

#1A Late 1800s Baseball Being Played Article – Baseball was Rough

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Old, Old Ball Game: Three Hits, a Run, Two Broken Fingers

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Using 1800s Rules, 'Ballists'
Search For a Simpler Life,
Without Steroids or Mitts

By JOSEPH PEREIRA

GEORGES ISLAND, Mass.—Steve Patrino, pitching for the Simsbury Taverners, reached back and hurled a fastball down the middle of the plate.

Scott Olson, batting for the Providence Grays, hit a screaming line drive back to Mr. Patrino, who knocked the ball down with his bare hands, recovered, and rifled it to the first baseman, who caught it bare-handed for the out.

The audible smack of a baseball on human flesh drew groans from the spectators. After the inning was over, Mr. Patrino, a school administrator, headed to a picnic cooler and iced his left palm.



Mike Gallen

The San Jose Dukes play baseball the old-fashioned way—no modern mitts and the occasional top hat.

"I'll be all right," he said, grimacing slightly. "It's all part of the game."

Mr. Olson, an engineer, felt the pitcher's pain. The Gray's shortstop has sprained or broken so many fingers on the field that he "can't keep count any more."

The Rhode Island-based Grays and the Taverners, who hail from Connecticut, are part of a cadre of amateurs who play the national pastime the way it was conducted in the late 1800s—before steroid scandals, \$200 million payrolls, the World Series or the introduction of padded mitts.

Dislocations, broken fingers and sore hands are common. So are trees on the playing field, unmown grass and umpires with top hats and canes. Vintage "ballists" wear lace-up shirts and cravats, speak a bygone baseball language and play by period rules that include seven balls for a walk, instead of four.

For many, Vintage Base Ball, as it

is called, represents an escape from the hustle of the 21st century. It recalls a time when hot dogs cost a nickel and a ticket to a ball game just 50 cents. "When we play Vintage Base Ball, many of us feel like children again," says Grays' coach Timothy Norton.

There's very little that's simple about recreating a 19th-century ballgame. With no single source about the sport's origins—few can agree even on who invented it—vintage enthusiasts delve into library archives and town records. (Ab-

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