

# John T. Brush—A Power in Baseball

By John B. Foster

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Illustration from Photograph

**J**OHN T. BRUSH, the president of the New York National League baseball club, and the principal owner, has been called a "man of mystery" because he has a mind of his own and goes about baseball business in his own way.

To his friends, his intimate friends, he never has been a man of mystery, but one who was known to be possessed of a powerful mind, and a determination which never has been daunted by obstacles, whether or no they seemed to be insurmountable.

He has suggested policies in the National League which have been voted down; he has formulated plans which have not been agreed upon; he has proposed legislation which has not been accepted; he has opposed officials whom he thought were unwise and injudicious in their actions—only to be antagonized by other members of the organization to which he belongs, yet he never has complained.

"You can make me swallow a bitter dose," said he one day to the National League, "but you can't make me like it."

That is characteristic of the owner of the Giants. If his policies have been turned down, if his suggestions have been thrust aside, if his counsels have been overruled, he has gone quietly on from day to day, subscribing faithfully to the rules which bind the organization together, and trusting that ultimately those who are associated with him will see matters as he does; and it is an historical fact that in the long run the course which was earliest outlined by John T. Brush has come to be that of the league of which he is a part.

Mr. Brush has been in baseball longer than any man in the National League.

He began to turn his attention to the national game when some of the men now connected with it were infants in arms.

First associated with professional baseball in Indianapolis, in the days when to be an owner or part owner of a major league team in the West meant an almost certain deficit at the end of the season, he devoted some part of his time toward formulating some method by which baseball could live, and the brunt of its support not be borne by the weaker clubs.

For that was the case in the earlier days of professional baseball. The smaller cities made little, or nothing, and more often lost on the season. The larger cities did not care whether the smaller won or lost. There was absolutely no co-operation between the club owners. The men who held the franchises in the more important cities were interested solely in having a circuit of eight clubs for each ensuing season. They did not care whether the circuit was made up of Tallahatchee or Tombigbee, if it was complete. They never went to the owner of the Indianapolis club, or the Cleveland club, or a club in some city of like population and said: "It has been a hard year for you; let's see whether we cannot arrange a method by which you will be able to recoup yourselves for the losses that you have incurred."

Not a bit of it. They met in annual session, boasted that their cities made all the money for the organization, and bullied the weaker clubs into accepting the crumbs which dropped from the table, with the alternative of getting out of baseball altogether if they did not like it.

John T. Brush is accredited with having formulated the classification plan from which ensued the brotherhood war in baseball. When it was proposed, the ball-players—that part of them at least who were the fortunate ones and who were obtaining the huge salaries which were possible in cities like New York and Chicago—denounced Mr. Brush bitterly, even savagely, and the rank and file of ball-players, who did not dig very deeply into what the proposition meant, and who were quick to follow the leaders of their own forces, took up the issue and also criticized the then owner of the Indianapolis club.

Yet the only fault with Mr. Brush's idea was that it was too altruistic. It was twenty years ahead of the times. It simply meant an equalization of salaries, so that the player in the smaller cities would receive wages on a par with those in the larger cities. The players in the smaller cities in reality were benefited by it, but they never got far enough into the merits of the plan to understand it. They merely saw that some \$5,000 salary somewhere was pared down, perhaps to \$3,000, and it seemed to them a heinous offence against their welfare, not recognizing the fact that their own salaries of \$1,500 had been increased \$500 and even more in some cases by the operation of the same rule.

Mr. Brush meant well and his plan ultimately has come to be adopted, though after a somewhat different fashion, throughout the league, and by the medium of another act of legislation for which he was a sponsor, which reconstructed all the business policy of the oldest organization in baseball.

Perhaps one of the greatest achievements of the career of John T. Brush, possibly the greatest, was the consolidation of the American Association with the National League in 1891, and the end of a war, which was as baneful as others in which baseball interests have been involved from time to time.

It may be added that it was one of the greatest triumphs in the history of professional baseball. Not only was the war ended, but when the articles of agreement were signed between the various owners of the two leagues, it was with the understanding that in the

future gate receipts should be divided on a fifty per cent. basis. From the moment that the ink dried on that document, the future of the smaller cities in professional baseball was secure, for at last they could afford to branch out and endeavor to compete on the same playing plane as the larger organizations.

Ask the owner of the Giants what he thinks the greatest of his baseball successes, and it is safe to say that he will reply, "the winning of the championship by the New York club in 1905." It is almost impossible to draw forth a word of conversation from him in regard to the part which he has played in baseball legislation. Perhaps there are not more than a dozen men with whom he will converse on such topics, and those usually are intimate friends who have been through some of his baseball battles with him, and know how persistently and with what personal self-sacrifice he has worked to bring about results which he thought were for the general good.

