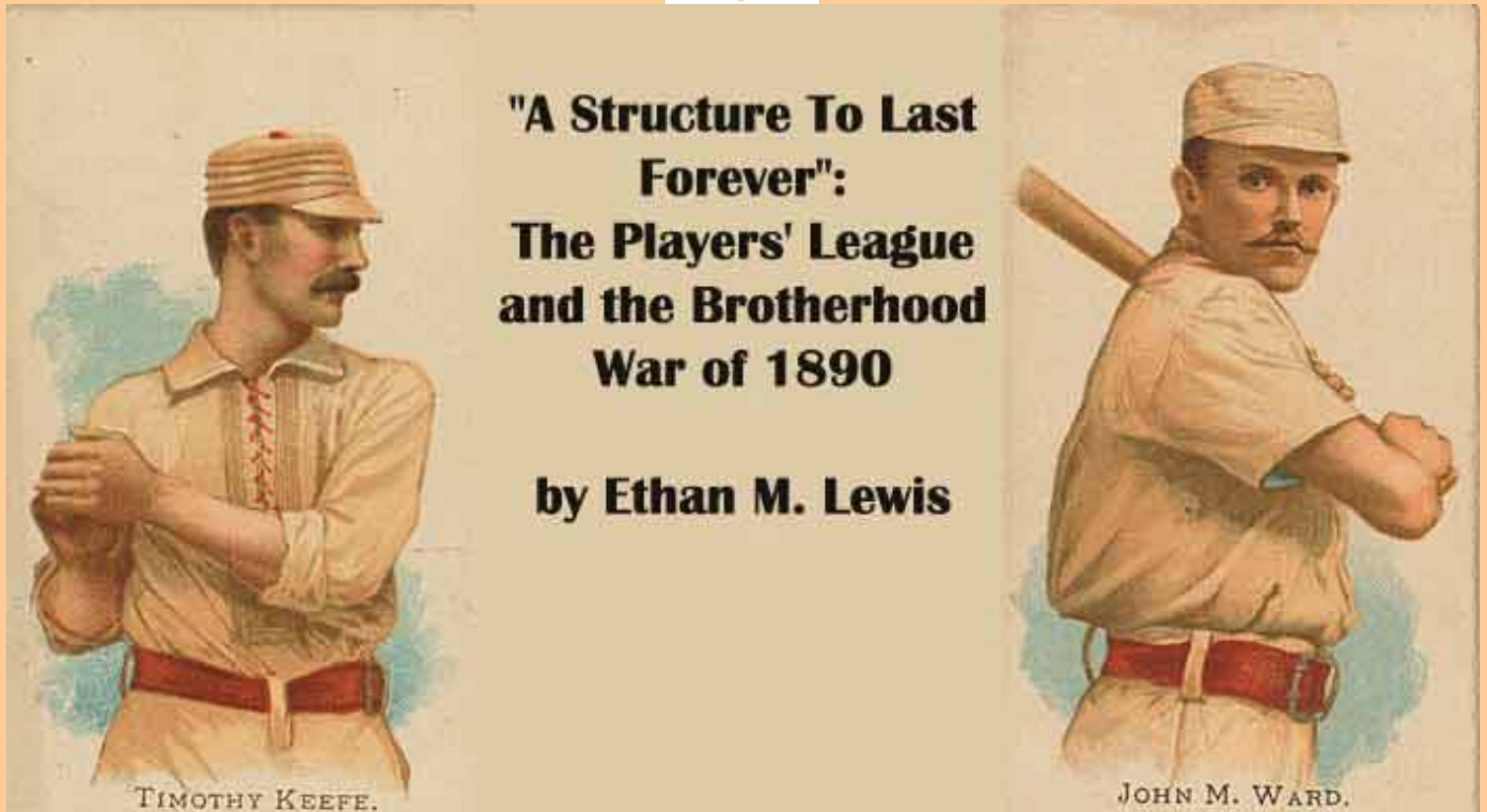


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"I Have Worked This Season As I Never Did Before"¹¹⁵

When the Leagues met to discuss terms for a settlement of the war, many backers of the Players' League, who had vociferously proclaimed their loyalty all season long, voted to withdraw from the fight and sell out to the National League. The surrender of the PL backers came as a surprise to, and without the input of the Brotherhood. This "stab in the back" was a result of a combination of factors, including inexperience, naivete, and cowardice on the part of

the PL backers, and cold-bloodedness on the part of the National League owners. As settlement talks proceeded, confusion reigned in the ranks of the Players' League, as players and capitalists alike did not know where each other stood, and eventually this confusion led to the very dissension and "every man for himself" situation for which the National League had hoped all season.

