

Beating the Bushes



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EDITOR'S NOTE

The Grapefruit and Cactus League seasons are underway, and thousands of minor leaguers currently in Florida and Arizona are hopeful of one day ascending to "The Show".

We have lots of great content in this issue, hopefully something for just about everyone. We'd love to get submissions from more members for future newsletters. Book reviews, short player bios, project reports, anything minor league related is welcome.

Enjoy this issue.

WID CONROY AND ELMIRA'S FIRST BASEBALL PENNANT

By Jack Smiles

Elmira needed a boost 102 years ago this summer when a trickle down from a nationwide economic recession forced the city's lifeblood, the Morrow plant of Willys-Overland, to lay off 345 men, 10 percent of the workforce. A winning baseball team helped ease the misery. And like the country and the Morrow plant would do, the 1914 Elmira Colonels made a roaring comeback.

And who better than first-year player/manager Wid Conroy to score the run that finished off the epic comeback that brought Elmira its first professional baseball pennant with the 1914 championship of the country's second oldest minor league, the class B (AA today) New York State League?

Conroy scored the winning run in the second game of a double header in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania on September 10. The Wilkes-Barre Barons were one of two Pennsylvania teams in the league, the Scranton Miners being the other. The Barons were the preseason favorite and lived up to it. On June 30 the Barons were in first place with a 38-16 record and the Colonels were fourth at 28-28, 11 games behind. From that point the Barons didn't exactly collapse, they played better than .500 at 41-39, but they were buried by a furious onslaught of wins by

the Colonels who played .747 baseball, going 62-21 in July August and September. The Colonels destroyed the Barons head-to-head winning 14 of 20 and 11 of the last 13. The Colonels clinched the pennant in Wilkes-Barre with a double header sweep on September 10.

Conroy, 37 in 1914, was a veteran short stop of 11 Major League seasons, with the New York Highlanders, later the Yankees, and the Washington Senators. He never batted higher than .273 in the majors but he was a slick fielder and base runner. In 1907 with New York he was second steals with 41, behind Ty Cobb's league-leading 49.

As the son of an Irish immigrant shoe factory worker from Philadelphia, Conroy was a good fit for the Elmira of 100 years ago. He had an us-against-the-world work ethic and take-no-prisoners mentality. He was once suspended 20 games for fighting Cub's star Joe Tinker.

Conroy's given name was William. Wid was short for Widow, his boyhood nickname. Before he took over Elmira in 1914 Conroy had experience with New York State baseball. He played with the Cortland Wagonmakers of the New York State League in 1899, where he led all shortstops in fielding percentage and he came to Elmira from International League Rochester Hustlers where he had played two seasons after Washington released him in 1912.

The 1914 pennant-winning season was a product of Conroy's leadership, playing — as the everyday third baseman he led the league in fielding — and his connections. Whenever the Colonels needed a player to fill a gap, Conroy found one who worked, or, as in the case of Emil "Irish" Meusel, one fell in his lap. In April Clark Griffith, the owner of the American League Washington Senators, bought Meusel, a 20-year-outfielder, from Los Angeles in the Pacific Coast League. Conroy had played for Griffith for three seasons and remained a friend. When Griffith decided Meusel, after only one season of professional ball, was not ready for the big time, he loaned Meusel to Elmira with the right of recall at any time.

Meusel may not have been ready for the American, but he was more than ready for the New York State League. A story in *Sporting Life* magazine called Meusel "the best fielder, thrower and baserunner in the league." He was also the best batter. Meusel led the NYSL in runs, hits and home runs and was second in batting average at .323, be-

hind his teammate Dick Kaufman, the Colonel's first baseman who batted .329. Kaufman, a 6-3, 190 pound first baseman from Lewisburg, Pennsylvania, was considered a can't miss major leaguer, but he played only parts of two seasons with the St. Louis Browns.

Meusel didn't miss. He developed into a career .310 hitter in the major leagues where he averaged 115 RBIs per season for New York Giants from 1922-'25, leading the league in '23 when he hit a team-high 19 home runs. He played in four World Series with the Giants hitting .345 in the '21 series.

The Colonels, or Widowers, as the scribes called them, never would have overtaken Wilkes-Barre for the pennant without Conroy and Meusel, but there were many other parts that were crucial.

Conroy found and signed three others players who Elmira couldn't have done without. George Hunter, a 27-year-old converted pitcher from Buffalo who pitched one season in the National League with Brooklyn, hit .274 as the everyday rightfielder and was second in the league in runs right behind Meusel.

Conroy went through two short stops before he bought Otis Johnson from St. Paul, Minnesota. Johnson batted .285 and scored 56 runs in 90 games. When second baseman Charlie Loudenslager went down with a broken shoulder, Conroy brought in 30-year-old Joe Ward who had played for the Phillies in 1909 and '10. Ward hit .313 in the last 38 games.

