

THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT ASHEVILLE

**LOUIS SOCKALEXIS: AN ANALYSIS OF THE MEDIA COVERAGE GIVEN
TO BASEBALL'S FIRST NATIVE AMERICAN**

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When Louis Sockalexis made his first appearance into professional baseball in April of 1897, no other Native American openly admitted to his ethnicity and competed in Major League Baseball.¹ Therefore Sockalexis paved an important path in the history of professional baseball. Curiosity and anticipation from fans and sportswriters accompanied Louis Sockalexis's journey. The media of the late 1800's treated him fairly and gave him every opportunity to succeed in baseball. Sockalexis became admired though articles written about him in newspapers and popular magazines. The *Cleveland Plain Dealer* and the *Cleveland Press* printed stories about their hometown team, the Cleveland Spiders, and Sockalexis made headlines regularly. The *Sporting Life* and *The Sporting News* also represented Sockalexis in their national magazines. Sportswriters revealed their opinions through their reports. From the time Sockalexis began his career, writers documented his games and off the field incidents. Despite being the first Native American in professional baseball, writers treated Sockalexis as a baseball player and his ethnicity had little effect on his treatment.

The way writers of the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, *Sporting Life*, and *The Sporting News* dealt with him differs from the way black minority players were handled during their break into professional baseball. By analyzing magazine and newspaper articles about Sockalexis and comparing them with the overall treatment by the press of black

¹ However, in the 1960's, discovery of James Madison Toy's debut into the American Association of Professional Baseball refuted the assumption that Louis played professional baseball before any other Native American did. A Sioux Indian, Toy debuted in 1887 and played for Cleveland's ball club. His period in professional baseball lasted only 106 games in 1887 and 43 games in 1890 before an injury forced him to retire. Toy's brief career came 10 years earlier than Sockalexis's and gave him rightful claim to the first Native American to play baseball professionally. Even though Toy began his career before Sockalexis, Toy disguised his Indian image. His handlebar mustache concealed his ancestry and led other players to believe that Toy came from European descent. Because of Toy's masked image, the baseball world of fans, media, players, and owners treated Louis Sockalexis as the first Indian in professional baseball. See in Jeffrey Powers-Beck, "'Chief': The American Indian Integration of Baseball," *The American Indian Quarterly* 25 (2001) 530.

baseball players, a unique distinction emerges. Sockalexis became a professional in 1897, exactly fifty years before any black players. In addition, writers accepted Sockalexis more than they did the first black baseball players. While writers documented and reported Sockalexis's experience, writers downplayed the importance of black athletes' stories and choose not to report them.

Two major journal articles provide the only scholarly sources on Sockalexis. Most of the writings about Sockalexis are not scholarly and are not based on any factual evidence but rather exaggerated stories. The first article, published in the *Sociology of Sport Journal*, examined Sockalexis's role in the history of the Cleveland Indians. The article, "An Act of Honor or Exploitation?: The Cleveland Indians Use of the Louis Francis Sockalexis Story," reviewed the process by which the Cleveland baseball team found their nickname. The article asserts that Cleveland's claim of honoring Sockalexis through the use of the Indian nickname has little factual evidence.² The article discounts the Cleveland organization's accusation that a fan inspired the honoring of Sockalexis. Through an analysis of newspaper articles from the *Cleveland Leader*, the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, and the *Cleveland Press*, the author Ellen Staurowsky declares, "The assertion that a fan recommended "Indians" to honor Louis Francis Sockalexis, although not impossible, has no evidentiary foundation in the articles chronicling fan or writer preferences."³ Staurowsky provided a small biography of Sockalexis and his baseball career. Also, she discussed the treatment Sockalexis received from the popular press. She states that little is known of Sockalexis the man. Most of the knowledge that sources provide about him comes from the media. Therefore his representation becomes based on

² Ellen J. Staurowsky, "Honor or Exploitation: The Cleveland Indians' Use of the Louis Sockalexis Story," *Sociology of Sport Journal* 15 (1998): 299.

the image that popular magazines of the time provided.⁴ Staurowsky's article described the social aspects and nature of the use of Sockalexis story. She concludes that the Cleveland organization exploited Sockalexis and did not honor him.⁵

The second article examined the racism Sockalexis and other Indian players faced during their integration into professional baseball. The article titled, "'Chief': The American Indian Integration of Baseball," begins with a comparison of the experiences that Native Americans and African Americans faced. Author Jeffrey Powers-Beck declares that Native Americans fared better than blacks but still experienced racism.⁶

Powers-Beck makes an argument that writers, players, and fans used the nickname "Chief" to demean Indian players. He states that sportswriters, fans, and fellow teammates gave most Indians this nickname. He gives evidence of this derogatory nickname and uses a quote from Joseph Oxendine, an Indian player, to illustrate this fact. Oxendine asserts that players, fans, and the media gave him the name in order to make sure he knew his place on the social ladder of baseball.⁷

A number of inaccuracies occur when Powers-Beck discusses Sockalexis specifically. The author asserts that Sockalexis received a number of derogatory nicknames: "Chief Sockalexis," "Sockalexis, the Big Medicine Man," and "genuine descendant of Sitting Bull." Powers-Beck fails to mention the sources from which these nicknames came from. Also, he uses a quote to express the racism that Sockalexis faced during his games but leaves out an excerpt explaining the reason behind the fans'

³ Staurowsky, 306.

