



**Name:** Michael Joseph "King" Kelly

**Years:** December 31, 1857 – November 8, 1894

**Residence:** Boston, Massachusetts

**Brief Biography:** "King" Mike Kelly was born on December 31, 1857 in Troy. Mike learned to play baseball living with his mother in Washington D.C. while his father fought in the Union Army during the Civil War. After the war, his father moved the family to Paterson, New Jersey. Unfortunately for Mike, both his parents died within a year and was forced to support himself by taking a job in the textile mills of Paterson at the age of thirteen. By 1873, the fifteen-year-old Kelly was good enough to be invited to play baseball on Blondie Purcell's amateur team in Paterson. Kelly's friend, Jim McCormick, was signed to play for Columbus Buckeyes, an international team, and Jim helped Kelly become his catcher. A year later, Mike signed with the Cincinnati Reds.

Kelly played as an outfielder and backup catcher for the Cincinnati Reds for two years. Kelly signed with the White Stockings for the 1880 season and played there until 1886. During his time in Chicago, he was among the league leaders in most

offensive categories, including leading the league in runs from 1884 through 1886 (120, 124 and 155 respectively), and batting in 1884 and 1886 (.354 and .388). Kelly was also thought to be one of the best defensive catchers at the time, and was one of the first to wear a catcher's glove and chest protector. Kelly's Chicago White Stockings won National league championship in 1880, 1881, 1882, 1885 and 1886. In 1886, the White Stockings sold Kelly for what was then a record \$10,000, to the Boston Beaneaters. It was in Boston that Mike Kelly became "King" Kelly. As a member of the Beaneaters, he continued to be a key run-producer, scoring 120 runs in 1887 and 1889. He continued to play well and was a great box office draw, but Boston failed to win any pennants. Kelly managed and played for the Boston Reds in the year-lived Players' League in 1890, and the Reds won the only Players League title. In 1891, Kelly returned to Cincinnati as the captain of a newly established American Association Club. The team was generally known as the Reds, but was also often called "Kelly's Killers" in the media due to Kelly's strong presence. The team was in seventh place when it folded in mid-August, and Kelly signed with the Boston Reds, who had moved to the Association after the Players' League folded. He spent just four games with the Reds before jumping back across town to the Beaneaters to finish out the season. After spending the 1892 season with the Beaneaters, and batting a career-worst .189, his contract was assigned to the New York Giants in 1893. He played just 20 games for the Giants, batting .269 and driving in 15 runs.

Kelly retired after the 1893 season, having compiled 1357 runs, 69 home runs, 950 RBI, and a .308 batting average. Unreliable record-keeping practices of the era prevent an accurate estimate of how many stolen bases Kelly compiled over his career, but statistics kept during his later years indicate he regularly stole 50 or more bases in a season, including a high of 84 in 1887. He also managed to steal six bases in one game. Kelly also was infamous for cheating, however, particularly on the base paths. Baseball games had only a single umpire at the time, and Kelly would watch the umpire to see if he was watching the play at first base or looking to see if a ball landed fair or foul. When he thought the umpire's back was turned he would run across the entire diamond from first to third, in full view of thousands of fans. He would occasionally get caught and get bad sporting press but the cheating made him endearing to the paying fans watching. In 1894, Kelly developed pneumonia on a boat from New York to Boston. He was rushed to the hospital where he died at the age of 36.

**Major Accomplishments:** 2-time NL batting champion (1884, 1886), 3-time NL runs scored leader, 3-time NL doubles leader, 5-time National League Champion (1880, 1881, 1882, 1885, 1886 and 1892) and was inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame in 1945.

**References:** [http://www.baseballchronology.com/Baseball/Books/Classic/Play-Ball\\_By-King-Kelly/](http://www.baseballchronology.com/Baseball/Books/Classic/Play-Ball_By-King-Kelly/) , <http://www.baseball-reference.com/players/k/kellyki01.shtml> , <http://www.hickoksports.com/biograph/kellyking.shtml>