

Spring Flings

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Kevin M Saldana, Chairman and Editor

Spring History
“On Board the Giants Special”
The Giants Southern Tour, 1911

By R. J. Lesch

Following spring training in 1911, the New York Giants toured the southern United States, playing the Southern Association and Eastern League teams representing the cities they visited. The Giants were expected to contend for the pennant in 1911, but it was a raucous stay in Atlanta during the southern tour that solidified the team and made that successful pennant run possible. The southern tour was an important part of the spring training experience, for both conditioning and financial reasons. The steadily-increasing competition level honed the Giants' baseball skills and enabled them to work into condition in time to face major-league competition on Opening Day (April 12, 1911). The string of exhibitions along the way helped the Giants pay spring training expenses and expose them to fans along the route who would not otherwise have had the opportunity to see major-league baseball firsthand.

Shunning Hot Springs, Atlanta, Augusta and other larger, more popular spring training locations of the day, John McGraw took his Giants to Marlin, Texas. Marlin was a remote town with mineral springs and a ballfield but without the nightspots and distractions present in the other sites. The Giants spent weekdays in rigorous two-a-day workouts. On weekends they traveled to Dallas, San Antonio and other Texas League cities to play local clubs.

The Giants broke camp on Friday, March 24 and split into three squads. One was composed of recruits, initially placed under the care of coach Arlie Latham (Known as the Freshest Man on Earth in his playing days for his noisy baiting of umpires and opponents). After one game, McGraw called Latham back and reassigned those recruits to pitcher Otis “Doc” Crandall. Doc was beginning his fourth major-league season, and only 23 years old himself, but had already become one of McGraw's favorites for his quiet, sober, unflappable demeanor. Crandall's squad played various dates throughout the South, and then dropped off some of the players in towns along the way, where they would spend the 1911 season playing for local teams who had purchased their contracts from McGraw. The rest of the players formed two squads which played weekend games in Dallas and Fort Worth. They then met in Dallas, boarded their special train and left Texas entirely.

From “on board the Giants' Special”, Damon Runyon wrote that “No aggregation of baseball players ever closed a Spring training season better equipped, physically, at least, for the feverish fray of the Summer, than the team which is now headed for New York.” However, the Giants had played only intrasquad games and weekend matches with Class D Texas League teams. The tests would get tougher. On Tuesday, March 28th, the merged team defeated the Birmingham club 7-6. A ballplayer from Kansas City named McBride homered off Christy Mathewson and added four singles, exciting the local fans, but the Giants pulled out the win with Hooks Wiltse in relief.

The next stop was Atlanta. The Yankees had passed through Atlanta not long before, and had drawn tiny crowds due to unseasonably cold, rainy weather. One game drew only 33 paying customers. Most of those had been members of the Washington Senators, who were training nearby. This worried Arthur Bell, superintendent of the Polo Grounds since 1880, who was handling the business arrangements for the Giants' southern tour.

Fewer than fifty spectators braved the chilly weather for the first game of the Giants series, Wednesday, March 29. The Washington players had an off-day, so they were back. Also on hand was Billy Hamilton, the former outfielder who was now a scout for the Boston National League team.

The most conspicuous person in the ballpark, however, was a loud, husky fellow named Brewster, "King of the Atlanta fans", who sat with his cronies in the grandstand behind third base and directed a steady blast of loud, insulting comments at the Giants. Brewster "made enough noise for twice the number," reported the New York Herald. "Even 'Arlie' Latham succumbed to the racket of the boy, and it takes a great deal to induce Latham to retire from the ring in a 'kidding' match. This was nothing new to the Giants.

Ever since McGraw took over the team in 1902, the Giants had been the loudest, brashest team in the National League. They feared nobody. As was the norm then, they dressed in their hotels and rode open carriages to the ballpark in every city they played. This exposed them to curses, insults, garbage, rotten vegetables pitched from windows above. It didn't matter whether they were in Chicago, Pittsburgh, Cincinnati or St. Louis. McGraw and his players took it and gave it back.

By the time their carriages reached the ballpark, the stories go, the train of opposing fans in their wake were so worked up that they paid their way into the ballpark for the privilege of screaming more insults at the invaders from New York City. That suited the Giants fine. The visiting club got a share of that ticket money. It also got the Giants themselves in a lather. They took it out on the other team.

Two years after McGraw arrived, the Giants claimed the National League pennant, then refused to play the upstart American Leaguers in the World Series that year. In 1905, they repeated as National League champions and then vanquished the Philadelphia Athletics in five games, Mathewson pitching three complete-game shutouts over a span of six days to cement his legend.

