

Classic post-war finals in British baseball

Joe Gray ★ 28 March 2009

This article has been written for Project Cobb (the Project for the Chronicling of British Baseball).

Historical documents covering baseball in Britain are not nearly as abundant as they are for baseball in the United States, but we do have some materials. For instance, thanks primarily to baseball historian William Morgan, there is a comprehensive list of national final scores dating back to 1890, along with a note of which finals went into extra innings.

When scanning through the list, it is difficult for someone with an interest in the history of baseball in Britain not to wonder what each game was like and, in particular, which the classics were. I decided to take this a step further, by drawing up a list of the classic finals based on the scorelines and then hunting for information on each game. The details presented have been cross-checked where possible.

What makes a classic final?

While a classic final may have many ingredients, such as a great individual performance or a number of changes in the lead, I had only the scorelines in each final to go on, as well as that note of the games that went into extra innings. Still, using this minimal information I was able to produce a reasonable definition: a final shall be considered as a classic if the winning margin of the deciding game was a single run or if the game went to extra innings. Any final meeting either of these criteria must have been an exciting one.

Of course, some of the more exciting finals may be missed: if a team overturned a deficit in the last inning to win by 2 or more runs, that will not be picked up by my definition. Nevertheless, the list should at least be free of non-classics.

Year	Result
1900	Nottingham Forest 17 – 16 Derby
1907	Clapton Orient 8 – 7 Derby
1908	Tottenham Hotspur 6 – 5 Leyton
1911	Leyton 6 – 5 Crystal Palace
1934	Hatfield (Liverpool) 13 – 12 Albion (Liverpool)
1938	Rochdale Greys 1 – 0 Oldham Greyhounds

Table 1. Classic finals played before World War II.

Finals satisfying the “classic” definition

To give myself a chance of finding further details for all games on the list of classics, I constrained my hunt for information to those finals played after World War II. However, I will still note the finals played before 1940 that met the definition (see Table 1). Baseball purists may pick out the 1938 game, which is the only contest in history with a 1–0 scoreline, and is thus perhaps *the* classic final.

Across all of the national finals played – including those of the semi-professional Scottish Amicable league of 1987–1989 and also those of a renegade, parallel national league in 1992–1994 – a best-of-three format has been used 12 times (there was a gap of over 100 years between the first such final, in 1890, and the second one, in 1991). A deciding third game has been played in four of these finals (1991, 1994, 1996, and 2006), but the third game has always been decided by more than 1 run. Still, it is worth noting that the 1991 final involved three 2-run games (the Enfield Spartans defeated the London Athletics in that series).

All other finals have been single games; of these, four were decided by 1 run without extra innings, one was decided by 1 run in extra innings, and one went to extra innings but ended up with a winning

margin of more than 1 run. These are the six classic finals making up the list, and the years concerned are 1969, 1976, 1979, 1984, 1989 (Scottish Amicable league), and 1993 (renegade league). If you do not have time to learn what I managed to find out about each of these games and just want to know the results, then I direct you to the website *British Baseball Data*, where you can find scores for post-World War II finals (<http://www.britishbaseballdata.co.uk/>). For those of you who are going to stick around, I will tackle the games in chronological order, listing the competing teams within each final in alphabetical order, rather than using the more traditional winners-first format, to avoid spoiling the result.

1969: Liverpool Trojans versus Watford Sun-Rockets

Liverpool Trojans

Although this is the earliest of our six contests, the Trojans are the only team involved in a classic final to still be in existence. Getting some historical background information on the team was thus relatively easy: I did not need to look further than the club's website (<http://www.liverpooltrojansbaseball.co.uk/>). A collection of historical articles on the site provides the following details.

A team named the Halton Trojans was formed in 1946 by a group of ex-servicemen. They were based in a pub in West Derby called the Halton Castle, which is where the "Halton" in the team's name came from (the manager of the pub took on the same role for the team). The Halton Castle served beer to a number of other baseball teams, and it was Alan Robertson, coach of the Liverpool Robins, who suggested that the Halton Trojans should form a competitive outfit after seeing promise in a friendly between these two teams.

The team's home ground was at Bellefield in Liverpool (where Everton Football Club trained), which confirms that there was no link to the Halton to the south-east of the city. An American named Eddie O'Melia, who had played professionally for the Liverpool Giants before World War II, was asked to be player-coach.

The pub also contributed the "Trojans" part of the team's name. The brewery Higsons produced a brand called Trojan beer, which was most team



Figure 1. The Halton Trojans in 1948, their third season. After folding in 1958 they would later reform as the Liverpool Trojans.

members' preferred drink. A barmaid referred to the team as "the Trojans in the back room" and this stuck when it came to decide on the moniker.

The Trojans (pictured in Figure 1 in 1948) survived until 1958, when they folded owing to a lack of interest. In 1964, the team was re-formed as the Liverpool Trojans, but only a few of the original members remained. One of those members was Norman Wells, Sr, who led the new team, entering it in the league for the 1965 season.

Watford Sun-Rockets

Since moving from South London to Hertfordshire in 2006, I have been interested to learn more about the Watford Sun-Rockets, as this is the only team from the county to make a national final. Some initial probing turned up one lead, which was that the team may have been linked to Sun Chemical, a producer of printing inks and pigments. Wanting some more details for the purpose of this article, I phoned William Morgan (the baseball historian mentioned in this article's opening paragraph). He offered a different explanation for the "Sun" in the team's name and supplied additional details too.

The team's beginnings can be traced back a few years from the 1969 final to 1964, when the Middlesex Athletics formed a second side known as the Middlesex Bees. After a split led by Peter Ash (who had previously chaired the Southern Baseball Association's foreign relations sub-committee), the team was renamed Barnet Quinta, giving rise to the rather unusual sight of a "Q" on a baseball cap. They competed in the league as Barnet from 1966 until 1968 and played home games at the Grange Playing Field. At some point before the 1969 season,

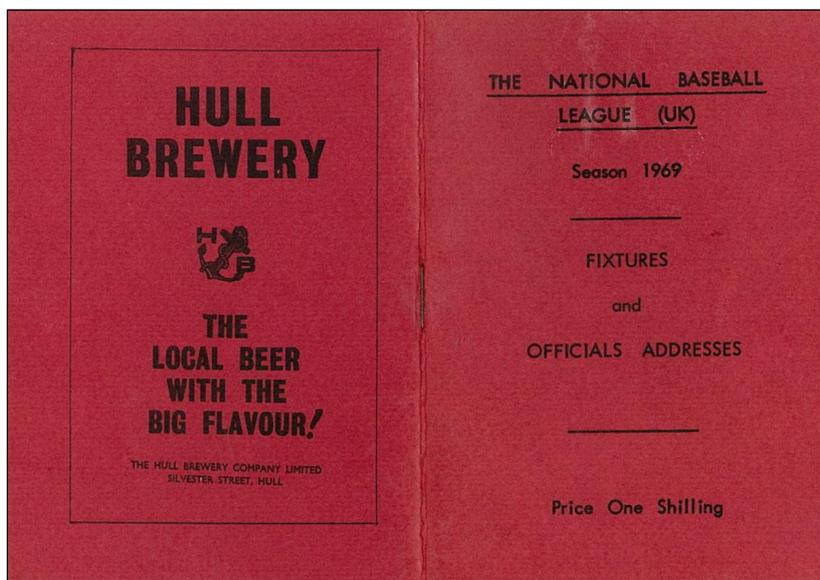


Figure 2. Cover of the fixtures book for the National Baseball League (UK) in 1969.

links were made with a firm called Sun Printers, which was based in Watford (Sun Printers does not appear to have been associated with the Sun Chemical of my original lead). Through this relationship with Sun Printers, a number of draughtsmen joined the team, and their relatively high salaries allowed the club to request annual subs at a time when most baseball teams had to settle for charging players by the game. Morgan also recalled that Oxhey playing fields in Watford served as the team's home ground.