⁴ Staurowsky, 300.

⁵ Staurowsky, 312.

⁶ Powers-Beck, 508.

⁷ Powers-Beck, 511.

scornful cheers. The quote reads:

War whoops, yells of derision, a chorus of meaningless “familiarities” greet Sockalexis on every diamond on which he appears. In many cases these demonstrations border on extreme rudeness. In almost every instance they are calculated to disconcert the player... It was during a pandemonium of “ki yis” directed to his ears, that he yanked down the drive that saved Thursday’s game, and it was to the accompaniment of a thousand derisive voices that he banged the ball to the fence Friday for a home run.⁸

The part that Powers-Beck omits actually states, “In almost every instance they are calculated to disconcert the player new to the unique methods prevailing in some of the cities of the big League.”⁹ He fails to describe the context by which the fans used this form of taunting.¹⁰

Finally, Powers-Beck uses the experience of Charles Bender, from the White Earth Reservation in Minnesota, and compares him to Sockalexis. He provides an example from the *Sporting Life* about how after Bender pitched the Philadelphia Athletics to victory in the second game of the World Series, writer Charles Zuber downplayed Bender’s performance. Powers-Beck states that Sockalexis experienced this same kind of racism.¹¹ In reality, writers praised Sockalexis performance on the field and he did not receive derisive nicknames.

Sockalexis’s story begins on October 24th, 1871 when Frances Sockbeson, Louis’s mother, gave birth to him. The name Sockbeson derives from the Passamaquoddy people. Louis’s mother did not come from the Penobscot tribe and therefore made Louis

⁸ Powers-Beck, 531.

⁹ “Cleveland Chatter: Tebeau’s Boys’ Quick Jump Into Playing Form,” *Sporting Life*, 8 May 1897, 8.

¹⁰ This quote will be discussed later in the paper and background will be given to show how fans acted towards players on a normal basis.

a mix between the two tribes. Frances married Louis's father, Francis Sockalexis, around the beginning of the Civil War. Francis, a Penobscot Indian, which was a branch of the Abenaki race, was born on Indian Island of Maine in 1841. He eventually became a high-ranking member of the Penobscot tribe whereupon in 1891 the tribe elected him to a two-year term as lieutenant governor.¹²

At the time of Louis's popularity in the late 19th century, the Penobscot nation established itself as a resilient group. The Penobscots interacted with the white people of Maine and New Hampshire for about three centuries. From their island on the Penobscot River, the Penobscots formed their own way of life and took care of themselves. During the years of 1820 to 1884 the Penobscot nation grew from 277 to 410.¹³ The Penobscots once inhabited most of the state of Maine in the 1600's, but disease destroyed most of their population. After constant warfare their land diminished to 4,481 acres on Indian Island, 12 miles north of Bangor, Maine. This small island became the home of Sockalexis.¹⁴

From the tiny island on the Penobscot River, Louis developed into a professional athlete. Louis took after his father, the fastest Indian in the Penobscot tribe. One exaggerated story states that Francis Sockalexis skipped a coin from Indian Island to the mainland, a distance of over 600 feet.¹⁵ Overall, Louis grew up in an athletically gifted family. Another notable athlete in Louis's family was his nephew, Andrew Sockalexis.

¹¹ Powers-Beck, 535.

¹² David L. Fleitz, *Louis Sockalexis: The First Cleveland Indian*, (Jefferson: McFarland and Company, Inc., 2002), 18.

¹³ "Sockalexis Ancestors: As Troublesome to Early Settlers as He Is to the Robinsons," *The Sporting News*, 8 January 1898, 2.

¹⁴ Fleitz, 5.

¹⁵ Brian McDonald, *Indian Summer*, (Emmaus: Rodale Press, 2003), 8.

¹⁶ Staurowsky, 307.

¹⁷ Fleitz, 38-39.

Andrew gained notoriety through his excellent long distance running skills. He competed in the marathon in the 1912 Olympics in Stockholm. Louis's childhood and young adulthood allowed him to advance his athletic talents. Louis went to a Catholic school and competed in a number of sports including skating, track, and baseball.¹⁶

Sockalexis took a peculiar route to professional baseball. After Louis attended Holy Cross College, a Catholic school, and participated on their baseball team for two seasons, he attended Notre Dame in South Bend, Indiana. During the year of 1896, Holy Cross experienced pressure from the Catholic Church to scale back their athletic programs. Father Luis Martin addressed the college of Holy Cross with a letter that stated athletics corrupted the school and the students. Mike Powers, who recruited Sockalexis to play baseball at Holy Cross, noticed the changing attitudes of the college and opted to transfer to Notre Dame.¹⁷ On December 16, 1896 the house diary of Holy Cross addressed the departure of Mike Powers:

Michael Powers, the great captain of H.C.C.B.B. Nine for some years past & as a consequence a free scholar, recd. Indirectly... I believe, a bribe from The Notre Dame University & had too small a spirit to refuse it. He left College at 3 this afternoon. Instead of injuring, as we do not believe was intended, it will rather improve our College nine & the College itself, though indeed other... small spirits, may imitate ex-Captain Powers.¹⁸

On December 18th, 1896, Louis became one of the “small spirits” mentioned in this quote

¹⁸ Anthony J. Kuzniewski, *Thy Honored Name: A History of the College of the Holy Cross, 1843-1994* (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1999), 168. In David L. Fleitz, *Louis Sockalexis: The First Cleveland Indian*, (Jefferson: McFarland and Company, Inc., 2002), 39.