In later years, though McGraw would have other pennant winners and other World Series champs, he considered the 1905 Giants to be the best team he ever managed. "We did not have a really slow-thinking ballplayer on that club," wrote McGraw in 1923. Moreover, the 1905 club had "that indomitable determination to win games regardless of who got the individual credit." This club, with hard-nosed players like Roger Bresnahan, Joe McGinnity, Cy Seymour, Mike Donlin, Dan McGann, and others the mold of the old Baltimore Orioles like McGraw himself, was fearless.

Only four players remained from the 1905 Giants: pitchers Red Ames, Christy Mathewson and Hooks Wiltse, and third baseman Art Devlin. McGraw had dealt Bresnahan after the near-miss in 1908. Roger now caught for and managed the Cardinals. McGinnity was in the Eastern League, managing and pitching for Newark. Cy Seymour had lost his outfield job to Snodgrass in 1910 and had been released that September. Donlin had deserted baseball for a stage career. McGann, several years separated from his playing days, had been found shot to death only three months earlier; his death had been ruled a suicide. McGraw had rebuilt his team with green youth, players fresh from the sandlots and the bushes. The younger players- Rube Marquard, Snodgrass, Art Fletcher- addressed their manager as "Mr. McGraw."

These young Giants had no trouble with Atlanta that day, however, collecting 13 hits and winning 10-3. Far from being rattled, the young team worked well together. McGraw had the luxury of using the game as a laboratory exercise and spent the day calling for the hit-and-run and the stolen base. His players executed them smoothly.

Brewster and company, however, had settled on Mathewson, the hero, and Meyers, the Cahuilla Indian, as targets for their abuse. Meyers, of dark complexion, drew a caustic stream of racist epithets. Meyers and his teammates lost no time in jawing back.

Up to now, the audiences for games had been well-mannered. The hectoring they had received from Dallas and Birmingham fans had been within the bounds of good taste. McGraw, in fact, might have wondered how his young players would handle the abuse they would receive when they played their bitter rivals in Chicago or Pittsburgh. Atlanta was his first chance to find out.

Prior to the Thursday game, the Giants took the field for practice and found Brewster on the field with the Atlanta team. Meyers and Brewster traded words and nearly came to blows. The two were separated, but the rest of the Giants enraged by the treatment of their teammate, directed their venom toward Brewster. The Atlanta players took the side of their paying customer. The New York papers carried different versions of the resulting fracas. They all agree that Brewster and shortstop Al Bridwell traded punches. The Herald has Bridwell getting the better of the fight: "Bridwell outpointed his man in every round. He was specially good with his left jabs and induced the 'bug' to keep silent the rest of the afternoon." Runyon also gave the decision to Bridwell, reported that the shortstop fainted left and then struck the King in the "royal pleural cavity". Another uncredited report in the American, however, has Brewster getting the better of the fight, with Bridwell's face bloodied from a cut.

Still, the King was apparently groggy enough that Mathewson was able to take hold of Brewster to escort him off the field. According to Runyon, Brewster tripped the larger Matty had threw him to the ground. One report has an enraged Mathewson (of all people) getting his hands around the Atlanta fan's throat as they wrestled. O'Dell, the Atlanta third baseman, charged in with a bat in hand to attack Matty. The rest of the Giants rushed in. It fell to McGraw, the unlikeliest of peacemakers, to stop the fighting (although one account has him doing so with a bat of his own in hand). The Washington players, again in attendance, having received similar taunts from Brewster, cheered heartily for the Giants.

When the game finally got underway, it was not pretty. New York took the Crackers 11-0, after just 7 innings. The aroused Giants slammed 15 hits. Team captain and second baseman Larry Doyle hit a home run in the first inning that astonished the few present that saw it. Doyle's blast struck a mountain cutaway just past the right field wall and lodged itself into the red clay thirty feet above ground level. The Giants did not let up on Friday. They humiliated Atlanta a third straight time, 11-1. Fights broke out between the teams even before the game started. O'Dell, who had charged Mathewson with a bat the day before, called the Giants cowards. Devlin responded. The two came to blows. Both were separated, but the dam had burst again. Devlin was ejected for arguing an umpire's decision on an attempted steal of home. Merkle was ejected for arguing a call at first base. Marquard was run out for criticizing ball and strike calls. The Crackers, for their part, crumbled even as the Giants raged. Atlanta fielders made eight errors during the contest, and never really challenged the major-league team. McGraw kept rubbing it in. He kept up a stream of taunts. He put his old coaches, Arlie Latham and Wilbert Robinson into the game. He sent his players to the plate out of turn; neither the umpire nor the Atlanta team noticed. Perhaps most galling, McGraw put himself in to pitch after Marquard was ejected.

