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THAT'S AS AMERICAN AS BASEBALL AND APPLE PIE



Photo © AP Images

People collect baseballs. Those who catch a ball during a game can ask for their favorite player's autograph and also get to keep the ball. Baseball fans stand up after the seventh inning of a game during what is called the "seventh inning stretch" and sing "God Bless America" and "Take Me Out to the Ball Game." Baseball card collectors spend millions of dollars to own certain rare cards. Boys and girls alike often spend the summer months playing baseball on local little league teams. These are all aspects of baseball in American culture - a game that is one of America's most popular pastimes.

Many consider baseball America's number one sport; but even more than being a popular sport, it is a cultural phenomenon that has influenced many aspects of American life. It would hardly be an exaggeration to claim that all Americans have had some contact with baseball at one time or another in their lifetime; as the title of this article suggests, there are not many things that are more American than baseball and apple pie (a popular dessert). The game has also had a considerable influence on American English. Many words and expressions from the game have slipped into everyday

speech and often have their own idiomatic meaning.

Baseball developed on American soil and has its roots in the game of rounders (such as cricket and one o'cat) which were popular with English settlers to the U.S. The game uses a ball and a bat and is played between two teams of nine players each. Their task is to score runs by hitting a thrown ball with a bat and by running to the safety of a base before being tagged with a ball. Each team has its turn at bat and one such turn is called an inning. A professional game is made up of nine innings. Games generally last about 3 hours; however, there is no time limit, so games can sometimes last much longer depending on how long each inning lasts and whether there is a need for extra innings due to a tie.

Going to a game is always a social event. It is connected not only with watching the game, but with many other traditions that have developed over the years which involve songs, food, and special cheers.

Without going into the technical details of the game, let's take a look at this all-American phenomenon of baseball.

BASEBALL'S GREAT HEROES



The Making of Babe Ruth

Babe Ruth, one of baseball's most famous players, was named George at birth, but will always be remembered as Babe, a nickname he acquired later in life. How did he get the nickname? It all goes back to his teenage years. After his mother's premature death, his father sent him to St. Mary's Industrial School for Boys, where he was introduced to the game of baseball by Brother Matthias Boutlier. George's pro

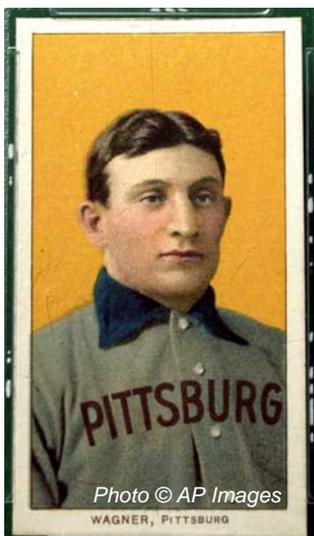
gress for baseball was easy to see and before long, when Ruth was only 19 years old, Jack Dunn, owner and manager of the minor league Baltimore Orioles, offered him a contract to play for the team. But, since George was too young by law to sign the contract at the time, Jack Dunn "adopted" him as his legal guardian so that he could play for the team. From that time on, the other players on the team called Ruth Jack's new "babe." The nickname stuck and is now associated with one of baseball's greatest players. Babe Ruth played a long time for the New York Yankees and made a great contribution to the team's storied history. In fact, when a new Yankee stadium was built in 1923, Yankees fans dubbed it "the house that Ruth built."



A Moving Farewell

On July 4, 1939 Yankee Stadium in New York witnessed one of the most moving events in the history of sports. In the presence of more than 62,000 fans and Yankees players Lou Gehrig, one of the best Yankees players of all time, delivered a farewell address. This was no ordinary farewell - Lou Gehrig was leaving baseball at the age of 36 because he had been diagnosed with a neuromuscular disease

called amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), a terrible terminal disease that caused his body to slowly stop functioning. His weakened condition was especially noticeable since he had set records for the most consecutive games played and was often referred to as the "Iron Horse" for his endurance. The whole nation mourned his demise as he was not only a great baseball player, but was also regarded as a man of great character. ALS is now commonly called "Lou Gehrig's disease" in the United States. Lou Gehrig passed away in 1941 at the age of 37. In honor of his memory the New York Yankees, for which he played 2130 games, retired his number, number 4.