With the provenance of "Sun" explained, I asked Morgan what the term "Rockets" could be attributed to. The explanation he gave was that the US Air Force base in Ruislip passed on their uniforms to the club, and that the word "Rockets" adorned the shirts (incidentally, the Ruislip Rockets made it to the national final in 1951, losing 9-2 to the Burtonwood Bees, also a US Air Force side, in what is Britain's only final to date between two teams of servicemen). It was not unusual for baseball equipment to be given or sold to the general public by bases around this time, making it hard to keep a baseball section in a sports shop. Lillywhites, for instance, tried to cater for baseball players, but without success.

Paths to the final

It is worth pointing out at this stage that not all British finals have been played between teams making it through a play-off after qualifying from the

top league. The 1969 national final provides a good counter-example, and I am able to supply the details courtesy of a schedule booklet for the 1969 season that I was lent by John Thomas (see Figure 2). Thomas was a baseball player of that era, the era before, and the era after, and we shall encounter him as a player in the classic final of 1984.

The game played between Watford and Liverpool was the final of the National League Cup competition, which was open to all affiliated clubs, much

like the FA Cup is in football. At the time, the top tier in Britain was known as the Major League. Watford played in the Southern Senior League, which was in the second tier, while Liverpool played in the North Western Regional League, in the third tier. It is quite likely that the tier a team ended up in depended as much on geography and willingness to travel as it did on ability.

According to the schedule booklet, to get to the final Watford needed to beat Brighton on 11 May, then Benfleet or Richmond on 8 June, before facing Sutton, who received a bye to this stage of the competition, on 29 June. Finally, Watford required a victory over Essex Thames Board Mills or one of four other Southern Senior League teams on 27 July. Similarly, the Trojans needed to defeat Stockport in a preliminary game on 31 May and then the Royals on 28 June, in order to advance as the team from the north west. Victory here set up a match on 3 August at Stockport against the winner from the north-east region (either Nottingham or one of three Hull teams: the Aces, the Priestmen, or the Royals [not to be confused with a team called the Royals from the north west that the Trojans may have faced earlier in the competition]).

The game

The final was played at Harvey Haddon Stadium in Nottingham on Monday 1 September. Aside from this detail (which was in the schedule booklet) and the scoreline, I was not particularly hopeful of finding

information on the final, but I tried a quick Google search nevertheless. Normally, putting “baseball” and a British place name into Google brings up stories about crimes involving bat-wielding or cap-wearing miscreants. I was surprised, then, to quickly find a game report from the final on the website of a local paper in Yorkshire and another in Wiltshire. I am not sure how the report became associated with papers serving two places that are close to neither Liverpool nor Watford, but I’m happy to accept the story as it is and rule out the possibility that it has been planted on the Internet as a spoof to trip up historians of British baseball.

The report, which was almost certainly written by a Sun-Rocket as no Trojans players are mentioned by name, tells of what sounds like a genuine classic. After six innings, with Liverpool leading Watford by a scoreline of 6–3, the Sun-Rockets replaced Phil Lago with Don Spencer. No runs were scored by either side in the seventh, and so the game entered the top of the eighth with the Trojans’ 3-run lead still intact. In that inning, Watford managed to load the bases with two outs, and the substitute Spencer came to the plate. Spencer cleared the bases with a triple to tie the game. The Trojans stranded Spencer at third but could not retake the lead in the bottom half of the frame, and following a scoreless ninth the game entered extra innings.

In the tenth inning, Don Brock scored the go-ahead run for Watford on a sacrifice bunt laid down by Don Cummings, but they did not plate any more runs and this time Liverpool did manage to respond, scoring a tying run to take the game, now standing at 7–7, into the 11th inning. Once more, though, Watford were able to score a run in the top half of the inning, with a player named Lea (a first name is not supplied) being driven in by a hit off the bat of Brock, and this time the Trojans could not keep the game alive, falling 8–7.

While this was undoubtedly an epic contest, the shine is taken off slightly by an accusation that the Sun-Rockets used ringers, a claim that is maintained to this day on the Trojans’ website:

“There was every reason to believe that the Watford team used illegal U.S. Naval players.”

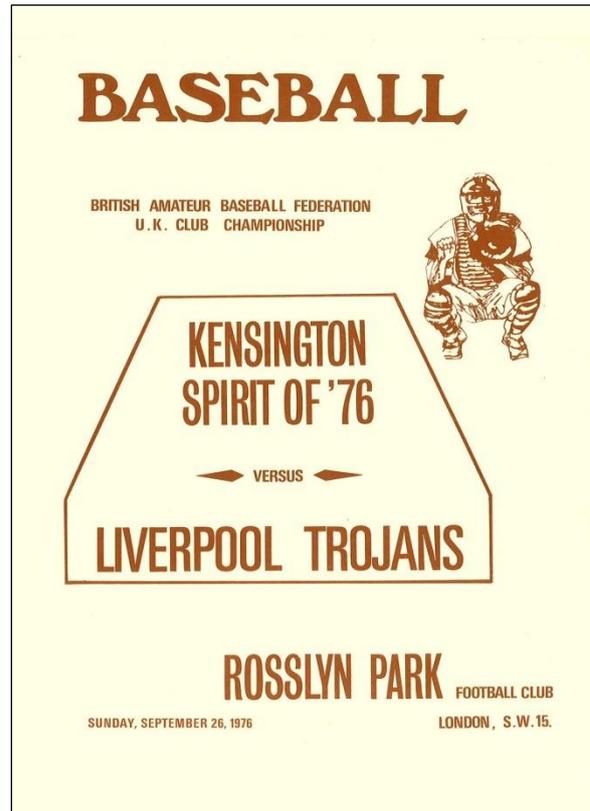


Figure 3. Front cover of the programme for the 1976 national final, between Kensington Spirit of '76 and the Liverpool Trojans.

After the final

Watford disappeared from the British baseball scene pretty quickly after 1969; in fact, it is possible that this was the team’s last competitive game. In contrast, the Liverpool Trojans are still in existence, as mentioned earlier in this section, making them the oldest extant team in the country, and by quite a margin.