¹⁹ Fleitz, 39.

and left Holy Cross to follow Mike Powers to Notre Dame.¹⁹

Sockalexis's time at Notre Dame lasted only one month. He left Notre Dame in order to compete professionally with the Cleveland Spiders. Altercations with local law enforcement created a brief stay in South Bend for Louis. William E. Hindel, Sockalexis's teammate at Notre Dame, recalls his run-in with the local authorities:

It was during the college baseball season of 1897 that Sockalexis and another Notre Dame student, whose name I don't recall, decided to paint the town of South Bend. They loaded up on Oscar McGroggins and wandered about in search of entertainment. They visited an establishment conducted by "Popcorn Jennie" and wrecked the place. While they were demolishing furniture, and hurling the broken parts out of windows, the local gendarmes arrived on the scene. They tried to quiet Sockalexis but only annoyed him. He became so provoked that he flattened two of the coppers with perfectly delivered rights to their jaws, but he was finally overpowered and dragged to the bastille.²⁰

Hindel continues with his story to describe how the president of Notre Dame, Rev. Andrew Morriseey, expelled Louis and his companion for their actions. Pat Tebeau of the Cleveland organization bailed Louis out of jail and took him to Cleveland the next day. Pat Tebeau wanted to sign Sockalexis to a professional contract earlier but Louis choose Notre Dame over Cleveland. Louis changed his mind after this incident and opted to start his professional baseball career.²¹

An article in the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, titled "A Chilly Start" reviewed a game between Cleveland and Columbus and gave Sockalexis fair treatment of his performance. Cleveland and Columbus played the game in frigid weather on April 10th, 1897. During the game, Sockalexis played well at times and below average at others. The conditions forced the game to end early. The article stated, "The game was called at the

²⁰ H.G. Salsinger, "The Facts About Sockalexis," *Baseball Digest*, unknown date, 55.

end of the ninth inning, as the weather was too cold to play any longer.”²² The writers of the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* did not focus on the negative aspects of Sockalexis’s performance and gave credit to him when he played well. When Sockalexis made a good throw from the outfield, the article declared, “Sockalexis made a magnificent throw in the ninth inning, from extreme right field to second base on Tebeau’s hit, which seemed good for a two-bagger.”²³ The writers from the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* used encouraging language for Sockalexis’s good performance. Also, at no point in the description of Sockalexis’s performance did the author mention his heritage. His ethnicity had nothing to do with the reporter’s review of the game. When Sockalexis did not play well, the article stated his performance fairly. Sockalexis made an error in the fifth inning that allowed Columbus to score a run and bring the game to within one run. The article pronounced, “Fischer got a base hit, which was stretched into three bases by Sock’s error.”²⁴ The article only stated that Sockalexis made an error. It did not tell what Sockalexis did to allow the runner to advance three bases or degrade Sockalexis in any way. Again, the article made no mention of Sockalexis’s ethnicity. Sockalexis also seemed to do well batting. The game box score noted that Sockalexis hit safely three times but the article explained two of his hits. A statement in the article clarified that, “While Sockalexis was given three hits in the score, two of them were of the scratchiest description and were gifts from the frozen Columbus fielders.”²⁵ The *Cleveland Plain*

²¹ H.G. Salsinger, “The Facts About Sockalexis,” *Baseball Digest*, unknown date, 55.

²² “A Chilly Start: Tebeau’s Indians Had to Hustle to Keep Warm at Columbus,” *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, 11 April 1897.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ “A Chilly Start: Tebeau’s Indians Had to Hustle to Keep Warm at Columbus,” *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, 11 April 1897.

²⁵ Ibid.

Dealer acknowledged when Sockalexis made mistakes and also praised Sockalexis when he executed excellent plays. Also, the newspaper made no distinction about Sockalexis's ethnicity and only examined his performance on the diamond.

The Sporting News also evaluated Sockalexis's performance based only on his baseball talents. Regardless if Sockalexis played poorly or extremely well, writers of *The Sporting News* reported his play as it happened. Towards the end of Sockalexis's career, his abilities diminished. He committed errors and lacked the aptitude he displayed in his first year of professional baseball. An article in *The Sporting News* writes, "Sockalexis' old failing on ground balls is as noticeable as ever. His failing on "high balls" has also been in evidence and this seems to be his greatest handicap."²⁶ The writer reports that Sockalexis exhibited trouble fielding balls hit to him while playing the outfield. The article makes no distinction about his ethnicity and only refers to Sockalexis as a baseball player.

