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MOUND n.5. Baseball. The slightly elevated ground on which the pitcher stands when pitching. Cant.

At first glance, this entry, in Webster's Second New International Dictionary, looks as if the editors miraculously forewore Chinese excellence in baseball — but this Cant. does not mean Cantonese (although the abbreviation list at the front of the dictionary indicates that it does). It means cant, unabbreviated. Following the entry for the word cant is an exposition meant to clarify the differences between cant, slang, jargon, argot, colloquialism, and others of the same species. Cant is explained as a phraseology of a class, usually a term of depreciation or contempt. Why MOUND, then? In a search of baseball terms in Webster's Second, the qualifier cant follows MOUND, ROUNDHOUSE CURVE and TEXAS LEAGUER; however, the designation Baseball cant attaches to PINCH HITTER.

Colloquialism, namely an informal non-derogatory term, is found in the definitions for HOMER and SHORT (short for SHORTSTOP). I note that slang, referring to popular but "unauthorized" words in vogue, is a popular modifier: it follows BUSH LEAGUE, BUSH LEAGUER, CLOUT, FAN, HURL, HURLER, PILL, SACK, SINKER, SLUGGER, SPITTER, STICK, UMP, WHIFF and YANNIGAN. FAN is a special slang word in Webster's Second, since it has two separate baseball meanings: to strike out, a devotee. Most of the remainder of baseball words, from FUNGO to FLOATER, and from INSHOOT and OUTSHOOT to UPSHOOT, are just labelled baseball, and not further modified.

These examples have not helped my understanding of the fine distinctions between "ordinary" words and those which are cant, slang and colloquialisms. Editors of Webster's Third Edition appear also not to understand, as they designate all these words simply with the modifier baseball.

Why these dictionaries include TEXAS LEAGUER and not BALTIMORE CHOP leads to a fresh set of puzzling questions that are best not belabored here. Play ball!

Answers can be found following 20.