

# **NBBO TO ALLOW SELECT PLAYERS TO BE PAID**

## **UNABLE TO STOP FLOW OF CASH, NBBO WINTER MEETINGS START WITH RADICAL CHANGE**

NEW YORK CITY (Nov. 10-13, 1868) – Ever since the audit of the National Base Ball Organization's member clubs started after the Winter Meetings of 1866 and wrapped up in early March of 1867, the issue of payments to players has constantly been at the forefront in the minds of members of both NBBO Headquarters and the NBBO Executive Committee.

While the 1866-67 audit did succeed in keeping rampant use of illicit payments to players in check, payments to players in relation to ability instead of in relation to need were still continuing. This was a simple matter of economics – even charging just a dime per ticket left nearly every one of the NBBO's 48 clubs with plenty of extra cash lying around after the end of each season, and it all had to go somewhere.

So, after two years of treading water on the amateurism front, the NBBOEC opened the 1868 Winter Meetings at the St. Nicholas Hotel with a radical proposal: since nearly every team is still paying numerous players for more than just living expenses and meal per diems, why not simply allow them to pay select players what the club feels they are worth?

The idea was met with a mix of enthusiasm and relief from most of the clubs, although staunch believers in amateurism like Cantabrigians, Eagle, & Eckford responded to the question with dismay. On one side was men who felt that base ball had become popular enough that it was a legitimate way to earn a living, and on the other side was men who felt that base ball should remain a pastoral game played for the sake of leisure and entertainment.

The proposal itself described who exactly would be eligible to paid to play base ball and have it all above board:

- Members of the current season's six regional champions
- All-Stars from the previous five seasons
- Major Award winners from the previous five seasons
- Golden Glove winners from the previous five seasons
- Team of the Year nominees from the previous five seasons

Given that only one out of every eight teams won their region each year, there are only two sets of award winners in the 48-team organization, and some players would overlap eligibility categories, the NBBOEC figured that it would lead to an amount of players eligible to become professional that worked out to 3-4 per 18-man senior squadron.

This proposal would turn the NBBO's teams into organizations somewhere between amateur and professional, a sort of "semi-professional" set of clubs that would use amateur players as their base while filling out their rosters with paid stars. Would it lead to clashes and resentment between the per diem players and the big money players? It certainly could, but such splits between groups of players were already in place on many of the NBBO's teams. Now it was simply being made official.

The proposal was passed on day two of the Winter Meetings, as many of the clubs voted yes with the rationale that formalizing player payments was not going to change how much cash was being spent and who it was going to. The one big remaining issue was payments to stars from independent clubs to get them to come into the NBBO ranks, but that was not something the clubs were able to work out. After all, how could the organization define which independent ball players were skilled enough to receive extra cash to play in the NBBO? Logistically, it seemed impossible on the face of it.

And with that, an extremely contentious issue that the NBBO had been dealing with shortly after its inception was finally conquered. However, if teams were finally able to treat some players as professionals, how long would it be before a group of teams argued that the sport was big enough that all players should be eligible to become professional?