

SABR MINOR LEAGUE COMMITTEE NEWSLETTER, October, 1991

We'll begin with a publication update. The Minor League History Journal, edited by Jim Sumner, and featuring articles from many of our members, is scheduled for printing this fall or early winter. We have received over 75 % of the funds needed to print through presales and contributions. We need immediate orders from committee members who have not already ordered. Contributions are tax deductible. Contact Dave Kemp at 605-338-8006 or Rex Stucker Chapter SABR, Box 85224, Sioux Falls, SD 57118. If the creek don't rise we plan to do a volume II, so we'll need articles. More on that later.

Bob Hoie and Bob McConnell report the completion of stat compilation for MLS III. We need volunteers to transfer the material from handwritten copy to text copy. This means several hours of putting stats on a computer database. It's also a good way to learn some minor league history. Dave Kemp is coordinating. If interested, contact Dave Kemp. Publication is scheduled for spring of 1992.

Every year brings requests from minor league teams for record verification. This year is no exception. We have two requests in need of clarification.

The first comes from the office of the New York-Penn League, where the Niagara staff recently threw four consecutive shutouts. How does this stack up in the record books? Bill Weiss has come up with the 1910 Portland (PCL) team, which had an 88 inning scorless innings, including nine complete game shutouts. Does anyone know of any longer streaks?

The second request comes from the San Antonio club and concerns most individual stoeln bases in a game. Eric Young of that team recently stole four bases in a game. Bill Weiss has uncovered two games of seven stolen bases, both in the California League. Lee Mazzilli of Visalia accomplished that feat on June 8, 1975 against San Jose, while Ricky Henderson (big surprise!) duplicated it on May 26, 1977 for Modesto against Fresno. Can anyone equal or top these marks?

Max Bernhardt has begun work on updating Ojobski's index of minor league franchises, following up on work done early in this committee's life by John Pardon and Jerry Jackson. Jerry has continued to work on the project in recent years, contrary to a report at the Minor League Committee meeting at this year's convention. Ironically, minor league committee member Miles Wolff has begun a similar project documenting minor leagues, towns, and franchises. Hopefully, someone will pick up Vern Luse's work on obscure and undocumented leagues.

John Spalding is researching the California Baseball League that operated from the early 1880s to 1905. He is looking for players as well as photographs showing players, teams, and ballparks.

A recent inquiry concerning what constitutes a minor league raises some interesting points. The Minor League Committee has established four criteria for a minor league:

1. Salaried players; 2. Prearranged, balance, home and home schedule; 3. Salaried, rotating umpires; 4. Membership in National Association not required. The 1991 Appalachian League schedule does not have a balanced home and home schedule. Does this make it an unauthorized league?

Ray Nemec has completed the 1901 Three-I League stats and all of the available 1907 Eastern Illinois League stats. He is presently compiling the 1908 E. Illinois League stats.

Thanks to Jim Brown for a recent article from New Orleans magazine on the 1948 New Orleans Pelicans. Contact Dave Kemp for a copy.

Cecil Darby reports the death of Edward Knoblauch, who was included in Minor League Stars II. He died in Schertz, Texas, February 26, the same day his nephew Chuck Knoblauch started spring training with the Minnesota Twins.

Ron Selter is researching the Longhorn and West Texas/New Mexico leagues. He has compiled individual career league batting records, career batting leaders, and single season batting leaders for the Longhorn League, 1947-1955. He is compiling data on hitters with at least 350 at bats and a .350 average in the West Texas/New Mexico League for the same period of time.

John Spalding donated Baseball Guides to the committee for reference work.

Eleven people attended the Minor League Committee meeting in New York. Unfortunately, many of the regular committee volunteers, including the chairman, were unable to attend. Those attending the meeting will receive a letter of clarification concerning the activities of the committee.

For the record, Dave Kemp continues as chairman, a position he has held since 1987. Bob Hoie continues to handle statistical inquiries and historical commentary and likewise continues his work on MLS III. Bob McConnell and John Spalding will begin to assist with research requests. Jim Sumner continues as newsletter editor and has been designated vice-chairman. Contributions to the newsletter can be sent either to Dave Kemp or the editor, the latter at 3215 Warwick Drive, Raleigh, NC 27606. The chairman wishes to remind committee members that absence from distant meetings should not be taken to indicate disgust or disinterest.