Although Sockalexis did receive verbal abuse from the fans, writers in the *Sporting Life* praised Sockalexis's efforts on the baseball field. In an article titled "Bowerman Can Pitch," an incident dealing with fans heckling Sockalexis appeared under the subtitle "Can't be Rattled". The article described the demeanor of the fans by stating, "In almost every instance they are calculated to disconcert the player new to the unique methods prevailing in some of the cities of the big League."²⁷ The emphasis of the fans taunts concentrates on upsetting a new player's performance and implies that Sockalexis would have received this verbal abuse regardless of his ethnic background.

²⁶ *The Sporting News*, 2 April 1898, 4.

²⁷ "Cleveland Chatter: Tebeau's Boys' Quick Jump Into Playing Form," *Sporting Life*, 8 May 1897, 8.

The actions of the fans against Sockalexis occurred towards everyone, regardless of ethnicity. The reporters of the *Sporting Life* referred to the National League as the “Big League.” The National League dominated professional baseball at the end of the nineteenth century because no other league established itself as an equal to The National League. Today professional baseball consists of two leagues: The American and The National. Professional baseball players around 1897 competed in a violent manner and many of the participants were rough and rowdy men. Players frequently hit umpires and umpires often struck players back. Players tried to injure opposing teams by sliding into bases with the spikes of their shoes and pitchers threw pitches at batters’ heads intentionally (batters during this time period did not wear protective helmets).²⁸ Players also abused each other verbally. In a chapter on The National League, David L. Fleitz states “Vile and vicious chatter was the norm on the playing field.”²⁹

When describing the type of verbal comments made towards Sockalexis, the *Sporting Life* implies that the fans only attempted to disrupt Sockalexis’s play by using normal language that a large amount fans used against most ballplayers. *The Sporting News* also supports Sockalexis’s performance in the game despite the fans’ effort to disturb his concentration. The article read, “It was during a pandemonium of “ki yis” directed to his ears, that he yanked down the drive that saved Thursday’s game.”³⁰ Powers-Beck used this quote to prove that Sockalexis faced racism when he played but he failed to give background on common actions of the National League fans. The article also described how Sockalexis could perform well even when faced with these hostile

²⁸ Fleitz, 47.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ “Cleveland Chatter: Tebeau’s Boys’ Quick Jump Into Playing Form,” *Sporting Life*, 8 May 1897, 8.

fans.

Sockalexis became popular with fans through his excellent play. By performing well during his first few months as a baseball player, fans began to become impressed with his play. D. C. R. of *The Sporting News* writes, “Sockalexis, the Indian of Indians, made his initial bow and captivated the spectators by his fine exhibition of playing. He did more at the bat than the rest of the club together and in the field was invincible.”³¹ This article shows two aspects about Sockalexis’s treatment as a baseball player. First, the author described how he fascinated the crowd. Secondly, Sockalexis’s playing performance gathered more attention than the rest of the team. His ethnicity probably caused much of the attention he received but the attention he did receive in this article placed him above the rest of his teammates. The writer also referred to Sockalexis as “the Indian of Indians.” Even though the article mentioned his ethnicity, it did so in a positive way. A racist recount of Sockalexis’s feats would have described him as a lesser player or even a lesser person. Consequently, this article does neither. The author even talked about his off the field demeanor and actions. D.C.R. declared, “In contrast with some of the other Cleveland players, he is every inch a gentleman, educated, and refined.”³² Again the author depicted Sockalexis’s off the field qualities as superior to those of his teammates.

The Sporting News also discredited the social stereotypes about Indians. The May 1st issue stated, “He has an excellent education, and there is nothing about his actions or his talking calculated to remind one of Wild West shows, tomahawks and all that sort of thing. The young man is a fluent conversationalist, who can tell many interesting

³¹ D. C. R., “Warned By the Umpire,” *The Sporting News*, 1 May 1897, 1.

stories.”³³ The author not only declared that traditional social stereotypes did not apply; he also regarded Sockalexis as educated and a good speaker.

Sockalexis’s popularity off the baseball diamond did not go unnoticed by *Sporting Life* magazine. When Sockalexis arrived in Cleveland, the *Sporting Life* wrote about the way he interacted with teammates and the people he lived with. The *Sporting Life* described Sockalexis by stating, “Sockalexis, the Indian, came to town Friday, and in 24 hours was the most popular young man about the Kennard House, where he is stopping.”³⁴ The facts of this article do not show any character traits or provide any description of Sockalexis demeanor. Also, it does not provide any evidence to how Sockalexis became well-liked in the Kennard House. The article does show that writers favored Sockalexis and gave chances for readers to accept him as a person as well as a baseball player although the statements made by the writer might be based on speculation and no real evidence supported this declaration. Later in the article, writers of the *Sporting Life* credited Sockalexis with being personable without providing any proof. Under the title “Offside Plays”, the *Sporting Life* writes, “Sockalexis, the Indian, makes friends fast. He already knows half the sports in town, and has only been here three days.”³⁵ Whether or not the writer had any real evidence to support this is debatable, but the fact that *The Sporting News* portrayed Sockalexis in a favorable way is certain.

