred Clarke, rarely enforced it.

**The Scourge of Alcoholism**

Widespread among baseball players, alcohol use was an integral part of baseball culture. That did not necessarily mean that drinking was always a matter of choice. Some of the game's greatest players, like "Old Pete" Grover Cleveland Alexander, suffered from alcoholism. Alexander was drunk when he pitched against the Yankees in the 1926 World Series. He was known as much for his affliction as for his talent. Cardinals manager Rogers Hornsby later remarked: "I'd rather him pitch a crucial game for
me drunk, than anyone I’ve ever known sober. He was that good.” Alexander told Fred Lieb, one of the twentieth century’s great sportswriters: “Sure I tried to stop—I just couldn’t.”

Throughout his life, Chicago magnate Albert Spalding championed temperance among professional ballplayers. As a former major league pitcher himself, Spalding could preach from the pulpit of experience. Yet his puritanical views fell on deaf ears. Drinking was “immoral,” he proclaimed, as if that would end the practice among those who were addicted. His views, he claimed, were simply a reaction to the public’s concern about the “dissipation of some of the players.” He defended the decision to sell the contracts of boozing Chicago stars Mike “King” Kelly and Jim McCormick to other clubs after they were involved in fights with the Pinkertons. These transactions, which were “for their own good as well as our own,” scored Spalding thousands of dollars.

Spalding sold King Kelly to Irish Boston, where he became a great fan favorite. Toward the end of his career, Kelly opened a saloon in New York—not the best post-career placement for an alcoholic. Kelly’s performance on the field rapidly deteriorated over his four seasons in Boston, and by 1894 he was in the minor leagues. That fall he developed pneumonia, and on November 8, 1894, he died at the age of 36.

Spalding dealt pitcher McCormick to the Pittsburgh Alleghanys, where he played in 1887 on the club with star hurler Jimmy Galvin. In his prime, McCormick had been known for his “raise ball,” but alcohol had taken its toll. McCormick led the Pittsburgh club in hit batsmen, wild pitches, walks and losses. It was his tenth and final season in the major leagues.

For those players he could not trade, Spalding used the stick. He drafted appropriate language for the standard player contract all players had to sign:

As an inducement to every player to so regulate his habits and actions as to keep at all times in a sound and healthy condition, the League contract provides that there shall be no wages paid where no services are rendered; that for the period during which a player is suspended or excused from play, for any of the above mentioned reasons, he shall forfeit such a ratable proportion of his wages, for the season, as the number of games not played by him bears to the total number of games scheduled for the season.

To deal with the alcoholism of his pitcher Ray “Slim” Caldwell, Cleveland Indians manager Tris Speaker adopted a unique approach. In 1920, Speaker required Caldwell to follow the following regimen:

After each game he pitches, Ray Caldwell must get drunk. He is not to report to the clubhouse the next day. The second day he is to report to Manager Speaker and run around the ballpark as
many times as Manager Speaker stipulates. The third day he is to
pitch batting practice, and the fourth day he is to pitch in a
championship game.

That year, Caldwell went 20-10 and won a game for the World Champion
Indians in their victory over the Brooklyn Robins. Caldwell only lasted
one more year in the majors, however.

Philadelphia Athletics pitcher Rube Waddell and his catcher Ossee
Schreckengost were both alcoholics. They roomed together while on the
road. Waddell, a strange person by any measure, tended bar when he was
not drinking at one. Later in his career with the St. Louis Browns,
management attempted to keep Waddell out of trouble by employing him
in the off season as a hunter. It worked, albeit briefly; however, Rube's
drinking continued.

It was also not uncommon for Schreckengost to miss a game because
of his alcohol problem. Connie Mack was convinced by his first baseman
Harry Davis to keep “Schreck,” as he was known, on the club if he
switched to milk shakes, some 15-20 a day. Davis sometimes accompanied
Schreck to the drugstore to make sure he was complying with Mack’s
orders. Once, Davis went to the drugstore alone and asked for a shake like
Schreck would order. The clerk reached under the counter and filed
Davis’s glass half with milk and half with sherry.