A Card worth \$ 2.8 million

Honus Wagner, known as "the Flying Dutchman," played for the Louisville Colonels and the Pittsburgh Pirates in the early 1900s and was considered the greatest shortstop of his day. His T206 card shown in the photo on the left is one of the rarest and the most expensive cards in the world. The card, released in 1909 by the American Tobacco Company, was part of a series of 500 different baseball cards. However, Wagner stopped the cards from being sold soon after distribution of them began. The

reasons behind his decision are not clear. Some people believe that as a non-smoker himself, he did not want the kids to have to buy cigarettes in order to get his card (the cards were inserted in cigarette packets), while others are of the opinion that he wanted the tobacco company to pay him for using his image. Today, there are only about 70 of his cards in the hands of collectors, some of whom are willing to pay over 2 million dollars for one. A record was set when one of the cards was sold for \$2.8 million in 2007.



A Baseball Player Commemorated in Stone

Stan Musial, the son of a Polish immigrant, knew from early childhood that he wanted to be a professional baseball player. But, to achieve his dream, he had to overcome the opposition of his father, who would have preferred that Stan pursue college studies. In the end, Stan's passion for baseball prevailed and today he is known as one of baseball's greats. He played 22 seasons for the St. Louis Cardinals where he was nicknamed "Stan the Man," and

chosen Sportsman of the Year in 1957 and Sportsman of the Decade for 1946-1956. He played as outfielder and first baseman in 3,026 games and was frequently selected for the yearly All-Star game. While playing with the Cardinals he won three World Series championships. He achieved such fame in St. Louis that a statue stands in his honor in front of the city's baseball stadium with the words "...Here stands baseball's perfect warrior" "...Here stands baseball's perfect knight." He continues to be an inspiration to young baseball players around the country.

Text by AIRC Krakow

Click to listen: <http://stream.state.gov/streamvol/libmedia/krakow/10474/bsb1/bsb1.wma>

GROWING UP IN A CITY WHERE BASEBALL IS KING



I grew up in St. Louis, Missouri, a city where baseball is as much a part of the summer as ice cream and visits to the swimming pool. The St. Louis Cardinals, the city's baseball team, has a proud history and numerous World Series championships - a fact that sparks excitement each spring as the team begins spring training in Florida and the whole city watches with anticipation to see if there is potential for another World Series victory.

The first time I remember the Cardinals going to the World Series I was six years old and in the first grade. It was an exciting time - all the kids in school wore Cardinals t-shirts to class each day and our teacher stopped normal lessons to draw a baseball diamond on the chalkboard and explain the intricate rules of the game to us. Each day in gym class we listened to the team's theme song

"Celebration" as we ran laps around the gym, hoping with each step that we really would soon get to celebrate a Cardinals' victory. The Cardinals did win the World Series that year, and I will never forget the euphoria and pride the win produced - it made a big impression on a six-year old; in fact, I still remember the names and positions of most of the players on that winning team.

Of course, the Cardinals do not win the World Series every year; but, win or lose baseball is an intractable part of the summer months. Each summer, loyal fans pack Busch Stadium to cheer on their team, eat hot dogs, and enjoy the long summer nights. For those that don't make it to the games, TV and radio broadcasts of the games buzz throughout the city all summer long making it hard to miss the fact that the season is in full swing. Even if you don't get a chance to go to a major league game during the summer, there are nightly games at local ball parks where kids of every age play on dusty fields, all hoping to be baseball's next superstars.

I no longer live in St. Louis and often find myself living overseas; however, the warm days of summer still bring baseball to my mind and no matter where I am I will always be a St. Louis Cardinals fan.