The top pitchers were "Slow" Joe Doyle, James Swift and John Creager, who won 15 games each and Frank Nicholson, who went 9-3 after being released earlier in the season by both Troy and Wilkes-Barre. Doyle, a 35 year old from Kansas who had pitched six seasons with the Highlanders, threw a near perfect game against Syracuse in July. One batter reached on an error by Conroy, but he was doubled up and Doyle faced the minimum 27 batters.

Lew "Old Dog" Ritter —a 38-year-old from Harrisburg, PA who had spent seven seasons as an outfielder with the Brooklyn Dodgers — caught and pitched for Elmira, winning 11 games in relief in 1914.

Though exact records don't exist, the Colonels were holy hell at home in Recreation Park (Dunn Field) where they probably they played .750 baseball. With a recession on 1914 was a tough year for baseball attendance. Recreation Park had been reconfigured to hold 4,000 fans and drew a capacity crowd on opening day, an impressive number in a season when three major league teams averaged fewer than 2,000 a game. Precise season attendance figures don't exist but Elmira and Wilkes-Barre were reported to be the only teams to break even while the rest of the league lost \$46,000.

However fan friendly Recreation Park was, it was not the out-of-town scribes favorite place. "That Elmira grounds," wrote a Wilkes-Barre writer, "is so small that a

wire screen is stretched all along the fence to keep balls from going out. The centerfielder plays right against the fence and the catcher isn't 10 feet from the grandstand."

Despite complaints about Recreation Park, at home the Wilkes-Barre scribes, players and fans were gracious losers. To a man the Barons congratulated the Colonels after the clinching game, while the fans gave the Colonels a rousing cheer and the writers said there was no team in the league the Barons would rather lose to.

When word of the clinching reached Elmira, Hager's Band paraded through the downtown streets and hundred of fans fell in behind the band and marched up Lake Street to the train station where they waited — with the Elmira Heights Fire Department Band and 300 employees of the Empire Bridge Company — for Conroy and the Colonels' Lackawanna passenger train to arrive from Wilkes-Barre.

The train pulled in at 10 o'clock and when the fans saw Conroy's smiling face in a window, the bands' big base drums boomed and the fans roared. Conroy was rushed to the head of an impromptu parade of the players, both bands and several hundred fans on foot and in automobiles. Fans who didn't march lined the streets setting off red and green Roman candles, blowing tin horns and cheering wildly. The celebrators marched south on Lake Street to Church, west on Church to Main, south to Water and north to East Market where the parade finally disbanded.

Though Elmira lost a post season best of seven series to Harrisburg, champions of the Tri-State League, the Colonels had an excuse. They had to play the series without Meusel who was recalled to the Senators by Griffith.

In any case the loss to Harrisburg could not diminish the joy in Elmira when Wid Conroy's Widowers won the city's first baseball pennant 100 years ago.



1914 Elmira Colonels

SHORT HISTORY OF THE WEST TEXAS-NEW MEXICO LEAGUE

By Ron Selter

One league that forever seems to captivate both fans and researchers alike is the West Texas-New Mexico League. The reason for this is simple: Numbers. As Bill James noted in his *Historical Abstract*, "There were five of these leagues down there, The West Texas-New Mexico League, the Big State League, the Arizona-Texas League, the Lone Star League and the Long-horn League. They were all hitters leagues; they had lots of people hit .380, hit 50 home runs."¹ Premier among these leagues stood the West Texas-New Mexico League. In fact, the batting statistics of the West Texas-New Mexico League became so legendary that still, some sixty years after its demise; the league remains a topic of conversation among minor league aficionados.

ORIGIN OF THE LEAGUE

The West Texas-New Mexico (WT-NM) League was founded at a meeting which was held at Carlsbad Caverns in Feb. 1937. The story in *The Sporting News* under the title: "*Seven Miles Underground Organizing Meeting for League*" stated: "The most novel league meeting in the history of the game will be held seven miles underground in one of the huge chambers of the Carlsbad Caverns, near here, on February 28, when representatives of towns expected to become members of the West Texas League (sic) will gather to perfect their organization. Baseball men from other sections of the country including President W. G. Bramham of the National Association, officials from the East Texas and Cotton States leagues, also will be in attendance and plans are being made for a chain hook-up over NBC, to describe the unique setting."² Milton E. Price was elected as the first president of the Class D WT-NM League; a post he was to fill until he retired following the 1951 season. At the meeting, they officially awarded the original six West Texas-New Mexico League franchises to four towns in Texas; Midland, Monahans, Odessa, and Wink; and two in New Mexico; Hobbs and Roswell.

The article also noted that one-time Fort Worth star pitcher of the 1920s, Joe Pate had been one of the most active people attracting baseball to the area.