The old third baseman always fancied that he could have been a pitcher, and he enjoyed tossing a few innings in such exhibitions. Here, McGraw allowed no runs in three innings, and kept up a barrage of taunts. When one Atlanta player dribbled a grounder back to the mound, McGraw fielded it, yawned dramatically, and threw the ball not to first base but to home plate. Meyers relayed the ball to Gowdy at first in plenty of time to retire the hitter. Despite the tiny crowd, reported as a mere 200, McGraw held the team on the field for a half-hour practice until the angry locals dispersed.

The next day the furious Atlanta papers called for police intervention should any of the New Yorkers get out of control during the final game. McGraw and Arthur Bell might of rubbed their hands at this. Maybe press reaction and the local hostility would mean a better turnout for the final game of the series. That did not happen. Only 350 people, not including the large police contingent, went to the park. The Giants' share of the gate receipts was not enough to pay the hotel bill in Atlanta.

Atlanta regained some measure of dignity, winning 6-5 when former Brooklyn player Otto Jordan

scored the winning run in the 10th inning. Then the Giants left Atlanta, much to the relief of Arthur Bell, for whom the trip had been a disaster. For McGraw, however, Atlanta was evidence that his current club had the fighting spirit of the Giants of old.

The Giants southern tour (a partial list)

Sat 3/25/1911: All three games (Dallas, San Antonio, Fort Worth) canceled, rain

Sun 3/26/1911: Dallas, TX: McGraw's Giants 6, Dallas 3

Fort Worth, TX: Doyle's Giants 2, Fort Worth 1

San Antonio, TX: Crandell's Giants 2, San Antonio 1.

Mon 3/27/1911: Austin, TX: Crandell's Giants 6, Austin 4.

McGraw and Doyle merge squads and travel to Birmingham.

Tues 3/28/1911: Birmingham, AL: Giants 7, Birmingham 6.

Wed 3/29/1911: Atlanta, GA: Giants 10, Atlanta 3.

Thurs 3/30/1911: Atlanta, GA: Giants 11, Atlanta 0, 7 innings.

Fri 3/31/1911: Atlanta, GA: Giants 11, Atlanta 1

Sat 4/1/1911: Atlanta, GA: Atlanta 6, Giants 5, 10 innings.

Sun 4/2/1911: Dallas, TX: Dallas 3, Crandell's Giants 2

Mon 4/3/1911: Greensboro, NC: Giants 11, Greensboro 0

Tues 4/4/1911: Norfolk, VA: canceled, rain.

Wed 4/5/1911: Richmond, VA: canceled, rain

Crandell's squad rejoins the rest of the Giants. (I am still looking for box scores of the games played by Crandell's squad, as well as other games they might of played between March 28 and April 4.)

Thurs 4/6/1911: Richmond, VA: Giants 12, Richmond 3.

Fri 4/7/1911: Baltimore, MD: Giants 9, Baltimore 4.

Sat 4/8/1911: Polo Grounds: Giants Regulars 4, Yale 0.

Polo Grounds: Giants Colts 4, Yale 0.

Sun 4/9/1911: Jersey City, NJ: Giants 6, Jersey City 3.

Mon 4-10-1911: Polo Grounds: Giants 18, Jersey City 3.

Wilkes-Barre, PA: Wilkes-Barre 8, Giants Colts 6.

Tues 4/11/1911 Polo Grounds: Giants Regulars 5, Newark 1.

Wilkes-Barre, PA: Giants Colts 7, Wilkes-Barre 4.

Wed 4/12/1911 Regular season begins

Our Committee in the News

The Following Article is from the Valley News (Temecula, CA) August 2, 2002
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Wildomar Resident Chronicles History of Baseball Spring Training Camps

By Joe Naiman, Valley News Correspondent (and STC member, too)

Wildomar- Although baseball is in its regular season and Spring Training will not return until next February, Wildomar resident Kevin Saldana is already involved in the baseball pre-season.

Earlier this year the Society for American Baseball Research created what they call the Spring Training

Committee and named Saldana as the committee's chair.