As mentioned above, at the close of the 1890 season the sentiments of nearly all observers of the baseball scene were for some form of compromise to settle the baseball war. There were some "avowed fire eaters" such as [Cap Anson](#), who wanted "the war of extermination to go on until the bitter end", but most of the leading men in the game were of the opinion of [Albert Spalding](#), who had "no desire to die with his boots on"¹¹⁶ [John Ward](#) also came out for settlement, declaring, "I favor a compromise with the National League upon the best terms which can be made. I want to protect the men who put their money into the Players' League clubs, and I am willing to make personal sacrifices to secure that end. If a compromise is effected, and I am assigned to play in Oshkosh...I will go there."¹¹⁷

At this point in time, October 1890, the Players' League was in a dominant position. In less than one year from its first public declaration the PL had built eight stadiums, signed the leading players of the day, won court decisions invalidating the NL contract, produced an exciting season, and outdrew the venerable National League. Plans were already in high gear for the 1891 Players' League season, and as the Sporting News noted, "With all due respect, the Players' League is a pretty healthy yearling."¹¹⁸ Most authors on the subject of the Brotherhood War assume that the events that transpired did so because the Players' league backers went to the NL looking to surrender. That was not the case. Unfortunately, a combination of inexplicable naivete and greed led the PL men to relinquish their advantage, and ultimately resulted in their selling out the Brotherhood players.

[John Ward](#), player-manager-capitalist, was expressing high confidence in the future of his enterprise, and even offered an olive branch to the NL and AA in the form of qualified support for a new National Agreement. He strongly opposed a reserve rule, however, instead favoring the Players' League method of long term contracts, which "is not unjust, and while it protects the player, it also protects the club."¹¹⁹ Unfortunately, [Ward](#) was one of the few PL men looking out for the players interests that week. In an event which is murky to this day, Al Johnson, Wendell Goodwin (Brooklyn capitalist) and Edwin Talcott met with [Albert Spalding](#) and John B. Day in New York to discuss the compromise. Apparently, when [Spalding](#) asked how the PL stood financially, the Players' League representatives honestly disclosed their losses for the season. Sensing an opportunity, [Spalding](#) and Day did not reveal the National League's fiscal woes, including those which necessitated Day's covert sale of his club in mid-season.¹²⁰ This placed the Players' League capitalists, new to the business of baseball and unaware of what constituted acceptable losses for a season, in a position where they felt in extreme jeopardy. Suddenly, the leaders of the organization, having failed to earn expected profits of \$20,000, believed that theirs was the only League to have lost money. They immediately began looking for a way to salvage their investment, and the first casualty was their relationship with the Brotherhood.

Sensing a turning of the tide, representatives from the old leagues ceased their discussion of settlement, and began to toe a much harder line. Al Reach, of the Philadelphia Phillies, stated "if [the PL] think we are trying to seek a compromise, they are greatly mistaken...they have invited this fight, and the [National] League will be the last to give up."¹²¹ The first serious meeting of the three leagues was held in New York's Fifth Avenue Hotel, the birthplace of the Players' League. The PL was to be represented by three capitalists (Johnson, Goodwin and Talcott) and three players ([Ward](#), [Ned Hanlon](#) and [Arthur Irwin](#)), as stipulated in their League constitution. Before the negotiations could get underway, however, an objection was raised to the presence of players in the discussions. [John Ward](#) rose to speak in defense of his fellow players, identifying themselves as stockholders as well as athletes, saying:

I believe I have more money at stake proportionately than any other gentleman on any committee. I have every dollar I own invested in the Players' League and if I were not a player there could probably be no objection to my presence here. I am objected to solely because I am a player. There is upon each of the sub-committees [of the NL and AA] a member who was formerly a player. Do these men wish to go on record as saying that the occupation of ball player bars him from business association

with respectable men? Mr. Spalding, are you willing to put such a stamp of infamy upon the profession of which for years you were a member and to which you owe your start in life?¹²²