Although always ready to criticize their employees for their
dissipation, the owners did not themselves abstain from alcohol. The
Sporting News reported that the real business among the club owners
always took place at a bar. Even baseball’s National Commission of the
early twentieth century did most of its work in the rathskeller of the Hotel
Sinton in Cincinnati.

Baseball management often criticized players for alcohol abuse, but it
rarely helped players confront their dependency. The Chicago White
Stockings did visit Hot Springs, Arkansas in the spring of 1886 to “boil out
the alcoholic microbes,” but there is no indication that it worked. Babe
Ruth also visited the spa in the 1920s but that certainly failed to stop his
excessive drinking. Don Newcombe, the Dodger pitcher, acknowledged
that alcohol abuse shortened his career, nothing that “[t]here is a distinct
lack of concern on the part of management. It’s paranoia on their part.
They want to keep it quiet and out of the newspapers. They want you to
believe that nothing like this could happen in their organization.”

Even with rehabilitation, alcoholism is a tough customer. Dodger and
Yankee pitcher Steve Howe was suspended numerous times and repeatedly
sought drug and alcohol rehabilitation, but to no avail. He could not break
his addiction.

Throughout the history of the game, many ballplayers battled alcohol
and lost. A few stand out as particularly notorious. Curt Welch,
centerfielder for the St. Louis Browns from 1885-1887, hid a pint of whiskey in the outfield grass at Sportsman’s Park. He would take nips between batters. Pete Browning, the “Old Gladiator,” was normally drunk on and off the field. Nonetheless, he batted .341 for his career, the twelfth highest all-time major league batting average. Browning, who played right field for Louisville in the American Association, said “I can’t hit the ball until I hit the bottle.” There is a story about Browning taking a 15-foot lead off second base in 1887 and then falling asleep. The second baseman “walked up and put him out, to the intense disgust of the spectators.” Even with his substance abuse (and perhaps because of it), Browning was either first, second or third in the league in hitting from 1882-1891.

The twentieth century had its share of serious alcoholics. For baseball fans who grew up in the New York metropolitan area in the 1950s, Mickey Mantle was a role model of courage in the face of physical pain. His Hall of Fame performances as the Yankees centerfielder inspired a generation of youngsters. We did not know, of course, how much alcohol he had consumed in the process. When he received a liver transplant in 1994, Mantle told America about his alcoholism and urged youngsters not to follow his example. Finally, he sought treatment at the Betty Ford Clinic, but it was too late to reverse a lifetime of physical and emotional damage.

*Nineteenth Century Stimulants*

In the 1870s, Tommy Barlow played four years of baseball in the National Association, the predecessor to the National League. He is credited with inventing the bunt hit using a twenty-four-inch bat. He was also a dope addict. Catching for the Hartford Dark Blues, he was the backstop for William Charles “Cherokee” Fisher, a “lightning pitcher.” Hit in the ribs by one of Fisher’s pitches, Barlow was transported to his hotel where a doctor administered morphine for the pain. Barlow became hooked on the drug.

The first great American epidemic in drug use was a result of the Civil War. Some 300,000 soldiers came home from the Civil War dependent on morphine, the so-called “army disease.” It is estimated that during the nineteenth century about two to five percent of the American public was addicted to opium and its derivatives. By mid-century, opium was sold legally across the country and was widely available. Many extolled the virtues of the drug. The Daily Graphic reported the following on an exotic New York City opium den: “Those in the habit of coming here say that it has a beneficial medicinal effect, and, if only inhaled in small quantities, animates the spirits and gives energy to the intellectual powers, at the same time imparting a languor to the body, leaving the mind free from nervous effects.”
By the mid-nineteenth century, a German chemist, Friedrich Gaedcke, had extracted cocaine from the South American coca leaf. The German army used this new substance to keep Bavarian troops alert. In 1863, an Italian pharmacist created Vin Mariani, a cocaine-and-wine concoction that became a worldwide sensation. Even Pope Leo XIII enjoyed the new libation and gave the discoverer a gold medal. Vin Mariani won a medal at a London exhibition and was declared the "wine of athletes." It was available at retail in Los Angeles in 1890 for ninety-four cents a bottle or by mail order in Atlanta for a few pennies more. Vin Mariani was widely advertised well into the twentieth century.