The West Texas-New Mexico League was founded to serve a fast growing region of western Texas and southeastern New Mexico that was a result of the Permian Basin oil and natural gas development that occurred in the area in the 1930s. While the area experienced rapid population growth, the combined population of the entire six counties in the WT-NM League area in 1937 only amounted to about 76,000.³ The towns were small to very small. For instance, the city of Wink Texas had a population of less than 2000. In Its inaugural season, the

league was geographically very compact and all of the six teams were in counties that were contiguous. The four Texas towns fell within a 80 mile stretch of West Texas, and the distance between the two most distant towns-Midland Texas and Roswell New Mexico-was only about 225 miles by road.

Actually, this was not the first time this area had been served by organized baseball. In the early 1920s, there was a West Texas League (followed in 1923 by the Panhandle-Pecos Valley League) that had many of the towns that later competed in the WT-NM League. Then in 1928 the West Texas League was revived. The Class D league survived through 1929, but never answered the bell for the depression year of 1930. The predominant importance of the oil and gas industry in the area was reflected in the team nicknames in the early years of the league: the Hobbs Drillers, Borger Gassers, Wink Spudders and Odessa Oilers. That tradition would more or less carry on until the league ceased to exist after the 1955 season.

Before WWII, as a Class D operation, the West Texas-New Mexico League was subject to a number of restrictions. Player salaries had a ceiling, the roster limits were 14 or 15 players, with an even lower limit for players with more than limited minor league experience.⁴ One result of the roster and salary limits turned out to be the great number of player-managers in the league. The other impact of the roster limits was the use of many position players as part-time pitchers and the use of pitchers as part-time position players. In fact the distinction between pitchers and non-pitchers became very blurred in the WT-NM League.

THE EARLY YEARS

The league commenced play on the afternoon of May 4, 1937 at Roswell New Mexico with an overflow crowd of fans attending the Hobbs-Roswell game.⁵ Late that same month the Wink Spudders became the first team in the league to install lights. At the same time the Hobbs franchise ran into trouble as the team drew only about 100 fans per game. After starting off with a 3-9 record, the owner-manager Ned Pettigrew quit, and the franchise had to be reorganized. James Murray became president and Fincher Withers took over as both field and business manager. They added lights at the Hobbs ballpark later in the season, which helped attendance.

At the start of June, the Wink team replaced its manager (D. E. Perry), not an unusual move then or now, but his replacement, the great Texas League pitcher of the 1920s, Joe Pate, was unusual. Until then Pate had been a league umpire. Joe Pate also assumed an ownership stake in the franchise. Ned Pettigrew, who had just given up ownership of the Hobbs franchise, was named by league President Milton Price to assume the presidency of Wink.

The league operated with six teams for only its first month and a half. On June 17 the Odessa franchise ab-

ruptly folded despite being in second place and having a winning percentage of .622. Lack of attendance was cited as the reason for the team's demise. The league stumbled on with five teams, which necessitated always having one team being off during each series until the Midland franchise, a farm team of the St. Louis Cardinals, also folded on July 9th, a little less than a month later. Midland threw in the towel despite being in 1st place. Apparently, Midland attendance had been hampered by the lack of night games. At the time the team folded, Midland was the only club in the league without lights.

None of the Midland players joined other WT-NM teams: being a Cardinal farm club, all of the players were assigned to other teams in the Cardinal farm system. By contrast, eleven of the Odessa players were picked up by other league teams. The attractiveness of the Odessa players to the other clubs probably stemmed from the fact they had been hitting at a .329 clip when the team folded. In the 16 seasons of the West Texas-New Mexico League's operation, no team ever topped this mark.

Wink assumed league leadership in the standings when the 1st and 2nd place teams dropped out. At the end of the regular season all four teams conducted a playoff, which 1st place Wink wound up the winner.

After the playoffs, Wink beat the Albuquerque Dukes, the champions of the Arizona-Texas League; 9 to 7 and 5 to 4 in the best two out of three played in Albuquerque.

Individual achievements during the league's inaugural season included Bob Hood of Wink, who won the Triple Crown (.372 Avg. 30 HR and 145 RBI) as well as leading in slugging percentage, HR percentage, total bases, and extra base hits. Mel Reist of Monahans also had a fine season, losing the batting title by one point, and hitting 21 HR with 119 RBI.

As far as pitching was concerned, Red Hay of Wink led pitchers with an 18-8 record and a league leading 3.97 ERA. Roswell pitcher Marshall Scott went 18-6 with a 4.36 ERA.

