

THE AUDIT COMES IN; EVERYONE PUT ON NOTICE

COMMISSIONER'S AUDIT OF FINANCES FINDS ILLICIT PAYMENTS COMMONPLACE

NEW YORK CITY (Mar. 11, 1867) – During the Postseason Meeting last November, the NBBO commissioner let it be known that it was time for clubs to come forward and be honest about cash payments to players, and he had the backing of law enforcement to get to the bottom of the situation if anyone tried to stall or refuse to cooperate. The details of the investigation were revealed at the Spring Meeting of the NBBO Executive Committee, and those details were simultaneously stunning and unsurprising.

First up: discussion of the clubs. The investigation showed that EVERY ONE of the NBBO's 48 clubs was paying somebody under the table. Some clubs, like Cantabrigians & Eagle, were only doing it for a few players. However, the most dominant clubs in the sport were handing out cash to half of their roster or more. During the previous season, three of the teams that made the Tucker-Wheaton Cup – Alleghany, Knickerbocker, & St. John's – passed out more cash to players than all others, and two others – Excelsior & Shamrock – were in the top seven. The only cup team that did not flagrantly throw around cash was Syracuse, whose total spending outlay was 25th out of 48. The highest spenders were exactly who one would expect: cup teams or clubs from major metropolitan areas like American, Atlantic, & Orange.

When auditing the financials and bank statements from previous years, some truly eye-watering stuff came out with regards to the players. To keep him from leaving Green Mountain, Anthony Mascherino was given \$1,000 in 1863, then \$1,450 in 1864, and then a staggering \$1,775 in 1865. That was not the \$70 to \$140 he was supposed to receive while playing in Vermont. Jim Creighton of Excelsior was another player who was receiving over \$1,000 per season. Willie Davis was given a four-figure amount to leave Susquehanna for American in 1865. St. John's was revealed to be paying Konrad Jensen \$1,500 to play for them in 1867. Finally, Kings County was going to give Cormack Alexander \$1,100 for the upcoming season.

The investigation found no fewer than 30 players who had been given at least \$500 to play during the 1866 season and 26 more who were set to be paid \$600 or more during the 1867 season, with every payment making the NBBO's official stipend of \$70 to \$140 look at best like a suggestion, and at worst like a joke.

What was going on was not Amateurism, but "Shamateurism". At the same time, what exactly could the commissioner do about it? Was he going to throw every notable metropolitan-based club out of the competition? Was he going to ban every single star player? Was he going to demand repayments of possibly tens of thousands of dollars from individual clubs? Every avenue of punishment seemed impossible on its face, because every club had at least one player who was being given more than the maximum stipend of \$140. Eagle, the NBBO's smallest club, only had two such players, but they still had two.

There was some good news. When the commissioner threw down the gauntlet on the issue of player payments in November, it spooked the clubs that were spending the most money under the table. While the celebrated James Burke did end up with Shamrock, the front office gave him \$600 when in winters past such a talented player might have received \$1,000 or more. Another example was Per-Olaf Bakken, who was paid more than \$800 by Kings County three years ago but after the investigation was announced was only given about 2/3 of that amount to come back to the club after two seasons with Orange. Of the 25 players who were making the most under-the-table cash, only two were with new clubs for 1867, another sign that November's announcement had an effect on the behavior NBBO front offices.

In the end, the commissioner and his top men told every club that an illicit financial arms race could not continue. While he would not ban those involved since it would basically mean throwing out more than half the clubs and roughly 1/3 of the players in one fell swoop, it was time for the most flagrant rule-flaunting to stop. Furthermore, he also stated if upcoming seasons showed that the clubs were making enough money that the best players were still being paid handsomely, then it just might be time for a radical reconsideration on how the sport is run.