

FOUNDERS' CUP VI: NIAGARA VERSUS GOLIATH

BUFFALO & PHILADELPHIA (Aug. 22-26, 1876) – Last year's Founders' Cup was a bit of a surprise. American was expected to handily beat their Colonial Conference opposition, Alleghany, who ended the season in terrible form. Instead, the series was another seven-game classic that featured a No-Hitter in Game Five and a ninth-inning rally to force Game Seven. American did come out on top, but it was a much closer series than expected.

Founders' Cup VI again featured American B.C., who was looking to win the A.P.B.L. title for the fourth time in five years, a run of championships no team has ever done. The opposition: Niagara B.B.C. who managed to vault itself from last place in the Colonial Conference in 1875 to first place in 1876, clinching a most unlikely pennant on the season's final day.

Niagara had an extremely difficult road to the Founders' Cup. Part of a three-way for the Colonial Conference lead on July 20th, they took a two-game lead by the end of the month and it would grow to three for only one day (Aug. 11). Going into the final day they were one game ahead of St. John's and were able to match a St. John's rout of Alleghany with a four-run win at Shamrock to complete an incredible worst-to-first season and make the playoffs for the first time since they were part of the N.B.B.O. in 1868.

American's road to the Founders' Cup was easier than it was last year. There was no 14-1 August surge by a contender that they had to defend against. Instead, the three-time champions were able to keep second-place Knickerbocker 5+ games behind them for the final two and a half weeks, taking the Metropolitan pennant with a week to spare.

Niagara made it to the Founders' Cup with pitching and defense. Their pitching duo of Tomoharu Mukai & Jack Smith ranked 3rd in combined ERA, while their fielders, led by Clyde Hudspeth & William Schumacher, ranked 2nd out of the league's sixteen teams in Efficiency & Zone Rating.

American made the Founders' Cup the same way they always had: terrifying offense that could never be held in check.

American was the favorite going in. Would they take their fourth title in half a decade? Or would 1876's surprise team have the biggest surprise of all up their sleeves?

GAME ONE (Glenwood Field in Philadelphia): NIA 5-6 AME
P.o.t.G: CF James Burke (AME) 2/5 (2B, 3 TB), 1 R, 3 RBI, GW HIT

It looked like Niagara might actually take the opener, and then...

Niagara scored first when CF Charles Barrett hit a one-run Single in T1. However, American didn't take long to reverse that by scoring via Error & Ground Out during B2 to go ahead 2-1. It would be 3-1 in B3 when Burke hit a one-run Single.

Niagara put up a four-run rally, the key hit a two-run Triple by RF Reginald Roper, to take a 5-3 lead. After that, there was no more scoring through the end of the 8th and it looked like worst-to-first Niagara just might knock off American to open the series. Then, with one out in B9 and two men on RF Franklin Petty hit a one-run Single to make it a 5-4 game and, of course, Burke followed with a two-run Double to win the game and save American some series-opening embarrassment.

GAME TWO (Glenwood Field in Philadelphia): NIA 4-14 AME
P.o.t.G: 3B William Carrigan (AME) 2/5 (both 1B), 2 R, 2 RBI

Game Two was a pounding by American to take a 2-0 series lead.

The hosts came to bat in B1 and scored three times, twice thanks to a Single by LF George Kassabian and once via Ground Out, and they added five more runs in the 3rd, the main moment a two-run Single by RF Franklin Petty, to take a commanding 8-0 lead that was never in any trouble. Niagara scored four runs over the middle innings to cut the deficit in half, but American sent five across the plate in B7 to go back ahead by nine before adding another run in B8.

GAME THREE (Greater N.Y. Sporting Grounds in Buffalo): AME 13-3 NIA
P.o.t.G: CF James Burke (AME) 3/6 (all 1B), 1 R, 3 RBI, 2 SB

Game Three was another American pounding that put the visitors one victory from championship #4.