For the 1938 season, the WT-NM League again began play with six teams. To resume operations as a six team league, Midland (with a remodeled ballpark including the installation of lights) returned and was joined by three new teams. Lubbock Texas replaced Odessa, Big Spring Texas replaced Monahans, and Clovis New Mexico replaced Roswell. Thus after only one full year only 50% of the league's original cities remained. (While Clovis "officially" replaced Roswell, the Hobbs team actually came away with the players from the 1937 Roswell club.)

For the 1938 season three teams had major league affiliations: Midland-St. Louis Cardinals, Lubbock-Dallas of the Texas League, which was part of the Chicago White Sox farm system; and Hobbs had a working agreement with Beaumont in the Texas League, which was part of the Detroit Tigers system. Only three clubs had lights installed before the season began, but all had them in place before

the middle of June. In early June, with attendance very poor, Clovis decided to bring the fences in, hoping the long ball would help to fill some seats: Left went from 370' to 335', center from 428' to 380', and right from 335' to 325'. Attendance improved markedly.

Lubbock finished first, nine games ahead of Clovis, and also won the post-season playoffs defeating first Wink (3 games to 0) and then Clovis (4 games to 1). As a hint of slugging feats in the league's future, the pennant winning Lubbock Hubbers hit 175 home runs in 130 games.

The top hitter that season was Lance Donaldson of Hobbs, who was leading the league after 67 games with a torrid .437 batting mark before being sold to Alexandria of the Evangeline League. The .437 average compiled by Donaldson was the highest ever recorded (Min. 250 AB) in the 16 year history of the league. The batting title (Min. 350 AB) was won by Hobbs teammate Cecil Smyly with a .367 average. The most notable pitcher that season was Ralph Marshall of Lubbock who threw a no-hitter that season, had an ERA of 1.55 in 58 innings, and tied the league single game strikeout record of 22. His tenure in the league was cut short when National Association President W. G. Bramham declared Marshall a free agent because of a rule violation involving a signing bonus. Also of note: Clovis's Ernie Nelson became the league's first 20 game winner, going 20-10 in 238 innings with a mind-boggling 4.88 ERA.

Unlike 1937, every club in the West Texas-New Mexico League finished the 1938 season. Although Lubbock drew above 30,000 during the regular season, and Big Spring and Clovis also had satisfactory fan support, attendance at the three other league towns did not measure up. During the latter part of the season, games scheduled at Midland, Wink and Hobbs had to be transferred to Lubbock and Big Spring because fan support was so abysmal. All tolled, attendance for the league as a whole averaged no more than between 300 and 400 per game.

Notwithstanding poor attendance in some markets, the WT-NM League expanded to an eight-team circuit in 1939. The Wink franchise transferred to Lamesa Texas, and three new franchises - Abilene, Amarillo, and Pampa, all in West Texas, joined the league. With Wink and Hobbs having dropped before the start of the 1939 season (and never to return), only Midland survived of the original six cities in the league.

The Abilene franchise did not do well (either at the gate or on the field), and moved to Borger July 9, 1939 becoming the Borger Gassers. For the first time in 1939, the league played a split season, with Lubbock winning both the first and second halves as well as the playoffs. The Lubbock team was a real powerhouse. The Chicago White Sox controlled team finished 16 games ahead of its nearest rival, Big Spring, over the course of the whole season. The plan for the playoffs had been for the first-half winner to face the second-half winner, but because of Lubbock's dominance, a modified Shaughnessy playoff was held. Lubbock defeated Big Spring (which had the

second best record for the whole season) 3 games to none; and Pampa (second in the second half) defeated Midland (which had finished third in the second half) 3 games to 2. In the finals Lubbock defeated Pampa 4 games to 1. In all this, Lamesa - which had finished the first half in second place - became the odd man out.

While 1939 might have been the Lubbock Hubbers year, 1939 had Gordon Nell's name written all over it. The Pampa outfielder *merely* led the league in runs (152), hits (207), 2B (60), HR (44), RBI (189) and in batting average (.392). Lamesa centerfielder, Emmitt Fullenwider, had a fine season with 43 HR and 140 RBI while hitting .335. As for pitching, Jodie Marek of Big Spring upped the league record for wins to 23 in spite of giving up 302 hits in 275 innings, and a 4.22 ERA.

As hitting inched up even further in 1939, league attendance shot up. 1939 saw 260,000 fans go through the turnstiles compared to 110,000 in 1938. Even taking into account the two new teams and slightly longer schedule, the gains were impressive: Amarillo (51,000), Lubbock (50,000), Pampa (35,000), Big Spring (31,000).⁶

After the 1939 experience with a split season, the league in 1940 reverted to a format of an undivided season with a regular post-season Shaughnessy playoff system. Pampa won a close pennant race by a mere 1.5 games over Amarillo. Amarillo jumped out to a 14-4 record in the early going, but then Pampa overtook them in late June. Pampa maintained its 1st place position until overtaken by Amarillo in early August, but surrendered its lead to Lubbock in late August, with Amarillo only 3 games out. After that, Pampa got it all together.