The Trojans had to wait 7 years for another chance to capture a first national title. Between these two appearances by the Trojans, their local rivals the Liverpool Tigers won the national final twice, in 1971 and in 1975. So what happened in 1976?

1976: Kensington Spirit of '76 versus Liverpool Trojans

I have a relative wealth of information for this final:

- ★ a programme (see Figure 3) and scoresheet lent to me by long-time baseball fan Dennis Newman;
- ★ issue 14 of *Baseball Mercury*, from December 1976 (<http://www.gbbsa.org.uk/mercury.html>);
- ★ personal correspondence from Jeff Archer, the manager of Spirit of '76 and author of *Strike Four: Adventures in European Baseball*, a book he

published in 1995 on his involvement in European baseball in the 1970s and 1980s;

- ★ personal correspondence, press clippings, and a scoresheet from Norman Wells, Sr, the Trojans' team manager.

Kensington Spirit of '76

The Spirit of '76 team – named after a clothing wholesaler that provided financial backing – was established in 1976 by Jeff Archer, an American. Archer had first encountered baseball being played in Britain on his honeymoon in 1973. Returning in 1975 with a job as a sales representative for an American sporting goods company, he was offered the role as manager of the Crawley Giants. In 1976 he expanded his involvement in British baseball by becoming President of the Southern Baseball League, as well as managing his new team.

Liverpool Trojans

The Trojans' history is covered in the previous section. It is worth adding here that the Liverpool side is the only team to appear in two classic finals, as defined in this article.

Paths to the final

Kensington Spirit of '76 won the southern area league and met the Nottingham Lions, Midlands league champions, in a one-game play-off for a spot in the national final. The southern side were comfortable 7–0 victors behind Ken Shugg's three-hit shut-out. The team had many pitching options besides Shugg, including a 16-year-old southpaw named Gary Charles, who was born in Swindon and raised in America, and who had a fastball peaking at around 80 miles per hour. Star batters included the youthful Simon Mundy and Shaun Ward, and the more experienced Al Brown, Randy Cooper, and Dave Draper. Jim Fuldner, who led the Southern Baseball League with a 0.44 earned-run average, did not play in the final, as by September he had graduated from the American School of London and returned to the United States.

The Liverpool Trojans, who went unbeaten in winning the Merseyside league, faced the Hull Royals, champions of Humberside, for a berth in the final. The Trojans won the game 15–10. Liverpool's

Brian Bretherton won the Merseyside league's home run title, while team-mate Art Bolton picked up the pitching award. Other star players included Norman Wells, Jr, Joel Greenberg, and coach Stan Windross, listed in the programme for the final as having batting averages of .500, .452, and .380, respectively. Merseyside All-Stars Kevin Greenall and Josh Jones were also highlighted in the programme notes.

The game

The game was played at the ground of Rosslyn Park Rugby Football Club on Sunday 26 September, with approximately 400 paying spectators in attendance. The starting line-ups are shown in Table 2, with the Trojans, who lost the toss, batting first.

Shugg's second pitch of the game was blasted for a home-run by Liverpool's lead-off, Bretherton. After a strike-out and a fly-out to right field, Wells drew a walk and then advanced to third on a double by Jones. Greenberg grounded out to third, though, to end the top half of the inning. An error by Wells put Ward, the Spirit of '76 lead-off batter, on base, and he was advanced to second on a sacrifice bunt by Mundy. However, Brown popped up to the first baseman and Shugg grounded out to the shortstop for the second and third outs. There were no runs in the next two innings, although Liverpool did load the bases in the second and got a man 90 feet from home in the third, with Wells stealing two bases after receiving a walk, the fourth issued by Shugg.

#	Liverpool Trojans		Kensington Spirit of '76	
1	Brian Bretherton	3B	Shaun Ward	2B
2	Stan Windross	CF	Simon Mundy	3B
3	Art Bolton	P	Al Brown	C
4	Norman Wells, Jr	SS	Ken Shugg	P
5	Joel Greenberg	1B	Dave Draper	LF
6	Carl Moody	2B	Randy Cooper	SS
7	Jimmy Kelly	C	Chris Mann	1B
8	Josh Jones	LF	Gary Charles	CF
9	Kevin Greenall	RF	Mike Shelton	RF

Table 2. Starting line-ups from the 1976 final.

Shugg's control problems continued in the fourth inning, with the first two batters being hit by a pitch. Both of these batters came round to score on a double by Windross after Bretherton had singled. Liverpool now had a 3-run lead, with men on second and third and none out.

Next up was Bolton, the pitcher, and he hit a ground ball to the third baseman. Bretherton attempted to score on the play, but Mundy threw to Brown in time for the tag. While Shugg managed to limit the damage with a pop-up and a fly-out, he was sent to centre-field after the inning, and Draper took the mound.

After the first two batters were retired in the bottom of the fourth, Spirit of '76 got their first hit of the game, a double by Cooper. This was quickly followed by a second double, off the bat of Mann, which drove in the first run of the game for the Londoners. Draper held Liverpool scoreless in the top of the fifth, and Spirit of '76 managed to pull back another run in the bottom of the inning, again with two outs: Shugg drove in Ward with a single after Ward had doubled and stolen third. No runs were plated in the sixth, and Draper continued to dominate the opposing batters with a three-up three-down seventh. In the bottom half of that frame, Shugg again came up to bat with a runner in scoring position, and his double was enough to tie the game at 3-3. This is how it remained going into the eighth after an inning-ending double-play in which Draper struck out and Shugg was thrown out trying to steal third base.

Aided by his sixth and seventh strike-outs of the game, Draper did not allow Liverpool a runner in scoring position in the top of the eighth. Cooper, who had scored the first Spirit of '76 run, led off the bottom of the inning with a single, and then stole second and third, before coming home with the go-ahead run on a ground-out to the pitcher by Charles.

Spirit of '76 took a 1-run lead into the top of the ninth, an inning that Liverpool would start with their clean-up hitter Wells on deck. After a Trojans pep talk, Bolton singled to start off the inning and then took second aided by a thrown ball bouncing off his helmet. Draper got two strikes on Wells, but the Liverpool manager's son ended the at-bat by hitting the baseball out of the park to give Liverpool back the lead. Draper retired the next three batters, but the



Figure 4. The Liverpool Trojans in 1976 (left) and Normal Wells, Jr, in 1986 (right).

Spirit of '76 now had to come to bat needing a run just to keep the game alive.

It was not looking promising for the Londoners after the first two batters were retired, but Brown, the next player up, managed to draw a walk. This brought to the plate Shugg, who had driven in a run in his previous two at-bats. He made good contact with the ball once again, sending it out of the park, but it was a couple of feet foul. He then struck out on a foul-tip to end the game. The Trojans were now national champions, after having come very close in that game 7 years previous.

I added the details of Shugg's final at-bat based on correspondence with Archer, as it does not appear on the scoresheet or in the *Baseball Mercury* game report. Everything else that Archer told me about the final checked out perfectly against the scoresheets; I am certain, therefore, that the game really did come down to this long ball just straying foul.