When Sockalexis first came to Cleveland to play professional baseball, his arrival did not create resentment or anger. The first Indian to play in the National League produced excitement and curiosity among fans and sportswriters. The press formed a

³² D. C. R., “Warned By the Umpire,” *The Sporting News*, 1 May 1897, 1.

³³ *The Sporting News*, 1 May 1897, 4.

³⁴ “Cleveland Chatter: The “Indians” Report to Their Heap Big Chief,” *Sporting Life*, 22 March 1897.

unique interest in the man from Indian Island. Chas W. Mears, a writer for *The Sporting News* addressed this situation in his article “Good Drawing Card: Sockalexis is the Best Advertised Player in the Business.” Mears writes, “Everybody in Cleveland, as well as in the other league cities, for that matter, are talking Sockalexis, and if the young Indian isn’t the best advertised new man that ever entered the big organization then it will not be the fault of the base ball paragraphers of the press.”³⁶ Mears also declared that Sockalexis received the most attention from newspaper writers. The attention that Sockalexis gained made him the most talked about and anticipated member of the Cleveland ball club. The press established a fondness for Sockalexis and his story.³⁷

The attraction that Sockalexis brought to the press and fans created a level of excitement for the upcoming 1897 season. Sockalexis’s life presented the press with a story to write about and relay to the fans of Cleveland. The press saw Sockalexis as a way to spark interest in the game of baseball and bring more fans to the ballpark. Mears writes that, “Of all the young players on the Cleveland Club’s list, he is the most talked of and it will be his appearance that will draw the greatest number of curious people at the opening of the season.”³⁸ Mears envisioned Sockalexis’s trek into professional baseball creating nothing but advantageous effects for the game of baseball and specifically the Cleveland team. *The Sporting News* did make a number of references to Sockalexis’s ethnic background as an Indian, but the writers never depicted him as causing any harm to the sport or the Cleveland team. In fact, most writers believed that Sockalexis would bring more popularity to both baseball and Cleveland. When Sockalexis became a member of

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Chas W. Mears, “Good Drawing Card: Sockalexis is the Best Advertised Player in the Business,” *The Sporting News*, 24 April 1897.

the Cleveland ball club, the national and local press began to pay more attention. The Cleveland organization collected fame and publicity before Sockalexis ever played a game.³⁹

Reporters also compared Sockalexis with other non-minority players. When the writers of *The Sporting News* placed Sockalexis's name on the same level as another teammates, they made the statement that these two men held equal status in the game of baseball. Chas Mears declares, "Cleveland's new players, Sockalexis and Pappalau, are furnishing plenty of humor for editorial paragraphers on various papers, and their names are liable to be handled without gloves by the scorers, but Tebeau has great faith in the men's ability so that after all the laugh will be on someone else."⁴⁰ Mears implied that the difficulty of the names of Sockalexis and Pappalau would give writers trouble. He compared the two players by stating that they both are new to professional baseball and possessed hard names to spell. He made no reference to Sockalexis's Indian background. A reader, who had no previous background knowledge of Sockalexis, would have been unable to distinguish him from any other player addressed in the article.⁴¹

Cleveland's manager, Pat Tebeau, also talked about Sockalexis without making any distinctions about his ethnicity. *The Sporting News* quotes Tebeau, "For right field we have Belden, Sockalexis, Blake, and Gilks. There is going to be a big effort to stop up that hole for keeps, and I think we will make it."⁴² Tebeau may have downplayed

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Chas W. Mears, "Good Drawing Card: Sockalexis is the Best Advertised Player in the Business," *The Sporting News*, 24 April 1897.

⁴⁰ Chas W. Mears, *The Sporting News*, 27 March 1897, 6.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² "Tebeau Talks: Cleveland Will Be in the Next Race," *The Sporting News*, 9 October 1897.

Sockalexis chance at earning the right field position because of his background but he made no mention of Sockalexis' heritage and compared him with the rest of the team members.

Not only did fans and writers see Sockalexis's presence as a way to increase ticket sales, bring about more press coverage, and increase fan interest but they hoped that Sockalexis would solidify a common nickname for their team. Before Sockalexis became a member of the Cleveland baseball organization, the official nickname of the team could not be decided on. The team used a number of nicknames in the years before 1897 but one single name never stuck. At the point of Sockalexis's arrival, Cleveland called their baseball team "The Spiders". The *Sporting Life* addressed the Cleveland nickname situation and stated, "There is no feature of the signing of Sockalexis more gratifying than the fact that his presence on the team will result in relegating to obscurity the title of "Spiders," by which the team has been handicapped for several seasons, to give place to a more significant name "Indians.""⁴³ The article also described how the new ballplayers are too stocky in stature to be called spiders and that "Indians" is a more appropriate term for the new breed of players.⁴⁴

Sockalexis's baseball career faded in three years. By 1899, he no longer competed in professional baseball. During the latter part of the 1899 season, Sockalexis's poor play appeared in the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*. In the 1899 season, towards the end of Sockalexis's career, the writers of the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* treated Sockalexis well and expressed a fair assessment of him even though he played poorly. The article harshly described Sockalexis by stating, "Then when the poor old Indian, Sockalexis, was put in