American surgeon William Halsted, a founder of Johns Hopkins School of Medicine, experimented with using a cocaine solution as a local anesthetic. He became addicted to the substance, as did many other physicians and dentists. In 1885, the *American Magazine* hailed cocaine's "practical importance" and "great value." In 1895, Heinrich Dreser, working for the Bayer Company of Elberfeld, Germany, diluted morphine with acetyls to produce a substance without the common morphine side effects. Bayer produced and marketed diacetylmorphine under the brand name heroin.

Patent medicines such as Hunt's Lightning Oil, Ayer's Cherry Pectoral, Darby's Carminative, Godfrey's Cordial, McMunn's Elixir of Opium, Dover's Powder, Wintersmith's Chill Tonic, Gooch's Mexican Syrup, and Mrs. Winslow's Soothing Syrup, made abundant use of the active ingredient, morphine. Parke-Davis, the pharmaceutical company, included cocaine in fifteen different products, and sold it in pure form with a syringe. Its advertisements boasted that cocaine "could make the coward brave, the silent eloquent, and render the sufferer insensitive to pain." In 1886, an Atlanta pharmacist added cocaine to a soft drink and named it Coca-Cola. This ingredient was later removed from the liquid refreshment.

Users could obtain opiates over the counter in pharmacies, from their physicians, at grocery stories, or by mail order. Salesmen delivered cocaine door-to-door. Opium poppies were grown legally across America. Congress banned opium in 1905, but did not outlaw heroin until 1924 after intense lobbying by tobacco interests.

**Amphetamines**

When Jim Bouton published his book *Ball Four* in 1970, the American public's reaction was as remarkable as Bouton's revelations. First there was general disbelief, followed by anger. Could his stories of amphetamine use in the locker room be true? According to Bouton, amphetamines, or "greenies," were an essential part of a ballplayer's preparation for the daily game; in fact, "a lot of baseball players couldn't
function without them.” The little pills, also called “uppers” or “speed,” worked effectively to stimulate a user’s central nervous system. They became a regular part of pre-game preparation.

Further, could ballplayers possibly drink as much alcohol as Bouton claimed? The drink of choice was beer and consumption of it was plentiful. Anyone who had followed the sport, of course, knew about these addictions and the other dysfunctional pastimes of the players. Bouton’s book came as no surprise to anyone who had been paying attention.

Bouton’s book, however, was discordant with the usual “gee whiz” baseball autobiographies, such as Christy Mathewson’s *Pitching in a Pinch*, published in 1912, and Joe DiMaggio’s *Lucky to be a Yankee*, published in 1946. DiMaggio had dedicated his book to “all the ballplayers in both leagues, a clean bunch of fellows and all grand sports.” The portrait Bouton painted of modern baseball players was not pretty. In addition to pep pills and alcohol consumption, players would cheat on their wives, play the game while hung over, fight on the team bus, and racially taunt their teammates and opponents. It was a vulgar and disgusting portrait of the heroes of the National Game.

The German chemist Edeleano had synthesized amphetamines in 1887, and they were first marketed over-the-counter under the name Benzedrine in the 1930s, as an inhaler to treat congestion. Athletes began using the new substance around this time as well, favoring it over strychnine as a performance stimulant. During the Second World War and the Vietnam War, American troops used amphetamines to stay awake on the battlefield. It was not until the Drug Abuse Regulation and Control Act of 1970 that the sale of amphetamines without a prescription was regulated by law. Amphetamines are sympathomimetic amines, similar to ephedrine, that chemically activate nerve cells in the brain and spinal cord. This, in turn, increases a user’s alertness and lessens his fatigue. There are several common side effects, such as change in mood, insomnia, and restlessness. As a Schedule II controlled substance, amphetamines are available only by prescription; however, they have been extensively abused by American society, and not just by baseball players.