THE PLAYS OF THE MONTH IN THE NEW YORK STATE LEAGUE,
1897-1900

By Tony Kissel

Years from now fans will look at Warner Wolf's Plays of the Month and Chris Berman's nicknames and laugh their spacesocks off. During my research on the New York State League from 1897 to 1900 I noticed a few plays which reflect the same spirit of the game. So, without further ado . . . let's go to the microfilm.

May 28, 1898- Cortland hosted Palmyra and was trailing in the bottom of the eighth inning. They rallied to tie the score and added the go-ahead run. This was all the fans needed, so many of them lit up what the local newspaper described as "Victory Cigars" to smoke on the way back home. As the fans puffed contentedly, Palmyra came back to tie the score in the ninth. Neither team scored in the tenth, so the fans continued to smoke the cigars. Cortland finally saved the day with a run in the eleventh. Victory cigars were never mentioned again in the paper.

August 10, 1898- In a game at Utica, the Lyons pitcher, a man named Tessier, was having a bad day and was enduring unmerciful heckling by a group of young boys in the stands. Tessier retaliated by firing the ball into the stands at his hecklers. The umpire promptly threw him out of the game and fined him \$50. A check of the boxscore under Hit By Pitcher lists no victims; perhaps his aim was off.

September 5, 1898- The Cortland Wagonmakers had one week left in the season. They were being clobbered by Auburn in the fourth inning, when their first baseman and second baseman began arguing on the field. Captain Shaffer at first base loved to jabber with the players, which apparently upset second baseman Shay. Reporters overheard words like "stiff" and "knocker." When the inning ended and they ran off the field, Shaffer ran at Shay and punched him in the nose, knocking him to the ground. Shay lay there a moment and then sprang to his feet holding a bat. The Cortland manager wrapped up his furious second baseman before he could take a swing. Meanwhile, the Auburn fans had become disgusted with Shaffer and tried to "wreak vengeance" on him for his unsportsmanlike behavior. A sheriff and an Auburn player had to escort him from the grounds. He was fined and suspended, while Shay suffered a broken nose. Captain Shaffer never played again for Cortland.

1899. Local newspapers had a field day with umpire "Foghorn" McNierney. The Auburn paper called him "Bismarck" and said his voice was like a foghorn on a Mississippi houseboat, and that he supposedly hailed from some Shakespearean cyclonic village in the wilds of Kansas. The Syracuse Journal felt that it was worth 59 cents just to hear McNierney's voice, which it likened to a calliope with a full head of steam. The Schenectady Union's opinion was that he sounded like the second villain in a barnstorming melodramatic company, while another paper compared the umpire's voice to a "Throttled Foghorn."

June 9, 1899- During a game in Cortland, Binghamton Binges' right fielder Hill was chasing a long foul ball near the bleachers. Before he could catch the ball, he was bitten by an irate dog. Hill was seriously hurt and eventually underwent surgery. Three months later, after a lengthy absence from the lineup, Hill returned to Cortland and hit a grand slam home run on the season's final day to help Binghamton win the game.

1900. Phil Rizzuto would have loved Rome's ballpark. A cattle shed stood in short right field. Balls hit over it were ground rule doubles. Opponents complained that Rome batters deliberately aimed for the shed, which was so long that it was also used as a backstop on overthrows to first base. The left fielders had a different problem. A race track ran through part of their area. Behind it was a steep dropoff. If they were unable to pull up in time, they would drop out of sight to a likely injury. Whenever Rome lost a road game, local wags would attribute this to their inability to take the cattle shed along on the train; the team couldn't hit without it.

August 15, 1990- Albany and Cortland were tied 4-4 in the ninth inning of a critical game in Cortland. An Albany batter attempted to bunt but was hit by the pitch. Several Albany players went over to first base, supposedly to make sure the batter was not injured, but in reality to have a laugh over the fortunate bad call by umpire Gifford. The protesting Cortland pitcher was ejected. The Cortland team captain continued to argue and was both ejected and suspended for three games. By this point the bleacher fans had seen enough and headed for Gifford. The umpire responded by forfeiting the game to Albany, spawning a fan frenzy in which he was surrounded, kicked, and slapped in the face. Gifford was rescued by the Cortland president and a local constable, who took him to the ticket office. When two more policeman requested by Gifford arrived, he was escorted from the grounds. An unruly mob of some 300 hooting men and boys followed Gifford up Main Street, bombarding him with "stale hen fruit, tin cans, corn cobs and anything that could be found for the purpose." He made it to his hotel and left town quietly.