

RECREATION

Baseball in the Civil War

During their winter of 1862-1863, the Union Army of the Potomac's camps and defenses stretched for over 150 square miles in Stafford County. In addition to keeping watch over Lee's Confederate Army across the Rappahannock River, they prepared for the spring campaigns with major reorganizations, reforms and intensive training and picket duty during that difficult winter. The weather and related conditions varied from ice and snow to rain and sleet to sunny and endlessly muddy. The soldiers (the average age being in the low 20s) needed recreation as well. In relation to weather conditions, their games varied from snowball fights to horse races, pole-climbing and greased pig chases to the already great American pastime of baseball. As spring approached junior officers and men began writing home asking for baseball equipment. Union Army baseball (and other games) were integrated long before Jackie Rob. Shortfalls on teams of all sorts were made up by recruiting the many former slaves who worked within the army's lines. The baseball played in those days was different in rules and play from the modern game, but it was still recognizable. General Abner Doubleday, often credited with originating the game of baseball, was present; but, it is not known whether he had the opportunity to take in a game in the camps. The serious and deadly business of war loomed ahead and the Battles of Second Fredericksburg and Chancellorsville broke up spring practice.