⁴³ "Cleveland Chatter: They're Indians Now," *Sporting Life*, 22 March 1897.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

the game against St. Louis, merely, as it appeared, to muff easy flies, there was another yell let loose all over the country.”⁴⁵ (The “yell let loose all over the country” had nothing to do with Sockalexis. This pertained to the situation of having two teams with the same management. Fans and writers believed that when two teams who had the same management played each other, the owners determined the outcome).⁴⁶ The article depicted Sockalexis negatively but in a fair manner. The *Cleveland Plain Dealer* portrayed Sockalexis as a ballplayer who had lost his skill and could not compete at the professional level in the beginning of the article. Then, towards the end of the commentary, Sockalexis’s poor fielding is defended by a statement about his performance as a hitter. The article acknowledged, “While Old Sox did make a ridiculous showing in the outfield in one of the games, he also did some remarkable work in the others, and at the bat in one game he lined out safe ones five times out of five chances.”⁴⁷ Sockalexis played substandard defense during his career, but even towards the end of his career, writers of The *Cleveland Plain Dealer* focused on any positive they could and tried to portray Sockalexis as a talented baseball player.

Sockalexis played in the National League for three seasons and during this time writers gave him nicknames. As mentioned earlier, Jeffrey Powers-Beck wrote in his article that Sockalexis received the nickname “Chief.” This nickname had the intention of disgracing him and ridiculing his ethnicity. He stated “Chief” placed Indians on a lower status level than other non-minority player. While Sockalexis received a number of nicknames during his career, the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* and *The Sporting News* did not

⁴⁵ “Cleveland Chatter: They’re Indians Now,” *Sporting Life*, 22 March 1897.

⁴⁶ “Good Luck Continues: Two Days Pass Without a Defeat for the Cleveland,” *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, 18 May 1899.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

refer to Sockalexis as “Chief” and gave him nicknames that honored his play and ethnicity. The most common nickname given to Sockalexis by *The Sporting News* was “Socks.” *The Sporting News* made a number of references to this name during Sockalexis’s career. One article states “Socks was the offspring...”⁴⁸ Another article declares in the title “They Left For the Spring Without “Socks.””⁴⁹ *The Cleveland Plain Dealer* also used “Socks” to refer to Sockalexis. In the article “A Chilly Start” the newspaper described a play during a game by stating “... which was stretched into three bases by Sock’s error.”⁵⁰ “Socks” was the most common nickname given to Sockalexis and it had no connection to his Indian Heritage. Writers used the nickname as an easier way to write Sockalexis’s name.

Writers did use nicknames that referred to Sockalexis’s Indian background. Before the 1898 season, manager Pat Tebeau arranged for the Cleveland team to practice in warmer weather. On March 6th, they left for Hot Springs, Arkansas. The Cleveland team departed without Sockalexis because Louis missed the train.⁵¹ Author Chas Mears stated, “Louis Sockalexis, the Penobscot warrior, came to town with a brand new pledge of abstinence and a promise to be good.”⁵² Mears referred to Sockalexis’s ethnicity but not with intentions of demeaning Louis. In fact, Mears continues on to write that Sockalexis possessed great ability and if he followed the rules of the team, he would have

⁴⁸ *The Sporting News*, 1 May 1897, 4.

⁴⁸ “Pat’s Indians: They Left For the Spring Without “Socks,”” *The Sporting News*, 12 March 1897, 2.

⁴⁹ “A Chilly Start: Tebeau’s Indians Had to Keep Warm at Columbus,” *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, 11 April 1897.

⁵⁰ Chas W. Mears, “Pat’s Indians: They Left for the Spring Without “Socks,”” *The Sporting News*, 12 March 1898, 2.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² Chas W. Mears, “Pat’s Indians: They Left for the Spring Without “Socks,”” *The Sporting News*, 12 March 1898, 2.

a great career in professional baseball.⁵³

Sockalexis never played in the National League after the 1899 season. By 1912, Sockalexis lived back in his hometown of Indian Island, Maine. He no longer had any connection with professional baseball and lived with his tribe. In an article titled “Sockalexis, Fat and Lazy, Takes Ease in His Tribe,” Sockalexis’s condition in 1912 is described. The title suggests that this piece humiliated and shamed Sockalexis for failing to become a national baseball hero but the article illustrated talents he still possessed and praised his efforts when he played in the National League. The article asserted throughout the commentary that he possessed talents in his prime that would have rivaled the best players ever. His speed and power at the plate matched anyone who played baseball.⁵⁴ The article described Louis harshly in the title, but the overall attitude of the article depicted Sockalexis positively. Statements about Sockalexis’s raw abilities contributed to the common myths and speculation that surrounded contemporary writings about Sockalexis.

Along with his baseball abilities, the article also praised Sockalexis’s ability as an umpire. From seeing Sockalexis umpire games around his hometown, the author regarded Sockalexis as an authority on baseball rules.⁵⁵ Sockalexis found a way to draw fans even as an umpire. The article declared, “He was a master of the situation from the moment he stepped upon the diamond. The keen black eyes which perhaps are about the only vestige of the Sockalexis of old, were always on the ball.”⁵⁶ He also gained praise for still being able to hit a baseball. The article stated that Sockalexis could still manage to hit the ball

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ “Sockalexis, Fat and Lazy, Takes Ease in His Tribe,” *The North American*, 4 August 1912.

well and even the best pitchers around Maine found it difficult to strike him out.