The unique committee hopes to identify the cities and ballparks used by all professional baseball clubs, including but not limited to teams in current and defunct major leagues, minor league teams, Negro League clubs, women's leagues and foreign leagues.

The committee will focus on Spring Training at all levels.

"If you tell a story of something you've got to tell them the whole story and get everything," Saldana explained "I'm trying to basically, through SABR, document literally anything and everything that happened in professional baseball."

Saldana started to work on a project covering Spring Training at the Class AAA level. He felt that more could be accomplished if a Spring Training Committee existed. "This is just one area that nobody is looking at. Why not?"

Saldana turned to SABR-L, SABR's electronic mail discussion group. "I came up with the idea in November and put a note on the SABR-L." He gained support from members of the Internet group and submitted the proposal to SABR.

The SABR board took up the matter at their January meeting and approved Saldana's application.

Saldana moved to Wildomar last summer.

He said his interest in baseball history and baseball came from being an Angels fan when he was younger. He carefully chronicled the Angels team from their spring training camps to Anaheim Stadium where his mother worked in the food service department.

Saldana saw his first Spring Training game in 1982, when the Angels were training in Palm Springs. IN May of that year he joined SABR. Saldana wrote a letter to SABR founder L. Robert Davids and received a response, and the 18 year old ended up joining the organization.

"It's been a heck of a ride," he said of his 20 years in SABR. Living in Wildomar puts Saldana close to some of the historic Spring Training sites. The Los Angeles Angels of the Pacific Coast League trained in Lake Elsinore in 1916 and from 1920 to 1923, and the Hollywood Stars spent three years training at Nick Matich Field in Lake Elsinore, splitting their Spring training sites in 1939 and 1940 and training full-time in Lake Elsinore in 1941.

Nick Matich Field was named after a Lake Elsinore mayor and was located at Pope and Lakeshore.

"The field itself is still there. It's not far from City Hall," Saldana said.

Going back even earlier, Saldana said the Angels also spent their 1911 pre-season based out of Murrieta Hot Springs. The Murrieta ballpark was about one-quarter of a mile from the hotel.

Spring Training Memories

A Canadian Snowbird at Spring Training

By T. Kent Morgan

Occasionally there is value in being a packrat. When Kevin Saldana was having difficulty finding someone to write about spring training memories for the newsletter, I decided to volunteer. Somewhere in my files were programs, newspaper clippings and notes that would help trigger details about several spring visits to Florida for baseball and books, not beaches and beer.

My first flight to Florida took place in 1987. Indian Shores in the Gulf Coast Beaches area turned out to

be the perfect home base. Jack Russell Stadium, the home of the Phillies, is about 15 minutes north in Clearwater, while the Blue Jays prepare for the season in Dunedin, another 20 minutes towards Canada. Al Lang Stadium, the home of the Cardinals and world champion Mets at the time, is about 35 minutes from Indian Shores, but I soon learned to give myself extra time enroute to the Saint Petersburg park for a stop at Haslam's bookstore. My best find was a first edition of The Bingo Long Traveling All-Stars and Motor Kings for six bucks.

I also went to spring training in 1989, 1991 and 1994 and always stayed in Indian Shores. Along with watching games in Clearwater, Dunedin and St. Pete, I have traveled to Lakeland to catch the Tigers and to the old Boardwalk and Baseball, home of the Royals. I also drove the Sunshine Skyway to Bradenton to see the Pirates and to Sarasota for a White Sox game. Despite my proximity to Tampa, I never attended a game there or in nearby Plant City.

A high light of the first couple of trips was the ability to look at the day's schedule, decide which game to see, drive to a nearby park and buy a ticket. In my archives I found a schedule for 1989, over a 12-day period, I had the choice of 41 games featuring 15 teams in the region from Dunedin south to Sarasota. As spring training games became more popular in the 1990's and new facilities were built, the need to plan and even order tickets in advance took away from the enjoyment.

You never knew whom you would be sitting beside. One afternoon in Clearwater the couple next to me talked about watching the Brooklyn Dodgers in Ebbets Field. At Al Lang, a rabid fan from Miami said he had season tickets not only for the Marlins, but also for the NBA Heat and the NHL Panthers. In Dunedin elderly snowbirds from Ontario wearing Blue Jays caps tried to convince a Manitoban that their team soon would win a World Series. That was before Joe Carter, Roberto Alomar and Devon White arrived on the scene. In Bradenton, I stood in back row of the bleachers and listened to a fan from Pittsburgh claim ancient McKechnie Field has the best atmosphere of any spring training park. It didn't that very rainy afternoon.