After the final

This victory was the start of a very successful 5-year spell for the Trojans (pictured in 1976 in Figure 4), with further national titles coming in 1978 and 1980. They were in the final again in 1982, but lost that one to the London Warriors. They have not been back since, although in recent years they have twice lost 1-run semi-finals, going down 6-5 to the Croydon Pirates in 2005 and 2-1 to the London Mets in 2007.

For Spirit of '76, this was the team's one season in the British league. However, the name did live on as Archer kept it for a team he set up in 1977 to play friendlies against European club teams, base sides, and American schools.

While Archer was no longer directly involved in the British league after 1976, part of the legacy he left



Figure 3. The East Hull Aces at the 1962 national final, a game they lost 8–3 to the Liverpool Tigers. Back row (left to right): A Ellerington, I West, D Oates, A Wilson, W Sanderson, D Smallwood, F Parker, J Read, G Jackson, D Akers. Front row (left to right): J Ginley, G Fitzpatrick, P Shorten (manager), G Ackrill, H Sanderson, R Hammond (captain). In front: R Ellerington (mascot).

was the expansion of the Southern Baseball League that he had overseen in his year as President. One of the new teams in 1976 was the Golders Green Sox, who for the previous 2 years had just been playing friendlies. The Green Sox are one of the two teams in our next classic final.

1979: Golders Green Sox versus Hull Aces

Both teams in this final feature in the “Past Great Clubs” section on the *British Baseball Data* website. This gave me an overview of the teams’ backgrounds, which I then supplemented with other details from that website, as well as information from *Baseball Mercury*. Details of the game are taken from a report by Brian Holland in issue 23 of *Baseball Mercury*, which was published in December 1979. The Golders Green Sox stats were supplied by Alan Smith, whose involvement in British baseball of 30 years and counting can be traced back to this final, as this was the game that got him hooked on the sport.

Golders Green Sox

As mentioned in the previous section, the Green Sox started up in 1974, playing just friendlies for two seasons before joining the league in 1976 under manager Jeremy Kilby. After losing nine of 14 games

in their first season in the Southern Baseball League, the team managed to win it all the following year, becoming the first national champions from the south of England since Watford back in 1969. A late surge in the league in 1977 saw the Green Sox emerge as qualifiers from the south, and in the semi-final they defeated the Liverpool Trojans 7–1. In that match the starting pitchers – Art Bolton for the Trojans and Harua Oda for the Green Sox – combined for 27 strike-outs without an unintentional walk. After advancing to the final, the Green Sox beat the Hull Aces 9–5 to take the title. In 1978, though, the Green Sox had another losing season, winning just seven of their 15 league games.

Hull Aces

Playing as the East Hull Aces, their name since 1954, the team won a first national title in 1963, after losses in 1959, to Thames Board Mills, and 1962, to the Liverpool Tigers (see Figure 5 for a photo and [http://www.gbbsa.org.uk/images/1962 final scoresheet.jpg](http://www.gbbsa.org.uk/images/1962%20final%20scoresheet.jpg) for a scoresheet from the 1962 game). Appearing in six more finals over the next 10 years, Hull had lifted the trophy on three further occasions by the mid-1970s. After the 1977 defeat to the Green Sox, which was their tenth appearance in a national final, the 1979 rematch offered a chance for the Humberside team to get even.

Paths to the final

According to a report by Normal Wells, Sr, in issue 23 of *Baseball Mercury*, the Liverpool Trojans won both the Merseyside league and the Humberside league in 1979. The Merseyside league title had to be decided by a play-off on 30 September, which was the last game of the season and one in which the Trojans beat the Liverpool Tigers by 1 run after crossing the plate twice in the ninth inning. The Trojans were losing semi-finalists in the national championships. Given that the Merseyside league title was not decided until after the semi-finals, the Trojans must have advanced as winners of the Humberside league, with the Hull Aces presumably finishing second to also go through.

The Golders Green Sox qualified for the semi-finals after having compiled a 10–2 record in winning the Southern Baseball League (see Table 3). Jim Minkkenen was the team’s main pitcher, posting a 2.50 earned-run average in the league. Dangerous hitters included Brad Thompson and Pete Binns, who averaged .500 and .419, respectively.

The other losing semi-finalist may have been the Bromsgrove Dodgers, who had a perfect record in the Midlands league, but I have not confirmed this.

The game

The final was played at Harvey Haddon Stadium in Nottingham, watched by a crowd making a noise that Brian Holland, in his game report, likened to what you would hear at Wembley on FA Cup final day. Minkkenen took the mound for the Green Sox, and his opposite number was Peter Darnell. Hull batted first in the contest.

Team	Wins	Losses
Golders Green Sox	10	2
Crawley Giants	7	4
Croydon Bluejays	7	5
Sutton Braves	7	5
Wokingham Monarchs	5	6
Thames Board Mills Raiders	5	7
Regents Park Eagles	0	12

Table 3. Finals standings in the Southern Baseball League in 1979.

The Aces opened the scoring in the second inning, with their pitcher reaching second base on a throwing error, stealing third, and then coming home while the Green Sox were busy trying to put out another Ace, who was trapped in a run-down. After that, Minkkenen shut the Aces down, retiring 12 straight batters and not allowing a runner past first through the eighth inning.

Behind Minkkenen’s solid throwing, the Green Sox took the lead in the fifth inning on a 2-run homer to right-centre by Thompson. The pitcher stretched this lead in the seventh inning after reaching second base on an error and then being driven in by a Lee Pierce double to deep left-field.

In the eighth inning, another error by the Aces allowed the Green Sox to score again, with Jim Neffendorf (the 1978 southern batting champion) being the beneficiary of the miscue and Tim Claffey driving him in.

I now pass over to Holland:

“As the game went into the ninth inning and Green Sox were holding a 4–1 lead, they must have thought they had the game wrapped up. No way! [...] Frank Parker led off for the Aces. He got to first base after the Golders Green third baseman, Cyrus Cooper, threw the ball over the first baseman’s head. Johnson followed with a walk. Terry Jarvis singled, allowing Parker to score. Johnson scored after Cooper threw another ball over the head of Mark Savage. B. Read singled, sending Darnell to third. Darnell put Hull back in the lead, when he scored in front of an unsuccessful tag at the plate.”

So the Green Sox now trailed 5–4 and had just three outs to stay in the game. Binns led off the bottom of the ninth with a single but was forced at second by Minkkenen. Pierce, who had hit a run-scoring double in his previous trip to the plate, was next to bat. This time he connected for a ground-rule triple to tie the score. Darnell, who was on the mound for Hull, managed to get the other two outs to keep the contest alive.

“Going into the tenth, Golders Green [...] brought on Savage in relief on Minkkenen

who went to first base. The first batter that Savage faced, Johnson, survived a dropped fly ball in left field. Then Jarvis lifted a fly ball to left. This time the fielder caught it. Johnson then scored off a ground rule triple by Darnell. Had he won this game for himself? Darnell must have thought so as he stood at third base, and watched Savage walk the next two batters to load the bases. Back came Minkkenen to the mound. He struck out the next two batters to finish the inning.”