Following the publication of *Ball Four*, then-Commissioner of baseball Bowie Kuhn summoned Bouton to New York from Houston, where he was pitching for the Astros. He publicly castigated Bouton for his book, issuing the following statement: “I advised Mr. Bouton of my displeasure with these writings and have warned him against future writings of this character.” Bouton responded by saying that he hoped the Commissioner’s scolding would help sales.

Although it was hard for anyone to be greatly surprised after Bouton’s revelations, there was some astonishment when on September 13, 1985, it was reported that John Milner had testified in the Pittsburgh cocaine
trafficking trials that the great Willie Mays kept a bottle of red juice, or liquid amphetamines, in his locker during his final season with the Mets in 1973. "I tried it once," Milner said. "I don't know what kind of speed it was, but it kept your eyes open." Mays later responded that he did not recall having anything like that in his locker.

**Ballplayers and Recreational Drugs**

Modern ballplayers have also struggled with the use of, and addiction to, so-called recreational drugs. Pirates pitcher Doc Ellis claims he pitched his 1970 no-hitter against the Padres while under the influence of LSD:

> I was psyched. I had a feeling of euphoria. I was zeroed in on the [catcher's] glove, but I didn't hit the glove too much. I remember hitting a couple of batters and the bases were loaded two or three times. The ball was small sometimes, the ball was large sometimes, sometimes I saw the catcher, sometimes I didn't. Sometimes I tried to stare the hitter down and throw while I was looking at him. I chewed my gum until it turned to powder. They say I had about three to four fielding chances. I remember diving out of the way of a ball I thought was a line drive. I jumped, but the ball wasn't hit hard and never reached me.

Other recreational drugs, like cocaine and marijuana, have been the bane of numerous baseball superstars. Dwight Gooden, Vida Blue, and Darryl Strawberry made headlines for taking these drugs. Montreal's great base stealer, Tim Raines, admitted that he would slide headfirst into second base to protect the cocaine he kept in his back pocket.

The Pittsburgh drugs trials in 1985 uncovered the extent of the use of recreational drugs by ballplayers, focusing particularly on cocaine. Although no players were indicted, testimony revealed that Keith Hernandez and other players had used illegal substances. Commissioner of baseball Peter Ueberroth suspended eleven players in 1986 for cocaine use, and imposed lesser penalties on a dozen additional players. Afterwards, Ueberroth announced that "baseball's drug problem is over." Despite his fanciful prediction, baseball continued to be plagued by recreational drug use.

**The Steroid Scandal**

Major League Baseball’s steroid scandal of the twenty-first century focused the public’s attention yet again on the use of performance-enhancing substances in the national game. Players knew that run production translated into salary production. As Ralph Kiner said:
“Home-run hitters drive Cadillacs, singles hitters drive Fords.” Although only a few players were involved with steroids, when Congressional hearings spotlighted some of the sport’s greatest stars, it convinced many Americans that the game was not on the level. The facts notwithstanding, baseball came in for another scolding.

In 1994, 1,084,000 Americans, or 0.5 percent of the adult population, said that they had used anabolic steroids, according to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's National Household Survey on Drug Abuse. In the 18-34 age group, about one percent had used steroids, about the same percentage of major league ballplayers who tested positive for steroid use.

Only two major league players have admitted using steroids. Jose Canseco told us that “steroids [are] the future.” It was certainly his past. He claimed he used steroids from 1985 to 2001, when he left the game. As the self-proclaimed “godfather of steroids,” Canseco has no regrets. Another user, however, did have regrets. Ken Caminiti, the National League’s Most Valuable Player in 1996, admitted in 2002 that he had used steroids during that great season when he hit .326 with forty home runs and 130 runs batted in. Caminiti was also an alcoholic and a drug addict. Eight days after he was released by the Braves in 2001 he was arrested in a Houston crack house. Caminiti died of a heart attack after a drug overdose in October 2004 at age forty-one in a hospital in the Bronx.