Sockalexis still had his sharp eye and ability to hit a baseball, but old age and lack of practice contributed to his decline in speed.⁵⁷ Overall, the article portrayed Sockalexis in a positive manner. It represented Sockalexis's positive qualities and remembered the great things he accomplished although the title suggested a negative depiction.

Sockalexis's became the first known Native American to play professional baseball and Jackie Robinson broke baseball's color barrier by becoming the first African American in Major League Baseball. The media covered both of their stories but in varied ways. For Jackie Robinson, the press feared the consequences of integration of baseball. The social implications of integration made sportswriters unsure of how the public would react to their writings. This fear caused writers to employ a hands-off technique when dealing with African American players.⁵⁸ While Jackie Robinson played in the Minor League system of Major League Baseball, only black sportswriters covered his experience. The mainstream white press ignored the integration of baseball for a number of reasons. Chris Lamb in "Democracy on the Field: The Black Press Takes on White Baseball" explains their reasons:

Most white sportswriters, like the public they wrote for, either criticized integration, ignored the issue completely or, as the *Sporting News*--the so-called bible of baseball-- did in 1942, said that no good would come from raising the race issue. The editor of the *Sporting News* was J.G. Taylor Spink, who, according to one writer, reflected the voice of conservative reactionaries who wanted to keep the sport segregated. Former *Washington Post* columnist Shirley Povich, one of the few white sportswriters who called for the integration of baseball in the 1930s and early 1940s,

⁵⁵ "Sockalexis, Fat and Lazy, Takes Ease in His Tribe," *The North American*, 4 August 1912.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ Chris Lamb, "Democracy on the Field: The Black Press Takes on White Baseball", *Journalism History*, 24 (1998) 51.

has said: "I'm afraid sportswriters thought like club owners--that separate was better.""⁵⁹

The Sporting News also downplayed the talents and importance of Jackie Robinson. In several articles, the press described Jackie Robinson as a good ballplayer who would never make it past the minor leagues. The writers stated that he would not make a historical impact on the game of baseball because his talents lacked against the competition of Major League Baseball. Consequently, the approach of paying little attention to integration prevailed over a fair documentation of Jackie Robinson's career. Eventually, he competed against the top competition of Major League Baseball for 10 seasons.⁶⁰

While Robinson's Minor League career gained little attention from *The Sporting News*, when he became a member of Major League Baseball sportswriters began to discuss his experiences. *The Sporting News* chronicled Robinson's career and published a number of articles about the entrance of a Negro player into professional baseball. While writers documented Sockalexis as a baseball player, Robinson received much more attention for his ethnicity. An entire article, titled "Negro Player Issue Heads for Showdown," dealt completely with Robinson's ethnicity. Author Dan Daniel discussed the repercussions of the signing of a black player and the problems that could arise from desegregation.⁶¹ Daniel also interviewed Branch Rickey about Robinson. In the interview, Daniel asked Rickey five questions concerning Robinson; four of those

⁵⁹ Lamb, 53.

⁶⁰ Lamb, 51-59

⁶¹ Dan Daniel, "Negro Player Issue Heads for Showdown," *The Sporting News*, 1 November 1945.

questions dealt with Robinson's ethnicity.⁶² Daniel asked Rickey, "Won't Robinson be embarrassed? Won't he run into hotel, Pullman and restaurant troubles? Won't there be trouble with Southern players?"⁶³ The primary concern of Daniel had little to do with baseball and more with Robinson's ethnicity. When writers reported on Sockalexis, their primary interest was his playing performance and not his Indian background.

Another example of *The Sporting News* placing a large amount of emphasis on ethnicity, came from an article titled, "No Good From Raising Race Issue." In this article, the author supported the segregation of baseball. He stated that intermixing black and white players would lead to unwanted experiences. He believed that baseball had a different kind of fan; one that teased and mocked opposing teams regardless of race. Even if no prejudices were involved, certain situations would get out of hand.⁶⁴ The article states, "It is not difficult to imagine what would happen if a player on a mixed team, performing before a crowd of the opposite color, should throw a bean ball, strike out with the bases full or spike a rival."⁶⁵ The break down of the color barrier in Major League Baseball brought fear of repercussions. Reporters may have believed that the mixing of blacks and whites would cause problems because of the social tension between the two but writers probably used this reason as an excuse to keep baseball segregated. Fear of the loss of superiority of whites in baseball and success of blacks probably provided the reason for writers of *The Sporting News* reporting against a Negro in

⁶² Branch Rickey was the owner of the Brooklyn Dodgers and the person who signed Jackie Robinson to a Major League Baseball contract. See Dan Daniel, "Negro Player Issue Heads for Showdown," *The Sporting News*, 1 November 1945.

⁶³ Dan Daniel, "Negro Player Issue Heads for Showdown," *The Sporting News*, 1 November 1945.