Now trailing 6–5, the Green Sox, once more, had just three outs to rescue the game.

“Claffey singled in the bottom of the inning. Again the Green Sox’ spirits were lifted. Savage grounded to the Hull shortstop, who made an unsuccessful attempt to throw Claffey out at the plate.”

This meant that after ten innings the game was all-square at 6–6.

“Charles Trevor led off with a walk. Johnson grounded to the pitcher who threw to Iso at shortstop to force out Trevor. In trying to get a double play Iso threw wildly to first, enabling Johnson to reach second. Yet again Hull took the lead when Jarvis singled and Johnson crossed the plate.”

The score now 7–6 in Hull’s favour, Darnell, who had already thrown 10.0 innings, needed three outs to close out the game.

“Thompson greeted Darnell’s eleventh inning with a single. Along came Minkkenen to hit a three bagger to tie the score. Next to bat was Pierce. He took the count to 3 and 1 before he hit the ball over the right field fence for a two run homer, and put an end to this thriller.”

After the final

After their 9–7 victory in 1979, giving the Green Sox their second title in just four seasons of competitive play, they won just three of 28 league games over the

next 2 years and then dropped out of the top tier. They returned in 1986, posting a 3–11 record in that season and a 4–10 record in the next. In 1988, the Green Sox managed just one win from 24 games, with their last few defeats being forfeits as players abandoned the sinking ship. The 1989 season saw a limit of four overseas players being introduced, and this ended any hopes of reviving the ailing team.

For a side that had just two winning seasons out of nine spent in the top tier, it seems remarkable that the Green Sox managed to be national champions twice. Not counting their league-winning season of 1977, for which standings are not available, they won 33 and lost 88 top-tier games.

The explanation for this is simple, though. Six of their players (including Binns, Neffendorf, Pierce, and Thompson) left to form the London Warriors in 1980, while Minkkenen and one other moved across for the season after that.

As for the Hull Aces, they were losing finalists in 1980 and 1981, and did not make the final in 1982, their last season with an adult team. What happened to their players? According to issue 32 of *Baseball Mercury*, the senior players broke away from the Aces to form a new team called the Hull Mets. The Mets are one of the sides in our next classic final.

1984: Croydon Bluejays versus Hull Mets

Like with the previous final, the “Past Great Clubs” section of *British Baseball Data* provides the background information for the two teams involved. No game report was published in the *Baseball Mercury*, so I was delighted when I recently came across several newspaper articles on the semi-finals and final in a scrapbook lent to me by John Thomas, the Bluejays’ catcher in 1984.

Croydon Bluejays

Founded as the Bluejays (Dulwich) in 1949, the team changed its name in 1964 to the Beckenham Bluejays, which better reflected the fact that Beckenham Place Park was the home ground. The Bluejays reached their first national final in 1967, losing 4–2 to the Liverpool Yankees. In 1971 the team moved to Rose Hill Park and became the Croydon Bluejays. They won the southern league title in 1974 with an 8–2

record, aided by Don MacDonald's league-leading 2.45 earned-run average, but this was at a time when southern baseball was not affiliated with the national governing body, denying the Bluejays a chance to compete in the national play-offs. Another noteworthy historical fact is that the Bluejays were followed by a young David Bowie in the early 1960s (see Box 1).

Hull Mets

As described above, the Mets came into existence in 1983. They made it through to the national play-offs in their first year and defeated the Clifton Cougars of the Midlands league 12–6 in the semi-final, before falling 10–3 to the Cobham Yankees in the final.

Did David Bowie play for the Bluejays (Dulwich)?

In an interview posted on the website for the music magazine *Rolling Stone* in 1999, David Bowie replied to the following question:

“Are you a baseball fan?”

When I was fourteen, I was a member of a group of expatriate Canadians who had a team called the Dulwich Blue Jays, and they'd play on weekends, and I used to play outfield for them.”

The summer he spent as a 14 year old was in 1961. Keen to cross-check this information, I contacted Jean Crook of the Old Timers Baseball Club. Having asked a Bluejays player called Phil Laing, she passed on the following information.

Laing, who was born in the same year as Bowie, started out with the Bluejays in 1961. The two met through mutual friends at Bowie's school, Bromley Technical College, and through this connection Bowie began to attend games, becoming an avid supporter. However, he did not play in an official game for the team.

The two stories are not necessarily contradictory, as Bowie may well have manned the outfield during training and pre-game drills.

As an afterthought, when Bowie was 15 years old he suffered an eye injury in a fight at school that impaired his depth perception. Perhaps this was something that prevented Bowie playing baseball anymore, forcing him down the path of rock stardom?

Box 1. David Bowie and the Bluejays (Dulwich).



Figure 4. The Croydon Bluejays at the national final in 1984.

Paths to the final

The Hull Mets qualified for the semi-finals as Humberside champions and defeated the Liverpool Trojans 14–7 to move into the final.

The Bluejays went 9–1 in winning the southern league and then demolished the Southglade Hornets 12–1 in an away semi-final, after plating 9 runs in the first four innings. Bob Burnham, a fleet-footed infielder, had two doubles and a triple for Croydon, while Dean Ward connected for four singles and Norman Laing and Ross Uphill had three hits apiece.

The game

The final was played at Waltham Abbey on Sunday 9 September. Led by ex-Great Britain manager Terry Warner and coached by Kevin Sylvester (a “big man with an intimidating red beard” according to a feature article in a local paper), the Croydon Bluejays held a 7–6 advantage in the eighth inning. The Hull Mets, however, rallied for 3 runs to take a 2-run lead into the ninth inning. The Bluejays (pictured in Figure 4) managed to get two runners on with two outs in the ninth and had Norman Laing at bat. Laing ripped a double to right field, scoring one runner and advancing the other to third base to reduce the deficit to a single run. Next up was John Harrington. He hit the ball down the right-field foul line, and it landed fair for a double, enabling Croydon to score first the tying run, and then the winning run moments after.

After the final

The Bluejays never made another final. In 1991 they moved again, this time to Clapton Football Club in East London, where they played for one season as

the Newham Bluejays. The following year they returned to Croydon and joined the renegade national league. After two seasons back in Croydon, the Bluejays relocated one last time: in 1994, they played, and lost, just four games as the Bromley Bluejays before folding.

In contrast, the Hull Mets went on to win two national finals, in 1985 and 1994, and shared another, in 1993. In addition, they were runners-up on five further occasions, including in 1997 when they were playing their first season under the new title of the Kingston Cobras. After two more seasons as the Cobras, the team folded in 1999.

Since the Hull Aces folded after the 1982 season, there have been ten national finals between a team from Humberside and a team from the south. These ten finals comprise the nine appearances by the Hull Mets, as well as one other game, which is our next classic final.