Nevertheless, fourth place Borger swept Pampa in the first round of the playoffs, and Borger then went on to win it all by overcoming Lubbock in seven games. In early August Borger signed former Yankee great Wiley Moore who went 5 and 1 the rest of the way with an impressive (for the WT-NM) 2.81 ERA, and helped solidify the team during the post season.

The 1940 season saw the first - but certainly not the last - .400 hitter in West Texas-New Mexico League history. Lubbock outfielder Edwin Schweda posted a .422 batting mark to win the batting crown and established a new league record. This mark also topped all batting averages in organized baseball that year⁷. (Schweda's 1940 season was his big one. In 1941, he went to the Western Association where he didn't do much, and then went off to war for four years. After his return, he had a credible year in 1946 in both the Carolina and Piedmont leagues, but dropped out of Organized Baseball.) Coming in with fine seasons once again were Gordon Nell (40 HR, 175 RBI, .389 BA for Borger) and Emmitt Fullenwider (39 HR, 149 RBI, .332 for Amarillo).

The 1940 season, in general, saw an upsurge in slugging, with home runs for the league increasing from 664 in 1939 to 833. The league also posted a .294 batting aver-

age that season, which was tops to date. While hitting appeared to be the story in 1940, Jim Ramsdell and Rex Dilbeck both tied the league record for wins with 23. Ramsdell went 23-18 with a 4.00 ERA for Big Spring/Odessa, and lefty Dilbeck had an exceptional 23-7 3.344 ERA season for the league leading Pampa Oilers. Pat Ralish led the league win ERA with a 3.25, which helped him to a 20-4 record. Kid Crider raised the league record for strikeouts to 206.

Also of note, Bob Crues (slugger supreme of the post-war West Texas-New Mexico League) first made his presence felt - but as a pitcher, with an exceptional 20-5 win-loss record, and good (in WT-NM terms), but not great, 4.21 ERA for Lamesa and Borger.

Off the field, not all teams were financially successful, as the Big Spring franchise had to be moved in mid-season to Odessa Texas, on June 20, 1940. Thus, Odessa returned to the WT-NM League some three years after its mid-season demise in 1937. Nonetheless, the mid-season 1940 transfer of Big Spring to Odessa proved not to be a success, and was reversed before the start the 1941 season. Odessa never returned to the West Texas-New Mexico League. When the league totaled up attendance after the season, they found that almost 8% less fans had found their way into WT-NM League parks in 1940.

Midland also battled attendance problems throughout the 1940 season, and had to be transferred to Wichita Falls for the 1941 season. In Wichita Falls, the team added lights at Spudder Park, the old Texas League grounds, to permit night games. The first night game would be played on May 12, 1941.

Shortly before press time it was announced that Abilene would protest Wednesday's game on these grounds:

- 1. Because Salina won**
- 2. Because Abilene lost**
- 3. Because it didn't rain before the fifth inning**
- 4. Because Sigler's decisions were not raw enough**
- 5. Because of the war in Spain**
- 6. Because Prince Herman, heir to the Grand Duchy over in Germany has announced his succession**
- 7. Because Manhattan has won a game**

-Salina (KS) Daily Union, August 5, 1909

The Big Spring Bombers had a very successful season in 1941, winning a record 91 games and taking the pennant by two games over Borger. Borger, in fact, dogged Big Spring all season, and even once in July managed to grab the lead. Big Spring finished on top despite a sub par team batting mark of .262 (when compared to the league mark of .270). Big Spring made up in pitching and defense what it lacked in hitting, as the club led the league in both fielding and ERA. Wichita Falls lost 95 games, finishing last (49 games out). The Wichita Falls Spudders hit only 18 HR and a team average of .241, some 19 points below the next worst team, Lamesa. Being eighth in batting, pitching, and fielding, it was not surprising they finished a distant eighth in the standings.

In the playoffs, Big Spring made it through the first round sweeping Amarillo, but lost to the fourth place Clovis Pioneers in the finals.

As for individual achievements, pitching shone brighter than all else. Pitcher after pitcher came in with sub-3.00 ERA years, led by John McPartland of Pampa with a 2.11. Jim Ramsdell set a league record with 25 wins in leading the Big Spring Bombers to the top.

Hitting in general, and home runs in particular, dropped substantially from 1940 to 1941. The league batting average dropped 24 points (.270 versus .294), and home runs declined nearly 50% (833 to 466). Gordon Nell, the perennial home run champ, led the league with only 28, with perennial bridesmaid, Emmitt Fullenwider, two behind him. Though Frank Hargrove led the league in batting with a respectable .388 average, only 15 full time players topped the .300 mark, just about half as many as the year before. During the 1941 season, stolen bases were nearly three times as prevalent as home runs, and the WT-NM League was not by any stretch the slugger's haven it would become in future years.

