

The Sports Scene



Carolina Panthers quarterback Jake Delhomme on last season's 8-8 record: "I don't think you could have a year worse than last year."

WRITE TO US

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As cradle of U.S. cricket, Phila. has honored place

By Frank Fitzpatrick
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For generations, the staid Main Line and its institutions, such as Haverford College, looked toward England for social and cultural direction.

Haverford "was part of England until about 50 years ago," joked Greg Kannerstein, the college's dean.

It's hardly surprising then that the first American cricket club was founded at the college in 1834. And when, decades later, that sport's popularity waned in the face of baseball's red-hot rise, Haverford and Philadelphia-area clubs kept it alive here.

"Philadelphia is a critical part of the story," Australian histori-

an Beth Hise said. "It's the heart of American cricket."

Hise and Tom Shieber, curator of the National Baseball Hall of Fame, were at Haverford yesterday poring through the C. C. Morris Cricket Library, the largest collection of cricket books and memorabilia in the Western Hemisphere.

Hise is gathering information and artifacts for an exhibition on the common ancestry and divergent history of cricket and baseball for London's Marylebone Cricket Club, which formerly served as that sport's governing body.

And at 7 o'clock tonight at Haverford's Stokes Auditorium, she and Shieber will dis-

cuss the origins and histories of the two sports. Admission is free.

While baseball quickly supplanted cricket as the bat-and-ball sport of choice in post-Civil War New York and Boston, the two managed to coexist and thrive in Philadelphia until the early decades of the 20th century.

That happened, Hise said, because local clubs, despite their inherent Anglophilia, were more inclined to let native Americans participate, not just transplanted-Brits.

"Some clubs in New York were more English than the English," Hise said. "They became very exclusive, and that didn't sit well in the Ameri-

can context. But other clubs, particularly in Philadelphia, were run by Americans, and Americans were encouraged to play. So it took on a local flavor."

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Haverford sent a number of cricket teams on British tours. Local players such as Morris and J. Barton King, who despite his regal-sounding name was a middle-class Philadelphian, established reputations among the English. When King died in 1965, British newspapers prominently displayed his obituary.

Though baseball likely developed from games other than cricket, many of its early

stars and managers were English-born cricketers.

The real turning point, when baseball ascended and cricket declined, took place in the years during and after the Civil War. The split, not surprisingly, involved money.

"With the success of the Cincinnati Red Stockings, the first professional team, baseball in a stroke went from being an exclusively amateur pastime open only to people with money and leisure time to something people could play for their job," Hise said. "That's what made baseball."

And, in most places, killed cricket.

Philadelphia cricket clubs such as Merion, Germantown

and Philadelphia still convert their tennis lawns into pitches in the fall and spring. And with recent changes in immigration patterns has come a local cricket renaissance.

Residents of the area from the West Indies, Pakistan, India and Bangladesh compete in Philadelphia in the sport that is undisputed king in their home nations.

"There's been a tremendous resurgence here," said Alfred Reeves of the British Officers Cricket Club of Philadelphia. "We've grown from three clubs to 25."

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