1989: Humberside County Bears versus Southern Tigers

Scottish Amicable sponsored a semi-professional National Baseball League in 1987, 1988, and 1989. I have taken historical details of the league from *British Baseball Data*, as well as from some programmes I was lent by Dennis Newman (see Figure 5). Crucially, one of the programmes he lent me contained a scoresheet that he had completed for the 1989 final.

The league was made up of regional All-Star teams. In 1987 and 1988, six teams competed in a single division, with the winner of the league being crowned overall champion. Two teams were added for the 1989 season and the league was split into a four-team northern division and a four-team southern division. The two divisional winners played a semi-final against the second-place team from the opposite division.

Games were played on Saturdays in front of paying spectators and using stadiums as venues. The

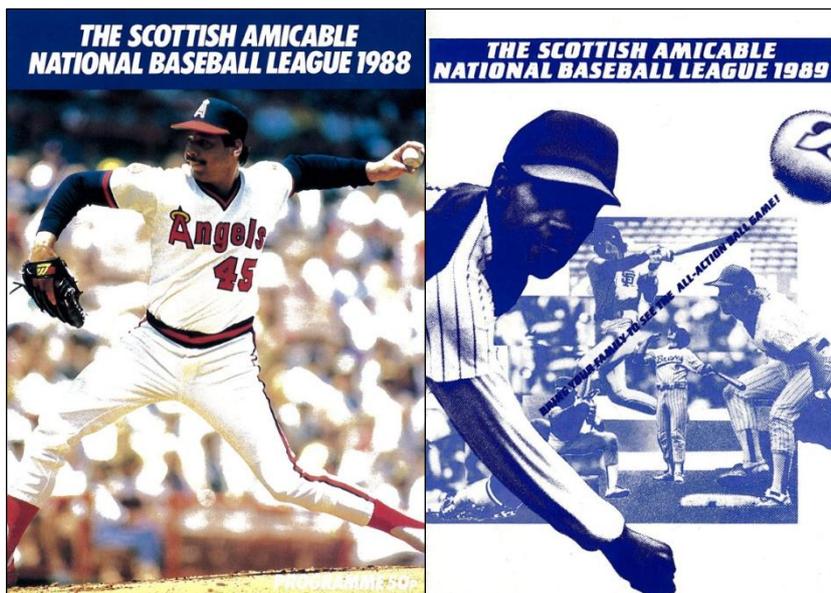


Figure 5. Front covers of Scottish Amicable National Baseball League programmes.

competition ran in parallel to the existing British baseball league, which continued to play its games on Sundays. Players in the Saturday league also played in the Sunday league.

Humberside County Bears

As one of the league's original members, the Bears compiled a 4–6 record in 1987 for a fifth-place finish, and then improved in 1988 to 6–4 and finished third (Mike Thurston picked up five of those six wins). The Bears played their home games at Costello Stadium and were run by Don Smallwood, who was President of the British Baseball Federation at the time.

Southern Tigers

Like the Bears, the Southern Tigers were an original member of the league, and they played their games at the Richmond Athletic Ground. Run by Peter Hunt, they went 5–5 in 1987 and 4–6 in 1988 to finish tied for third place and tied for fourth place, respectively. In both of their first two seasons, the Tigers relied more on batting than pitching, with their only notable feats on the mound being Julian Dodwell's two shut-outs in 1987. In contrast, they had three hitters among the top-ten list for batting average in both 1987 and 1988.

★ In 1987, Alan Bloomfield picked up the batting title as well as being awarded the Most Valuable Player trophy; he hit .579 and slugged 1.000, while scoring 19 runs, driving in 13 runs, and stealing 18 bases. Jim Dunn batted .440, slugged 1.080, and

drove in 14 runs. Finally, Dan Godfrey had a .436 batting average, a .615 slugging average, and 11 stolen bases.

- ★ In 1988, it was Dodwell who took the batting title, with a .529 average; he also crossed the plate 18 times and hit three home runs. Bloomfield's .429 average put him third on the top-ten list, and like Dodwell he scored 18 runs and hit three four-baggers. Darrin Ward batted .371 and was the other Tiger in the top ten.

Paths to the final

The Humberside County Bears won the northern division in 1989 to set up a semi-final encounter against the London Warriors, Scottish Amicable champions in 1988, while the Southern Tigers took the southern division to advance to a semi-final tie against the Lancashire Red Sox, the 1987 champions (see Table 4). The Bears' only defeat came against the Mersey Mariners, while the Tigers suffered their two losses to the London Warriors.

In those semi-finals, which were played on Saturday 5 August, the Bears beat the Warriors 18–5 and the Tigers knocked out the Red Sox in a very high-scoring contest that ended 33–16.

Team	Wins	Losses
Northern division		
Humberside Bears	8	1
Lancashire Red Sox*	4	5
Mersey Mariners	4	5
Yorkshire Yankees	2	7
Southern division		
Southern Tigers	7	2
London Warriors	5	4
Bedford Dukes	3	6
Nottingham Knights	3	6

Table 4. Final standings in the 1989 Scottish Amicable National Baseball League.

*The Red Sox won two from three against the Mariners, which was used to decide that the former rather than the latter would be given second position and therefore qualify for the semi-finals.

#	Humberside County Bears		Southern Tigers	
1	Barry Marshall	1B	Pete Edwards	2B
2	Darren Turtle	SS	Alan Bloomfield	SS
3	Mike Thurston	LF	Julian Dodwell	CF
4	Simon Radge	2B	Keith Wilesmith	P
5	Phillip Thurston	RF	Joe Walker	C
6	Ray Todd	3B	Steve Keeping	1B
7	Andy Peacock	CF	Paul Bullock	RF
8	Andy Maltby	C	Matt Abbott	3B
9	Brian Thurston	P	Paul Collins	LF

Table 5. Starting line-ups from the 1989 Scottish Amicable final.

The game

The game was played at the Richmond Athletic Ground on Saturday 12 August. The Humberside team had three Thurston brothers in the starting line-up (see Table 5), with Mike being the oldest and Phillip, at 16, the youngest. Brian, the middle brother, was described as the number-one pitcher in Great Britain in the programme notes. The Tigers batted second.

Wilesmith faced the minimum number of Bears' batters in the top of first and then had a two-base hit in the bottom of the inning to drive in Dodwell, who had also reached on a double. In the second, the visitors went three-up three-down, while the home side's powerful offence appeared to be moving up through the gears, with doubles from Collins, Bloomfield, and Dodwell contributing to a 4-run inning. However, the Tigers were held scoreless for the next six innings, managing only one hit – a triple by Edwards – and three other base-runners.

While Brian Thurston was overpowering the Tigers, striking out 12 through those first eight innings, the Humberside batters were rallying. Leading off the third, Peacock drew a base on balls to become the Bears' first base-runner, and Brian Thurston and Marshall also walked to load the bases with one out and Turtle at the plate. The shortstop hit a fly ball and the runners tagged up. Peacock crossed the plate but Thurston was thrown out advancing to third. The run was awarded on this time play.