American scored twice in the 2nd on Singles by LF George Kassabian & C Raynard Steinbach, twice in the 3rd on Singles by Kassabian & 1B William Busby, and two more times in the 4th on a two-run Single by Burke. That put American ahead 6-1,

and after Niagara scored twice in the 6th they responded with a seven-run 7th, the big moment a two-run Single by RF Franklin Petty, to make it 13-3 and end the game as a contest. The series was now 3-0 to mighty American.

GAME FOUR (Greater N.Y. Sporting Grounds in Buffalo): AME 8-6 NIA

P.o.t.G: RF Franklin Petty (AME) 2/5 (2B, 3 TB), 1 R, 1 RBI, 2 SB

Of course it was going to be American. It's always American.

After a two-run Triple by 3B William Carrigan put the visitors ahead 2-1 in T2, a third run scored via Wild Pitch. With the 3rd & 4th going by scoreless, Niagara scored three times in B5, the big hit a two-run Single by 1B Sweeney Martin, to go ahead 4-3. Single runs by American in the 6th & 7th made it 5-4, but Niagara came right back and took the lead 6-5 in B7 on another two-run Single by Martin. Then...

American came to bat in the 9th and, with men on first & third, Petty hit a one-run Single to tie the game 6-6. The next batsman, CF James Burke, hit another run-scoring Single to give American a 7-6 lead. A Wild Pitch then allowed in another run to make it 8-6 to American, and that was all Simeon DiStefano needed as he set the Niagara men down 1-2-3 in B9, and American had taken the series in a sweep.

For American, it was the fourth time in five years they were crowned the best team in the sport of baseball. There was **ABSOLUTELY** no more questioning the power of this team from Philadelphia, one that had so clearly conquered a league that was supposed to be a party of equals when the split with the N.B.B.O. happened ahead of the 1871 season.

For Niagara, becoming the victim of the Founders' Cup's first sweep was an embarrassing way to end the season, but in the end nothing could take away from the fact that they made it there by going from last place to first in the Colonial, as well as the fact that they took the pennant by fending off St. John's on the season's final day.

FOUNDERS' CUP MOST VALUABLE PLAYER

CF James Burke (AME) – .381 (8/21), 8 RBI, 3 R, 1 2B, 4 SB, 1.0 WPA, 0.2 WAR, 2x P.o.t.G.

Naturally, in an American sweep of the Founders' Cup it was James Burke who was their best player. He was the Player of the Game in both the opener and the closer, and while William Carrigan (.389) & Martin Prince (.400) had higher Averages it was Burke who led both teams in Hits, RBI, & Stolen Bases.

As rough as the Founders' Cup was for Niagara, they did have a few players put in a good word for themselves. Irving Polk (.400), Sweeney Martin (.412), & Arthur Bliss (.429) all hit .400 or better, and Martin had six RBI. The big problem: the rest of the lineup was nonexistent, especially All-Stars Clyde Hudspeth & Reginald Roper, who combined to hit 3/31.

FOUNDERS' CUP SUMMARY

American Baseball Club win series, 4 to 0.

Game 1: American Baseball Club defeat Niagara Base Ball Club, 6 to 5:

American Baseball Club Takes 1-0 Series Lead with Walk-off Win

W: J. Everhart (1-0) L: T. Mukai (0-1)

HR - None

Boxscore Game Log

Game 2: American Baseball Club defeat Niagara Base Ball Club, 14 to 4:

American Baseball Club Tops Niagara Base Ball Club Again, 14-4

W: S. DiStefano (1-0) L: J. Smith (0-1)

HR - None

Boxscore Game Log

Game 3: American Baseball Club defeat Niagara Base Ball Club, 13 to 3:

Niagara Base Ball Club Lose Third Straight, 13-3

W: J. Everhart (2-0) L: T. Mukai (0-2)

HR - None

Boxscore Game Log

Game 4: American Baseball Club defeat Niagara Base Ball Club, 8 to 6:

Founders' Cup Sweep to American Baseball Club

W: S. DiStefano (2-0) L: J. Smith (0-2) S: W. Strickland (1)

HR - None

Boxscore Game Log

Series MVP: CF James Burke (American Baseball Club)