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Special Collections *Flyer*

Play Ball!

Special Collections is, as its name suggests, focused on collections, or aggregates of material which form a coherent resource for teaching and research. However, once in a while individual books or other items are particularly apt at revealing a present much changed from the past.

Such is the case with the book under discussion here, *The Base Ball Player's Book of Reference, Containing the Rules of the Game for 1866; with an Explanatory Appendix; Full Instructions for Umpires; Instructions on Scoring; the Three Best Averages of Each Club for 1865, etc.*, published in New York by J.C. Haney & Co. The recently completed World Series provides an appropriate opportunity to take a look at it, although the men who prepared this book would no doubt have been astonished to know that a future world champion team would come from what was to them a sparsely populated, mosquito and alligator-infested swamp, and would on top of it be named after a tropical fish!

As will be seen, however, team names and locations are not the only changes that the sport of baseball has undergone in the last 130 or so years.

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There has been much debate about certain aspects of the history of baseball. Clearly it was not invented by Abner Doubleday in Cooperstown, New York. Just as clearly, the sport was one of the chief amusements of Union soldiers during the Civil War. This small volume, measuring 5¾ by 3¾ inches, with a mere 76 pages, is proof of how quickly baseball became a serious matter in the year after the end of that conflict.

The unnamed authors of this rule book were at pains to invoke seriousness of purpose. "The physique of Americans", they note in the Introduction, "has long been a vulnerable point for the attacks of foreigners on the weaknesses of our countrymen, and hitherto we have only too-well merited the palpable hits made by our healthy out-door-sport-loving cousins of England." Not only would baseball "bring us up to the physical standard of our forefathers," but it would also, therefore, enable Americans to be seen as the equals of those English cousins, at least on the