⁶⁴ "No Good From Raising Race Issue," *The Sporting News*, 8 August 1942.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

professional baseball.

Even though sportswriters paid little attention to Robinson's Minor League Baseball career and primarily focused on his race during his Major League career, he made a large and lasting impact on professional baseball. On the other hand, Sockalexis's career ended abruptly and left fans and sportswriters room for speculation. Stories and facts expanded into mythical achievements that had no actual evidence. Newspapers and magazines did not record the stories and false statements but portrayed Sockalexis through their eyes. The representation presented by sportswriters provided an interesting image when comparing Native Americans to African Americans. Writers welcomed Sockalexis into the baseball world by presenting him to the public through their words. For African Americans, on the other hand, the press provided a small outlet to relay their story to the American public. The popular press, such as *The Sporting News* and *Sporting Life*, found Sockalexis's story more noteworthy than Jackie Robinson's. In reality, Sockalexis's story proved to interest many American readers but the struggle for integration of baseball held a higher significance to American culture and society. Cleveland newspapers and popular baseball magazines described Sockalexis's skill and potential talent, the effects his arrival would cause, and his popularity. For African American ballplayers the press decided to ignore and overshadow their onset into professional baseball and their race always overshadowed their performance on the baseball diamond. For whatever reasons, Sockalexis received better treatment from the press than did African American baseball players.

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- “Cleveland Chatter: Tebeau’s Boys’ Quick Jump Into Playing Form.” *Sporting Life*, 8 May 1897, 8. (This article in the *Sporting Life*, a national sports magazine, described how fans of the National League acted towards opposing players and how they treated Louis. I used this article to contradict what Powers-Beck stated in his article).
- “Cleveland Chatter: The “Indians” Report to Their Heap Big Chief.” *Sporting Life*, 22 March 1897. (This article discusses how Louis was received when he first came to Cleveland to be a part of the team. I used this article to show how players and fans welcomed him).
- “Cleveland Chatter: They’re Indians Now.” *Sporting Life*, 22 March 1897. (This article occurs in the same magazine as the previous source. I used this part to show that upon Sockalexis’s arrival, talk began of Cleveland using the nickname “Indians”).
- Daniel, Dan. “Negro Player Issue Heads for Showdown.” *The Sporting News*, 1 November 1945. (This article discusses the issue of a black player in baseball. It discusses the motives for signing a black player and the problems that could arise. I used this to show how *The Sporting Life* gave a lot of attention to Jackie Robinson’s race and little to Sockalexis’s).
- D. C. R. “Warned By the Umpire.” *The Sporting News*, 1 May 1897, 1. (This article shows Louis interaction with fans and what writers thought of him. It discusses how Louis does not fit into the typical stereotypes of Native Americans).
- “Good Luck Continues: The Last of Poor Sockalexis.” *Cleveland Plain Dealer*. 18 May 1899. (This article describes a game towards the end of Sockalexis’s career. I used this to show that even at the end writers still gave him good treatment).
- Mears, Chas W. “Good Drawing Card: Sockalexis is the Best Advertised Player in the Business.” *The Sporting News*, 24 April 1897. (This article talks about how writers welcomed Sockalexis into the professional baseball world and how well advertised he was).

- Mears, Chas W. *The Sporting News*, 27 March 1897, 6. (This article discusses how Sockalexis and another teammate's names were hard to spell. I used this article to show how writers compared Louis with other players without talking about his ethnicity).
- Mears, Chas W. "Pat's Indians: They Left for the Spring Without "Socks"." *The Sporting News*, 12 March 1898, 2. (This article discusses an incident when Sockalexis missed the train for a team trip. In the article the writer used a nickname for Louis which I used to contradict Powers-Beck's statements about Indian athletes' nicknames).
- "No Good From Raising Race Issue." *The Sporting News*, 8 August 1942. (This is another article in *The Sporting News* based completely on race. I used this in the same way I used the Dan Daniel article).
- "Sockalexis' Ancestors: As Troublesome to Early Settlers as He Is to the Robinsons." *The Sporting News*, 8 January 1898. (This gives a brief background of where Sockalexis came from and some history on his tribe. I used this in my background section to talk about Louis's family).
- "Sockalexis, Fat and Lazy, Takes Ease in His Tribe." *The North American*, 4 August 1912. (This article discusses how Louis went back to live in his tribe. Despite the harsh title most of the article discusses how great of a player he was and how great he could have been. I used this to give another source for writers praising Sockalexis).
- "Tebeau Talks: Cleveland Will Be in the Next Race." *The Sporting News*, 9 October 1897. (This article gives a projection for upcoming Cleveland season. It talks about how Louis will be competing for a starting position with other players. I used this as another example of how writers treated Louis as just another player and not an Indian).
- The Sporting News*, 2 April 1898, 4. (This article discusses the problems that Louis had playing defense and catching fly balls. I used this as another example of an unbiased report of his abilities).
- The Sporting News*, 1 May 1897, 4. (This article discusses how Louis does not fit into the typical stereotype of Native Americans. I used this to again show that writers portrayed Louis in a fair way).