THE IMPACT OF THE WAR

The 1942 season began with a contemplated split-season arrangement, and with only one change in the league's lineup. Albuquerque, New Mexico, left the Arizona-Texas League to join the West Texas-New Mexico League, replacing Big Spring. (Actually Albuquerque replaced Big Spring when the Big Spring franchise moved to Pampa, and the Pampa franchise moved to Albuquerque.) The 1942 competition could be characterized as two good teams - Clovis and Lamesa, and one very bad team - Wichita Falls, with everyone else in the middle. Clovis won the first half, and had a very impressive - a league record, as a matter of fact - .732 winning percentage for the whole season.

The Wichita Falls team was neither an artistic nor a commercial success. The club stumbled out of the gate with a horrible 1-11 record, and talk centered around moving the team to an abandoned Arizona-Texas territory, El Paso, Texas. The franchise, however, transferred to Big Spring Texas two weeks into the season (May 9th), and the Big Spring Pirates began life with a 4-14 record. Even with

the re-christening the club didn't do any better in Big Spring, and by late May the team had also abandoned Big Spring to become a "road team", playing exclusively as the visitors for the remainder of the first half of the season. The club changed its name from the Wichita Falls Spudders to the Big Spring Pirates and, finally, they became simply the Pirates when they became homeless. The team finished the first half of the split season with only 8 wins against 47 losses. The resulting .145 W-L Pct. would be the worst ever recorded in the history of the league. The team batted at a paltry .223 clip, connected for only seven home runs, and produced an average of only 3.1 runs per game. (To show how bad the club's batting average had been, the second worst team batting average was a .277 by Clovis.) At the same time, the team's pitchers were giving up a whopping 7.5 runs per game. This more than explains the Pirates dismal W-L record and, probably, why the club finished the season without a hometown. This has to qualify the Pirates as one of the truly awful teams in minor league history.

By contrast, in the first half of the 1942 season, the Clovis Pioneers established the highest winning percentage in the history of the WT-NM League (.754). The Clovis success was due in large measure to the pitching of Ken Wyatt and William Hewitt who combined for a 30-4 record. For the season Lamesa placed ahead of Clovis in batting, runs scored, fielding and ERA. The Lamesa Dodgers only managed, however, to finish second, 8 1/2 games behind Clovis, in the most important category - the standings.

For the start of the second half of the split season the hapless and homeless Pirates, as well as the Albuquerque Dukes, dropped out of the league, leaving only six teams to continue. (In truth, Albuquerque withdrew. And so the league felt obliged to disband the traveling Pirates.)

After only 15 games into the second half, with Lubbock a half game ahead of Clovis, the effects of WWII forced the league to stop play and disband. What happened was that four teams - Clovis, Amarillo, Pampa, and Borger - abruptly dropped out of the league after July 4th double-headers, leaving only Lubbock and Lamesa. These two teams spent several days trying to line up two other teams in an effort to finish out the season, but were unsuccessful, and the West Texas-New Mexico League bit the dust. The manpower drain, and to a lesser extent the travel restrictions of the war, severely curtailed minor league play throughout the nation. The West Texas-New Mexico League, like the majority of the minor leagues, had been forced to suspend operations for the duration of the war.

In a sidelight, Monty Stratton - the former White Sox pitcher who lost his leg in a hunting accident, and whose life was portrayed by Jimmy Stewart in the 1949 movie, *The Stratton Story* - managed the Lubbock Hubbers. On May 15th he quit his post, lamenting to The Sporting News stringer, "Bus travel is just too hard on a fellow."⁹ Probably getting shelled unmercifully in his only mound appearance on the mound didn't help either.

Clovis left-handed pitcher Ken Wyatt topped the league in individual achievements. He led the league in wins, W-L Pct., complete games, strikeouts, and ERA. Wyatt went unbeaten for the season en route to winning 17 straight. Frank Warren of Borger became the second .400 hitter in the league's history when he won the batting crown with a .402 average. After Warren, the second most notable season had to be that of Amarillo left fielder Frank Hargrove. He hit .373 with 22 HR and 84 RBI in only 67 games; one is left to imagine what his numbers would have been like had he been able to play whole schedule of games. The 1942 season would also turn out to be Hargrove's final year in organized ball, and one can imagine what his career might have been.

SLUGGERS OF THE SOUTHWEST - THE POST WAR YEARS

In the post war era the West Texas-New Mexico League attained its final configuration and enjoyed its golden age both on and off the field. The postwar years produced the slugging feats that made the West Texas-New Mexico League legendary in minor league history. With the post-war year of 1946, the West Texas-New Mexico League began a ten season run of hitting exploits during which the league produced no less than 16 single-season batting marks of .400 or better.