Jack Russell is my favorite place to watch a game. It's cozy and you can choose seats in the sun or the shade. And you can't go wrong at Al Lang where all the seats are good and sailboats cruise on Tampa Bay behind the third base stands. Unfortunately, Tommy Walton has passed away so fans can no longer buy a hot dog from "the world's greatest singing salesman," while he entertained them with The Whole World's in his Hands.

Checking the memory bank, I remember Steve Carlton not pitching well for the Phillies against the Cards in 1987 and thinking about when he was a rookie in the Cards chain with my hometown Winnipeg Goldeyes. A couple weeks later the Phillies decided not to offer him a contract. In 1987, the young Bo Jackson captured the interest of many fans and he amazed me with his power in batting practice with every ball that did not fly over the fence hit on a line. My first look at Moises Alou convinced me that his name got him a look from the Pirates and he would never make it as a major league hitter.

After watching the Tigers hammer my Twins in Lakeland in 1987, I never dreamed that the Twins would be World Champions in October. My scouting report – not much talent beyond Puckett, Hrbek, Gaetti and Viola. And they do teach at spring training. Tiger third baseman Darnell Coles made a couple of bad throws so after the game, manager Sparky Anderson was working with him on his release. Fans shouldn't miss the practices at the training sites where you can get close to the action and listen to coaches instructing players. And inter-squad and "B" squad games are where you get the chance to see the prospects.

In 1994 when Michael Jordan was with the White Sox, nearly everyone near me in the ticket line at Ed Smith Stadium said they were there to see him. Late in the game Jordan ran from the dugout to the warm-up area behind the right field fence. The crowd became excited as he was likely getting into the game and they didn't care when he struck out as a pinch-hitter. Once Jordan was out of the gam, the stands emptied.

While the desire to go to spring training never has left me, the high cost in Canadian dollars for Florida

as a travel destination has kept this snowbird home in recent years. Many Manitobans are vacationing in Arizona instead so that may be my next spring training stop. Teams that I haven't seen are based there so I'm just waiting for a friend with an extra room in a condo to invite me.

...And Finally a word too many from the Chair

I would like to thank committee members RJ Lesch, Joe Naiman and T Kent Morgan for their contributions to this issue. At the National Convention last June our first annual committee meeting was held, it was attended by 18 people, some of whom were actual committee members. My thanks go out to Vice-Chairman Dave Raglin for chairing the meeting. Members are reminded to visit the committee website at <http://groups.yahoo.com/Groups/sabrspring/> on a regular basis. List members are reminded that they have the opportunity to be listed as regular committee members by writing me an e-mail at sabrkev@angelsbaseball.com. Only regular committee members are included in the committee roster sent to the SABR Office. There is no real difference between being a regular member and a committee member. If you are in doubt as to your status, again write me an e-mail. And speaking of the SABR Office Congratulations goes out to Acting Executive Director John Zajc, who will lose the acting part of his title on January 1st. The SABR board could not of picked a better man for the job. Speaking of SABRJohn he has asked committee chairpersons to put a few announcements into our committee newsletters so, here goes...

The SABR website is continually improving and adding more features, including a searchable membership directory. The online membership directory should be available by January 1. Members without internet access can request a printed membership directory beginning in April. It will be a laser-printed copy.

Nominations for SABR President and two Director positions are being accepted through February 1. Contact Nominating Committee Chair Paul Andresen to nominate someone: 3006 NW McKinley Drive, Corvallis OR 97330, 541-752-8424, bilko56@attbi.com

The 2003 SABR Bulletin schedule will be: March, April, Sept/Oct and Nov/Dec

The book publication schedule will be:

For 2002: The National Pastime is in the mail now

The Best of "By the Numbers" will be out in the next three weeks.

The Baseball Research Journal should be out late January

For 2003: The National Pastime should be mailed in May/June

The Baseball Research Journal should be mailed in October

The Deadball Research Era National League Book is the third publication for 2003:

At an estimated 400 pages, it will be SABR's largest ever.

The national convention will be July 10 to 13 at the Denver Marriott City Center.

If anyone wants to make a presentation, contact G.S. Rowe at 7205 Poudre River Rd #6, Greeley, CO 80634, growes36@attbi.com. Deadline is March 15.

The Seymour Medal Conference will be May 2-4 at the Radisson Gateway Hotel in Cleveland. If anyone is interested in making a presentation, contact John Zajc, 1-800-969-7227 or info@sabr.org. The deadline is February 18.