

DURN DANES!

By Bob Carroll

Recently, the wire services ran a story that researchers had found references to “baseball” years earlier than its traditional 1839 invention by U.S. General Abner Doubleday. Supposedly, the early dates brought into question that baseball was first played in Cooperstown, N.Y.

Well, duh! In truth, no responsible baseball historian and few serious fans have put any faith in the Doubleday yarn for nearly half a century. The new dates may be of interest, but they hardly disprove what was thoroughly disproved long ago. It’s like NASA suddenly announced the world isn’t flat after all.

Although baseball’s history has been rehashed ad nauseum, the origins of football have not had the same wide exposure. As a consequence, a number of myths about football’s early years are still out there and likely to show up in otherwise learned manuscripts.

F’rinstance, just about everybody who writes about football’s origins has to bring up Kick-the-Dane’s-Head. As I’m sure you know, the mean old Danes conquered England in the 900’s or so. By a hundred years later, the Dane’s went back to Daneland and the English sat around waiting for William to conquer them in 1066.

According to the myth, the Englishers so hated the Danemarkians that they’d dig up the skulls of those presumably dead Danes who’d been buried there and give them a good pasting. All this Danish pastry eventually devolved into a game where whole teams of Brits tried to kick a Dane’s skull from one village to another.

Now if those kickers were smart enough to figure out they couldn’t kick the whole Dane for miles, I think they were probably smart enough to know that kicking skulls makes your toes smart. I mean, skulls are hard! And toes are soft! Especially that one that runs piggely-wiggely all the way home.

I’ll just bet those Saxons had a different angle. I’ll bet they filled a bag or a pig’s bladder with straw and then called it a “Dane’s Head.”