The league resumed play in 1946 as a Class C league and would continue to operate as a Class C league through the 1954 season, when it became Class B for its final season. The only franchise change from 1942 was Abilene, Texas, replacing the ill-fated Wichita Falls/Big Spring team. The league established in 1946 a configuration it would maintain, with only two franchise changes, for the next ten years. The eight teams were comprised of six from West Texas and two from New Mexico. The West Texas-New Mexico League now spread from Albuquerque, New Mexico, in the west to Abilene, Texas, in the east, a distance of about 500 miles. This was a far cry from the very compact six team operation that began the 1937 season. Expansion and the replacement of smaller markets with larger towns contributed to the increase of the league's population base: going from 76,000 in 1937 to 440,000 in 1946. In addition, the other factor leading to an increase in the league's base was the general growth of population in the West Texas-New Mexico area. Between 1940 and 1950 the population base in New Mexico (Albuquerque and Clovis) increased 93% and the increase for the Texas portion of the league (Abilene, Amarillo, Borger, Lamesa, Lubbock, Pampa) was 52%.¹⁰

In 1946 the league played a 140 game schedule, and the first place team, Abilene - which led the league in batting, pitching, and fielding - won an up-to-then record 97 games. Early on though, Amarillo and Pampa were in the pennant race. Pampa, in fact, set a league record of thirteen straight wins, and Amarillo was tied for first as late as June 17, but Abilene pulled away from there on. By contrast, Lamesa lost 104 games and finished a far-distant last - 62.5 games off the pace. The Lamesa pitching staff, "assisted" by a defense which contributed 406 errors, gave up 8.6 runs per game and totaled 1205 runs

allowed for the season. Lamesa was so bad that the team officially petitioned the league in July to split the season, which the league rejected.

In 1946, the league held a Shaughnessy playoff as they had in the prewar years with the exception that the first round would change to the best four out of seven games. Abilene was surprised by fourth place Lubbock 4 games to 1, and Pampa defeated Amarillo 4 games to 2. Pampa took the championship by defeating Lubbock in six games. Pampa destroyed Lubbock 13 to 1 in the final game. After winning the championship, Pampa went to Henderson, Texas, to face the winners of the East Texas League. Pampa beat the Henderson Oilers three straight at Henderson. Back in Pampa to finish up the series, the hometown Oilers scored 14 runs in the first two innings, and went on to crush the Henderson Oilers by a 25-9 score.

The total league offensive effort reverted to the same general levels as in the pre-war 1940 season, with a league batting average of .288 and 888 home runs. A soon to be famous minor league slugger named Joe Bauman of Amarillo led the league with 48 home runs, which broke the old league record of 44 set in 1939 by Gordon Nell. Bauman, of course would move on to the Longhorn League, where in 1954 he would set the then all-time organized baseball record of 72 home runs in a season. Sportswriters around the league, however, voted Hayden "Stubby" Greer, shortstop-manager of pennant winning Abilene, the Most Valuable Player. Greer hit .358 with 23 HR and 131 RBI. He also led the league with 38 stolen bases. Stubby Greer would wind up with a lifetime .330 batting average in a 15-year minor league career ending in 1957.¹¹

While pitching, in general, once again took a back seat to hitting, pitcher Bill Evans set two league records: 26 wins in a season, and 297 strikeouts. Future Cub pitcher Warren Hacker also had a fine season at 20-4 3.67, as did John Hall of Abilene with a 20-9 and league leading 2.45 ERA.

In 1947 the West Texas-New Mexico League reached incredible levels in terms of pitcher-pounding offensive numbers. The league average jumped nearly 20 points to .304 and the league, with 1200 home runs, established a minor league record (for an eight team league). Three teams exceeded 200 home runs, and six teams scored over 1000 runs, all accomplished in a 140 game season. The Lubbock Hubbers that year were one of the greatest offensive minor league teams in minor league history. The Hubbers hit .315 with 210 home runs and a slugging percentage of .533, which was good for 1247 runs - an average of 8.9 runs per game. The Hubbers also came in first in pitching and second in fielding. They finished with a record 99 victories, placing first by a comfortable margin of 14 games and took the playoffs while winning 8 and losing 2. The Hubbers were led by Bill Serena, the all-time slugging shortstop. He hit .374 while establishing new league records in home runs with 57 and RBIs with 190. He topped off his great regular season by leading the Hubbers to victory in the playoffs, clobbering an amazing 13 home runs in only 10 games. For the regular

season, his league record slugging percentage of .832 is one of the highest in minor league history.

