



WHY IS THE BASEBALL NAMED DRAKE?

The Atlantic League of Professional Baseball introduced its own branded baseball as its official ball in 2021. Known as the “Drake,” the ball honors an unsung inventor whose development of the two-piece, interlocking “figure-eight” cover helped standardize and grow the game of baseball.

Born in the Dry Pond section of Stoughton, Massachusetts, on February 16, 1839, Ellis Drake was a natural-born inventor. The son of a shoemaker, he inherited his father’s inquisitive nature and drive to find efficiencies in their workplace, a shop near the intersection of Plain Street and West Street.

As a youngster, Drake played the game then known as “round ball.” At the time, one of the biggest challenges was the lack of durability and consistency in baseballs. Balls were handmade by local teams and merchants, and their size and weight varied widely. The ball was not standardized until 1872, when rules were established that remain largely unchanged today: baseballs must weigh between five and five and a quarter ounces and measure nine inches in circumference.

Early baseballs used what was known as an “orange peel” design. They featured pieces of leather stitched together in segments. This construction proved weak, as the corners and joints loosened easily. While still in school, Drake developed a two-piece, interlocking cover using leather from his father’s shoemaking operation to hand-stitch a more durable ball.

A few years later, brothers George and Harry Wright brought baseballs using Drake’s design to market. Drake did not obtain a patent for the new cover, and as a result, he never received the credit he deserved for his invention. The Wright brothers, who commercialized the design, received considerable acclaim. George Wright was the shortstop for the first professional baseball team, the Cincinnati Red Stockings, and his older brother, Harry, served as the team’s manager. George, inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame in 1937, later partnered with Boston businessman Henry Ditson to establish the Wright & Ditson sporting goods company, which was eventually sold to the A.G. Spalding Company in 1889.

Drake later reflected, “It is a satisfaction to me, however, to think that I have been able to confer some pleasure on the world, though I have never received a thank you or a complimentary ticket to a ball game.”

The baseball cover was not Drake’s only invention. Over the course of his life, he designed skates, devices to improve the manufacture of shoes and sewing machines, as well as cannons, artillery shells, and fuses.

Ellis Drake died on December 18, 1912, at the age of 73. He is buried in the Dry Pond area of Stoughton, Massachusetts. His legacy is still embedded in modern baseballs and honored on the cover of every Drake branded ball.