After a brief recess, the meeting resumed, but after further discussion, the player representatives were barred from the meeting, and [Ward](#), and his companions left the hotel by a side door and refused to comment. ¹²³

Following this split, events quickly transpired to bring an effective end to the Players' League. Talcott and Edwin McAlpin consolidated their New York Players' League franchise with the Giants of the National League, and planned to play in the NL in 1891, even though the PL Giants were more successful on the field and at the box office all season long. Wendell Goodwin also consolidated his Brooklyn Players' League team with Byrne's Bridegrooms over [Ward's](#) objections, and in Chicago John Addison sold out to Spalding for part ownership in the White Stockings. ¹²⁴ [John Ward](#) decried the turn of events, saying "I don't like the way certain capitalists of the Players' League have been acting of late. They are not treating the players in good faith. It would be a good idea if the Players' League made up the losses of some of them and allowed them to retire". ¹²⁵ Unfortunately, by that time, [Ward](#) had to face the fact that there was no more Players' League, only a Brotherhood of Players suddenly bereft of financial backing.

[Ward](#) bitterly described the situation as perceived by players. He said:

The Players' League had the call when the season closed, but the ridiculous and needless weakening by the local backers has placed it in an embarrassing position, while the National League magnates have been benefitted....When they started in with this fight they knew very well what to expect, and they have no right to squeal now. There are lots of players who have put their all into the Players' League who are willing to play for almost nothing next season to continue the fight if necessary. No, I am not in favor of consolidation. I think with a non-conflicting schedule, two clubs can live in New York and Brooklyn, and also in Boston, Philadelphia and Chicago...I think both sides could make money and the public would be better pleased. ¹²⁶

In spite of the fierce dedication of [Ward](#) and other players, the battle was over. Al Johnson came back to the PL fold after being rebuffed by [Spalding](#) in an offer to consolidate the Cleveland PL team with Chicago's teams, swearing to "go broke" if necessary. His gesture was too little, too late, however. By losing the franchises in America's largest markets (New York and Chicago) the Players' League was irreparably crippled. The PL even lost the support of the Sporting News which wrote:

We have gone back on the Brotherhood because that organization allowed itself to be controlled by a lot of capitalists like Talcott, McAlpin and Goodwin who took the first opportunity to throw the players down. As soon as the players allowed these ducks to run them they lost their identity and forfeited our support. Just now there is no Players' League, and no Brotherhood...This being the case and the players having shown their complete inability to manage their affairs we see no way out of the difficulty but a return to the old order of things....It is a pity, but Ward, Ewing et al will have to be slaves once more. ¹²⁷

By the end of November, the Sporting News wrote, "The Players' League is dead. Goodbye Players' League. Your life has been a stormy one. Because of your existence many a man has lost by thousands of dollars. And before long all that will be left of you is a memory--a sad, discouraging memory."¹²⁸

Notes

115. "Ward and Spalding" *New York Clipper* December 20, 1890.
116. "Spalding and Anson" *The Sporting News* October 18, 1890.
117. "Ewing and Ward--They Are Again Ready To Knuckle Down To The Bosses" *The Sporting News* October 18, 1890.
118. "Caught on The Fly" *The Sporting News* October 18, 1890.
119. *New York Clipper* October 14, 1890.
120. In his memoir, Spalding described "delegation from the management of the Players' League, bearing a flag of truce." [America's National Game](#) p. 288. Harold Seymour, a less self-interested observer, described the meeting as "the Players' League's first mistake. From this point on it was out-generaled by Spalding." [Baseball: The Early Years](#) p. 241.
121. "Reach Talks To The Point" *The Sporting News* October 19, 1890.
122. "The Tripartite Committee Meets" *New York Clipper* November 1, 1890.
123. *ibid.*
124. "The Latest News" *The Sporting News* November 11, 1890. "Addison Willing To Sell" *The Sporting News* November 1, 1890. Addison retained his interest in the Chicago National League club for the rest of his life, through the point when the team became known as the Cubs. In fact, Addison Street, near the Cubs' ballpark, is named in his honor. [Lowenfish and Lupien, The Imperfect Diamond](#) p. 48.
125. *New York Clipper* November 8, 1890.
126. *ibid.*
127. "The Reasons For It" *The Sporting News* November 8, 1890.
128. *The Sporting News* November 22, 1890.

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