The Bears did not add to that run in the fourth but led off the fifth with a bunted single by Todd, the team's first hit. Back-to-back fielder's choice plays left the visitors with a runner on first – Maltby – and two outs. The pitcher was walked and Maltby then advanced to third on a wild pitch. Next, a successful double steal brought Maltby home to reduce the deficit to 3 runs. After another walk by Marshall, Turtle, who had driven in the opening Bears'

run, came to the plate with two runners on. He got more on his fly ball this time, enough to send it out of the ground for a 3-run homer that tied the score.

The score remained tied through the sixth and seventh innings, but the Bears took a 1-run lead in the eighth and had Peacock due up as their first batter in the ninth, who had got on base in each of his three plate appearances. For some reason, Peacock was pulled for a pinch-hitter, Ashley Robinson. Wilesmith struck Robinson out and had allowed only two hits up to this point. However, the number-eight and number-nine hitter – Maltby and the pitcher – had back-to-back singles. Maltby was forced out but Brian Thurston scored a run, and with two out, Marshall at third, and Turtle at first, Wilesmith faced the Bears' number-three hitter, Mike Thurston. The Tigers' pitcher had struck him out twice already, though, and did the same here to end the inning.

Having had only one base-runner from the past 13 batters, the Tigers now had three outs left and trailed by 2 runs. Abbott led the inning off with a double and Collins was walked, but after this good production from the bottom of the order, Brian Thurston made Edwards his 13th strike-out of the game. Still, the pitcher now had to face Bloomfield and then Dodwell, batting champions from 1987 and 1988, respectively (see Figure 6). Bloomfield loaded the bases with a walk, and Dodwell also received a base on balls, reducing the Bears' lead to a single run.

If Brian Thurston could retire his opposite number Wilesmith, then he would just need the out



Figure 6. Julian Dodwell (left) and Alan Bloomfield (right) playing in red Great Britain uniforms.

of Wilesmith's battery mate Walker to win the game, and Walker was 0-for-4 with three strike-outs. But the Bears' hurler never got a chance to face Walker again as Wilesmith drove the ball to the outfield for a walk-off hit, bringing both Collins and Bloomfield home.

After the final

This was the last game played under the sponsorship of Scottish Amicable. The initial deal was for 3 years, but if Scottish Amicable had seen a reason to support baseball in Britain originally, it seems plausible that they would have considered continuing with the financial backing. I have heard of two main reasons that contributed to the deal not being renewed: firstly, it may have been that the company was unhappy with organization and support from the British Baseball Federation; secondly, and more seriously, allegations surfaced of fraudulent use of the sponsorship money.

If there is truth in the allegations, then it is scandalous that personal greed may have denied baseball the chance to gain a proper fan base in this country, something a long-term semi-professional league could plausibly have achieved.

The elite players who had made the regional All-Star teams in the Scottish Amicable league returned in 1990 to playing in an amateur-only baseball system. Of all these elite players, Brian Thurston may well have been the pick of the pitchers, but when it came to batting and fielding few would argue that one player stood out from the rest: Alan

Bloomfield. It is he who scored the winning run in the 1989 final, and he also had a role to play in the last of our classic finals.

1993: Enfield Spartans versus London Warriors

Our last classic final is the 1993 championship decider for National League Baseball (UK), which was a renegade competition that ran between 1992 and 1994 in parallel to the league sanctioned by the British Baseball Federation. The split from the British Baseball Federation was triggered by a series of disagreements between the national governing body and some of the southern teams.

British Baseball Data provides the historical framework for this section. I supplemented this with London Warriors stats and historical details provided by Alan Smith and information from issues of a fanzine called *Linedrive!*, which were lent to me by Mark Tobin. *Linedrive!*, which was edited by Warriors supporter Phil Ross, covered all three seasons of National League Baseball (UK). The fanzine contained editorial features and game details (volume III issue 1 provides a match report from the 1993 final), and its covers were drawn by Rex Phillips, another Warriors fan. Included on each cover was a baseball-themed cartoon, and a selection of these can be found at <http://www.gbbsa.org.uk/rex.html>. One cartoon not included in this online collection is a sketch with particular relevance to this final (see Figure 7).

Enfield Spartans

The Spartans were formed in 1982 and qualified for their first national final in 1989, beating the Sutton Braves 15–9 at the ground of Sutton United Football Club. Despite also taking the national title in 1990 and 1991, the Spartans were one of the teams driving the split from the governing body. They qualified for the first National League Baseball (UK) final in 1992 but finished runners-up.

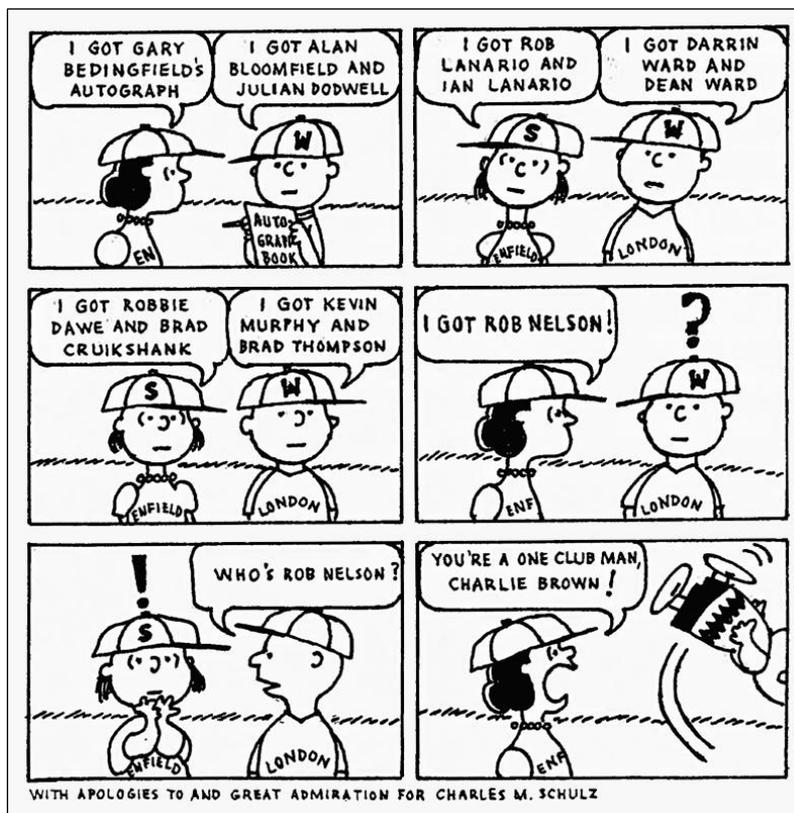


Figure 7. One of the cartoons by Rex Phillips that appeared on the front cover of *Linedrive!*, which was a fanzine edited by Phil Ross to cover the renegade national league that ran between 1992 and 1994.