The public contretemps about the comparatively minor use of steroids finally compelled owners and players to revise their drug testing scheme. Without any proof of the effect of steroid use on game performance or assurance as to the privacy of the results, the parties struggled to satisfy congressional leaders, lest they lose credibility with the audience or be subjected to thoughtless oversight. Much as Commissioner Landis’ draconian rule drove game-fixing (but not gambling) from baseball, the new testing plan drove steroids from the game. The only cost was to the privacy rights of the ballplayers.

Today, those athletes fortunate enough to rise to the major league level are exceedingly well-compensated for their performance on the field. In exchange for their elevated status, we demand that they meet a high moral standard on and off the field, and that they relinquish their privacy. Their predecessors carried this baggage of clean living with inconsistent success. Leo Durocher, no angel as a player or a manager, once said: “If any of my players don’t take a drink now and then they’ll be gone. You don’t play this game on gingersnaps.”

*The Babe, Matty and the Iron Horse*

Perhaps the best demonstration of dysfunctional living off the field by
a baseball player was that of George Herman "Babe" Ruth. No one can
doubt his enormous impact on the game on the field, but off the field he
represented all the excesses of the Roaring Twenties. As Burt Whitman, a
Boston sports writer, wrote in 1918 before Ruth's sale to the Yankees:
"The more I see of Babe, the more he seems a figure out of mythology."

Babe Ruth enjoyed living on the edge. Babe drank whisky for
breakfast. During spring training with the Yankees in 1921, he was so
drunken that he ran into a palm tree in the outfield and was knocked
unconscious. Did his rambling life help his game? Sportswriter W. O.
McGehee wrote, referring to the Babe: "I am quite sure that statistics will
show that the greatest number of successes have been scored by those who
have led moderately dirty lives." However, there was nothing moderate
about Babe's off-the-field antics.

The Babe had difficulty accepting any authority other than that offered
by his own free will. After the 1921 season, Ruth and other World Series-
winning ballplayers barnstormed, violating Commissioner Landis' edict
against such activity. He thought the rule was unfair, and so he did what he
wanted, telling Landis that he could "go jump in a lake." Landis did not
take Ruth's advice: "It seems I'll have to show somebody who's running
this game." The Commissioner suspended both Ruth and Yankee
teammate Bob Meusel for the first forty games of the 1922 season.

Not every ballplayer was an alcoholic or drug addict. Most were
simply great athletes who entertained us. A few extraordinary baseball
athletes deserved their Olympian status, proving themselves to be the
exceptions that made the rule. Giants' pitcher Christy Mathewson was one
such model. Grantland Rice said of Matty: "[He] brought something to
baseball no one had ever given the game—not even Babe Ruth or Ty Cobb.
He handed the game a certain touch of class, an indefinable life in culture,
brains [and] personality."

In addition to his singular personal qualities, Matty won 373 games,
the most in National League history. A college-educated player on a club
where almost no other player had completed high school, Matty was a
moral straight-arrow who taught Sunday school and spoke to youth groups
about clean living. As an officer during World War I, Matty suffered a
poison gas attack and died prematurely from tuberculosis at age forty-five.

The "Iron Horse" Lou Gehrig is most remembered for his remarkable
2130 continuous game streak, but he was also an exceptional role model for
America's youth. On June 1, 1925, Gehrig entered a game as a pinch-
hitter. Almost fourteen years later, on May 2, 1939, after Gehrig had been
performing below his standard of excellence and feeling quite weak, he
benched himself. It was the last game he would play. As he stood at home
plate in Yankee Stadium on July 4, 1939, he said, "For the past two weeks
you have been reading about a bad break. Yet today, I consider myself the
luckiest man on the face of the earth.” America saw the genuine article, a hero among men who faced adversity with courage. His incurable condition, arterial lateral sclerosis, later became known as Lou Gehrig’s disease. No one was perfect, but Gehrig was close.

The travails baseball players suffered from alcohol and drug abuse are sad tales of personal tragedy. As such, they present us with the genuine hardship that many face each day, even without a golden glove or a steady bat. Americans face alcohol and drug addiction in various ways, but normally do so out of the public spotlight. That does not relieve the misery. It only makes it private.
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