Michelle Riebeling

 **Click to listen:** <http://stream.state.gov/streamvol/libmedia/krakow/10474/bsb2/bsb2.wma>

Baseball Mascots

Mascot is a person, an animal, or a thing that a group, especially a sports team adopts as a symbol for good luck. In this photo, you can see four Major League Baseball mascots (from left to right):

The Phillie Phanatic (Philadelphia Phillies);
The Pirate Parrot (Pittsburgh Pirates);
Homer the Brave (Atlanta Braves); and
Mr. Met (New York Mets)



Photo © AP Images

Learn more about baseball mascots on the web:
Mascot Hall of Fame: <http://www.mascotHalloffame.com/>
Major Leagues Baseball Mascots: <http://kids.aol.com/sports/mlb/mascot-gallery>
Minor Leagues Baseball Mascots: <http://www.minorleaguebaseball.com/mlb/multimedia/mascots.jsp>

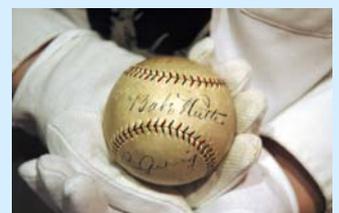
Wit & Wisdom

Observations from those close to the game.

"When I was a small boy in Kansas, a friend of mine and I went fishing. I told him I wanted to be a real major league baseball player, a genuine professional like Honus Wagner. My friend said that he'd like to be president of the United States. Neither of us got our wish."
—Dwight D. Eisenhower (1890-1969), 34th President of the USA

"Nothing flatters me more than to have it assumed that I could write prose — unless it be to have it assumed that I once pitched a baseball with distinction."
—Robert Frost (1874-1963), one of America's most esteemed poets

"Half this game is 90 percent mental."
—Yogi Berra (born 1925), former New York Yankees catcher and member of the Baseball Hall of Fame, famous for his malapropisms. Read more "yogi-isms" on his web site at <http://www.yogiberra.com/yogi-isms.html>.



Two balls signed by two famous players: Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig. (Photos © AP Images)

Activity Page

Exercise 1

Many baseball expressions became idioms, and are used in everyday English. Can you match the idioms with their meanings? The explanatory sentences will help you!

- 1/ **Be a hit**—"The award ceremony was a hit, attracting an overflow crowd."
- 2/ **Step up to the plate**—"Mary needs to step up to the plate and decide which proposal will best serve the interest of the company."
- 3/ **Strike out**—"John struck out with his book proposal; he received a rejection letter from the publisher today."
- 4/ **Throw a curve**—"The boss threw us a curve ball when he announced that each employee would have to bring his own food to the company picnic."
- 5/ **Off base**—"His cost estimate was way off base, far higher than warranted by current prices for labor and materials."
- 6/ **Out of left field**—"His silly proposal for solving the problem came out of left field."

A/ to fool, surprise; to bring up the unexpected

B/ unrealistic; inexact; wrong

C/ irrelevant; unexpected

D/ to act; take, accept responsibility

E/ to please someone: be a success

F/ to fail

Exercise 2

Answer these questions based upon the texts on pages 1 and 2.

- 1/ What can the fans do when they catch a ball at a game?
- 2/ What does the audience sing after the seventh inning?
- 3/ From which games did baseball originate?
- 4/ Is there a time limit to a baseball game? If yes, what is it?
- 5/ Which famous baseball player has one of the most expensive baseball cards?
- 6/ Why couldn't George (Babe) Ruth sign the contract with the Orioles himself?
- 7/ What nickname was given to Stan Musial?
- 8/ For which team did Lou Gehrig play?
- 9/ What did Yankees fans dub the stadium built in 1923?



Photo © AP Images

Answer key:

http://hungary.usembassy.gov/quiz_key.html

Zoom is available online at

<http://hungary.usembassy.gov/zoom.html>

Please send comments and requests

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Glossary (in the order of appearance)

inning - a division of a game during which the two teams alternate as offense and defense

premature - occurring before the proper time

pro prowess - superior ability, skill

to dub - (here) to call, name, nickname

to prevail - to prove more powerful than opposing forces

intricate - very complicated

intractable - hard to control

buzz - make a humming sound

malapropism - a ridiculous misuse of words, especially through confusion caused by resemblance in sound

More on the Web

Baseball glossary: <http://www.pbs.org/kenburns/baseball/beginners/glossary.html>

Baseball rules in Wikipedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baseball_rules

Major League Baseball official web site: <http://mlb.mlb.com/index.jsp>

Minor League Baseball official web site: <http://www.minorleaguebaseball.com/index.jsp>

National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum: <http://web.baseballhalloffame.org/index.jsp>

Video clips are also available here!

The World Series: <http://mlb.com/mlb/ps/index.jsp>

About the **baseball cap** in Wikipedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baseball_cap