London Warriors

As mentioned in the section on the 1979 national final, the London Warriors were formed in 1980 after several players left the Golders Green Sox. Playing their home games in Regents Park, the Warriors won the national title in their second year of existence. Following a second championship in 1982, the team moved to Tufnell Park for three seasons and made the national final in 1985, losing 10–8 to the Hull Mets.

The Warriors did not compete in 1986 as they were unable to secure a home field, but several of their players moved to the Cobham Yankees. This team won the national title in 1986, 1987, and 1988; the Yankees and the Spartans are the only sides to be national champions 3 years running. While the Yankees were dominating the Sunday league, Scottish Amicable's sponsorship of a Saturday league saw the Warriors resume play in 1987, using Richmond Athletic Ground as a home field.

In 1989, the introduction by the British Baseball Federation of a limit of four overseas players per team led to the end of the Cobham Yankees (as it did for the Green Sox). The Warriors players who had

been playing their Sunday league baseball for Cobham moved to the Sutton Braves, a team whose roster already featured Alan Bloomfield.

There was no London Warriors team in 1990 after the Scottish Amicable National Baseball League folded. In 1991, the Braves joined the Barnes Barnstormers to become the London Athletics, playing in Barnes. The Athletics were the team on the losing end of the Enfield Spartans' third straight victory that year, and this was the best-of-three final mentioned earlier in this article in which all games were won by 2 runs.

In 1992 the "Warriors" name was revived for National League Baseball (UK), and they were the team that defeated the Enfield Spartans in the renegade competition's inaugural championship. Justin Brown was the star player that year, hitting 16 singles, 13 doubles, one triple, and nine home runs for a 1.000 slugging average, while not conceding an earned run in 46.2 innings on the mound.

How were the Spartans connected to *Ball Four*?

In *Ball Five*, a 10-years-later epilogue to Jim Bouton's classic baseball diary *Ball Four*, Bouton describes how he launched his big league comeback with the Portland Mavericks, an independent team that played in the Class A Northwest League:

"The Mavericks were the dirty dozen of baseball, a collection of players nobody else wanted, owned by actor Bing Russell [...] In a league stocked with high-priced bonus babies, Mavericks players made only \$300 per month and had to double as the ground crew. Revenge being a strong motivator, the Mavs had the best team in the league [...] The afternoon before a game we'd drive through the streets of whatever town we were playing in and insult the citizens over a loud the loudspeaker [...] No insult was too outrageous. 'Hey lady, that sure is an ugly baby you got there.' And so on. Needless to say, that night the stands would be filled with hundreds of irate fans rooting passionately for our defeat."

It was while with the Mavs that Bouton met Rob Nelson, his Big League Chew partner. It was in the bullpen in Civic Stadium, Portland's home ground, that the two dreamed up the business venture.

Box 2. The link between Rob Nelson, who played for the Enfield Spartans, and *Ball Four* diarist Jim Bouton.

Team	Wins	Losses
London Warriors	19	2
Bury Saints*	14	7
Enfield Spartans	12	8
Birmingham Brewers	11	9
Essex Eagles	10	11
Cambridge Knights	7	14
Waltham Forest Angels	5	15
Croydon Bluejays	4	16

Table 5. Final National League Baseball (UK) standings in 1993.

*This team was linked to Bury St Edmunds rather than the Bury in Greater Manchester.

Paths to the final

In 1993, the London Warriors compiled a 19–2 record to win the league and secure an automatic berth in the final (see Table 5). A new pitcher called Cody Cain was the team's best hurler, as he posted an earned-run average of 0.00, just as Brown had done the season before. Oliver Heidecker led the team in batting average (.491), while Brown had the best slugging average once again (.673).

The Enfield Spartans finished third in the league, which meant that they would have to advance through two rounds of play-offs to make the final. After beating the Birmingham Brewers in round one, they defeated the Bury Saints to set up a one-game final against the Warriors.

The game

The final was played at RAF Feltwell, with Cain taking the mound for the Warriors and Rob Nelson (see Box 2) pitching for the Spartans, who batted first.

Cain pitched 6.0 scoreless innings and left the mound with a 1-run lead, courtesy of his own solo shot in the bottom of the third. Brown, the Warriors' relief pitcher, allowed the Spartans to load the bases in the top of the seventh, and Gary Bedingfield bunted in Iain Lanario to tie the score. London struck back immediately, though, with Cain getting his second run-scoring hit of the game off Nelson in the bottom half of the inning, which drove in Alan

Bloomfield. This proved to be the game-winning run. Cain was an unsurprising choice as the game's Most Valuable Player.

After the final

The Enfield Spartans made the final again in 1994 for their sixth straight appearance, setting a record that still stands. This time they won after finishing behind three other teams in the league, gaining their fourth and final national title. The team returned to the British Baseball Federation league after National League Baseball (UK) finished following the 1994 season, where they played until folding in 2001.

Like the Spartans, the Warriors returned to the national governing body's competition in 1995, making the final that year aided by ten wins on the mound from Cody Cain (see Figure 8). However, Menwith Hill took the first two games in a best-of-three series to take the 1995 crown. The Warriors raised their number of national titles to six with victories in 1997 and 2000. Their last year was 2005, and several players moved to the Richmond Flames for the start of the 2006 season.

Conclusion: Does one final stand out?

Even though I did not witness any of the six finals described above, I have little doubt from the game reports that each one was a genuine classic. Is it possible from the details I obtained to say which was the pick of these?

While the extra-inning finals of 1969 and 1979 both sound like incredible games to have watched, for me the victory of the Bluejays in 1984 tops all the others. My reasons for this are that this was the only title in the club's long history, that the tying and winning runs scored with two outs in the ninth inning, and that the game-winning hit travelled down the foul line before dropping fair.

Acknowledgements

Firstly, I owe thanks to Josh Chetwynd, author of *British Baseball and the West Ham Club* and *Baseball in Europe*, firstly for suggesting that I should get in touch with William Morgan, which led to him kindly supplying me with issues of *Baseball Mercury* to put online, and secondly for alerting me to



Figure 8. Cody Cain pitching for Great Britain at Finsbury Park.

Jeff Archer's *Strike Four*, which I wrote a review of that the author found, triggering a very enjoyable exchange of emails that is ongoing.

I am also grateful to Jeff Archer, William Morgan, Dennis Newman, Alan Smith, John Thomas, and Normal Wells, Sr, as well as the Liverpool Trojans Baseball Club for giving me permission to reproduce photos off their website.

Finally, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Mark Tobin of *British Baseball Data* (<http://www.britishbaseballdata.co.uk/>). The thoroughness of his online records made this article far more enjoyable to write than it would have otherwise been, and he responded rapidly to several requests I had for further information.

About Project Cobb

Project Cobb has been established to unify and publicize the various efforts to publish historical details on baseball played in Britain under modern rules. In addition, it serves to promote the preservation of British baseball history as it happens. Further details are available on the Project Cobb webpage: <http://www.gbbsa.org.uk/cobb.html>. If, after reading this article, you would like to share any historical information you have with Project Cobb or wish to become a collaborator, contact information can be found on the webpage.



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