Talk to him about his baseball club, and about the achievements of his players, and he is as great a baseball "fan" as the wildest "bleacherite," who sits in the Polo Ground and is alternately in ecstasy or despair.

From the time that John T. Brush got into baseball he was madly infatuated with the idea of winning the championship. When he was the owner of the Indianapolis club, his one idea was to put together an organization which would be strong enough to bring terror to the hearts of the New York, Chicago and Boston teams, which carried off the lion's share of baseball honors.

He bent all his energy to get together a team which would make a fine showing in the National League. "The only trouble that we had at that time," said he one day, when he was discussing baseball with his usual dry humor, "was that those of us who were the 'small fry' had to dig down in our jeans and pay for the fun that we had in traveling around to New York and Boston, while the New York and Boston people had money thrown at them and traveled in superior style out to our cities and lorded it over us."

After he acquired the franchise of the

Cincinnati club, he was still bent on winning a championship. One day while in the East, attendant upon a league meeting, he was joking with Frank DeH. Robison, his warmest personal friend in baseball. The Cleveland owner, as usual, was laughing at Mr. Brush because he never had won a pennant, and referred to the fact that Cleveland had at least finished second, which was more than could be said for Cincinnati.

"Never mind," replied Mr. Brush, "I'm not through yet. I'll bet you that I win a championship in the National League before you do."

They made a wager of a dinner and Mr. Brush won, although at that time neither of the men had the faintest idea that the championship would be captured by Mr. Brush as the owner of the Giants, one of the most famous clubs in all baseball history.

The present New York owner spent money right and left when he was with Cincinnati. He purchased release after release, that seemed as if it would do the Cincinnati club good, but with the usual run of misfortune which had followed Cincinnati for years, it seemed out of the question to get championship work from the players.

One day there came an opening to buy the New York club. But one or two men in the United States knew that it could be purchased. John T. Brush was one of them. He lost no time in acquiring the necessary amount of stock which would put him in control of one of the oldest baseball organizations in the United States. There was no publicity in regard to the deal, until after it was completed, although there were a very few who knew that it would possibly be made.

With the New York club he secured the services of John J. McGraw as manager, turned the playing end of the organization over to him, and after waiting a year, finally had the hope of a lifetime realized when the Giants won the championship, and he was the president and owner of the organization.

For years suffering from an illness that has at times almost been unbearable—rheumatism of the most painful description—it is rarely that this baseball pioneer has been heard to utter a word

of complaint. Now and then the malady has been so violent that involuntary groans of agony have escaped the invalid, but so far as personal courage is concerned, John T. Brush bears his illness with the fortitude that he bears adverse legislation and the criticism of others.

"I never pretended," said he to the writer, "that everything which I suggested to the National League was right. I have made it clear that several things, which have been suggested by me were right, in spite of the fact that they were rejected at the time, and taken up afterward, when it was seen that they could not be avoided. I have sometimes been absent at National League meetings merely because I did not propose to waste my time where I knew that I would be overridden by men who were either hard to convince or purposely stubborn. I proved my point repeatedly when I was called upon to do so, and I shall be able to prove it again when the time makes it necessary, and I never worry about what is done, so long as it is done legally. I confess frankly that I am not satisfied with the policy of the National League in all things, but I don't suppose that there ever has been a man who was."

It has been to his intimate friends, too, that he has revealed another side of his nature—that of assisting the needy and the worthy, and keeping his charity concealed. Many a ball-player, who has been with John T. Brush, has been helped during the winter months, and never knew the source from which he had been assisted. Many a ball-player without funds has been relieved by the same source, although the contribution was sent anonymously.

On the other hand, there have been those who would, without justification, seek to obtain assistance from the New York owner. As chilly a reception greeted them as the warmth which this man of moods can throw into his conversation when he is at his best with his friends.

In the last two years, especially, the Giants and the Polo Ground have been his hobby. Started on the way to improve the field in New York, on which the games are played for the champion-

ship of the National League, he has determined that it shall be the handsomest baseball ground in United States. He is wrapped up in the idea of giving New York baseball patrons a finer home for professional baseball than can be found in other cities.

Perhaps the rebuilt stand on the Polo Ground may lack the stability of those magnificent new structures which are to be erected in other cities, but it is unquestionably true that the New York owner has so improved the buildings in his home city that he has one of the most artistic parks in the United States and when all the details are completed it

will most certainly be a feast of beauty. Divided with the attention which he puts on the fitting for the game, is that which he puts on the players for his team. "I am going to win that National League championship once more," said he to the writer. "I had it won in 1908, but they euchred me out of it. I'll have it won in the year to come, or in some other year to come, merely to show that I am still in baseball. The law, they said, took the championship away from us in 1908. It wasn't a case for law, but for justice. Poetic justice will give it again to the Giants where it belongs."



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