Through the middle of July, Lubbock and Amarillo battled for first, more often than not tied. But by August 20th, Lubbock had pulled out to a six game lead, and coasted home to a final 5 1/2 game lead over Amarillo. Besides Serena, Bob Crues had an excellent season (with 52 HR, 178 RBI, and a .380 BA), foreshadowing his great 1948 season. And Gordon Nell had another of his typically great seasons: .344 with 49 HR and 173 RBI. Also, three players with more than 100 games hit .400: Leon Cato (.410), Buck Fausett (.409), and George Sturdivant (.404).

League pitchers, obviously, had a hard time in 1947, but two posted pretty good ERAs: Paul Hinrichs of Lubbock led the league with 3.35 ERA. But two 20 game winners give a better picture of where ERAs went to in 1947: Al Johnson (21-11) finished with 5.02, and Lenny Heinz had a 4.69 ERA.

The league was not only an artistic success, it turned out to be a commercial one as well. Attendance for the regular season was 619,901 in 1947 (the first year for which complete attendance data are available), with an additional 54,406 for the playoffs¹². Lamesa, a town of only 8000 inhabitants, drew over 66,000 fans, and the town began to be known as "The biggest little town in baseball."¹³

In 1948, the West Texas-New Mexico League had its greatest seasons, and arguably the greatest offensive season ever in the minors. The hitting exploits of the year before were completely overshadowed by what happened in 1948. The season produced four .400 hitters (100 games of more) and an additional thirty-five .300 hitters, counting only the regulars. The top four teams in the standings - Albuquerque, Amarillo, Lubbock and Pampa - had team batting averages grouped between .322 to .324 (six of the league teams hit above .300 for the year). All four of these teams scored more than 1150 runs during the 140 game regular season. The minor league home run record - which the WT-NM set the prior year - was broken when the league clubbed a total of 1217 home runs. The season also saw league records in runs (9090), batting average (.310), and slugging percentage (.485). These marks would never again be approached, much less topped, in future years.

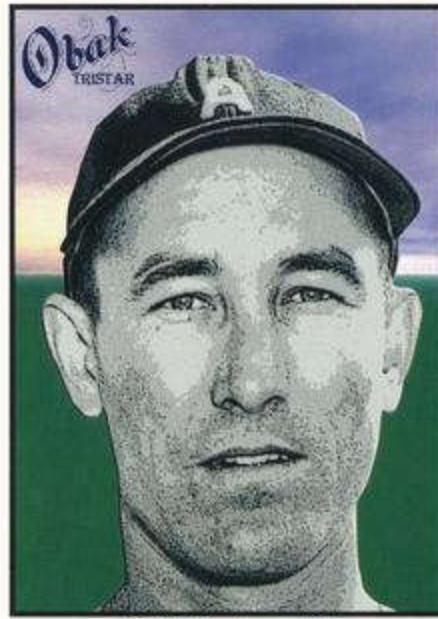
The best offensive club in the league was Amarillo, which scored a record high 1267 runs in only 140 games, and was had to be considered one of the all-time great hitting teams in the minor league history.

The Amarillo Gold Sox were led by outfielder Bob Crues, who probably had the greatest all-time season ever. Crues drove in an all-time organized baseball record 254 RBIs, breaking Tony Lazzari's record set in the PCL in 1925 by 32 RBIs.¹⁴ (As noted before, Crues started out as a pitcher in the pre-war WT-NM League winning as many as twenty games in a season before hurting his arm. After going 20-5 in 1940 for Borger, his contract was bought by Scranton in the Eastern League. During spring training with Scranton in 1941, he came up with a sore arm. He struggled through that year and the next before going into the service. Once in the service, he gave up pitching - primarily because his arm was gone, and began playing first base and his hitting blossomed. Crues returned to the WT-NM in 1946, but was released by Lamesa before hooking on with Amarillo, where he finished with 29 HR, 120 RBI, .341 BA)¹⁵ The incredible RBI total was made possible by hitting 69 home runs, combined with a .404 batting average and a record setting .848 slugging percentage. To give some idea of the magnitude of his season, the runner up was Ron Bowen of Albuquerque, 82 RBIs behind at 172; and 2nd place Virgil Richardson of Lubbock hit only 38 HRs, 31 HRs behind Crue's 69 round trippers. To go with those totals, Bob Crues hit .404 during the season. Yet, surprisingly, Crues didn't even win the triple crown, as his batting average wound up only fourth best in the league that season. The batting crown went to Hershel Martin of Albuquerque, who set a new league record with a .425 batting average. Martin also had another notable individual batting achievement in 1948; a record setting On-Base Percentage of .572 that would stand for the life of the league. Martin, a former major league outfielder (.285 BA lifetime), turned 39 at the end of the 1948 season; he would finish his career in the league in 1953, ending a minor

league career that began with Monore in the Cotton States League in 1932 with a .317 lifetime batting average.¹⁶

The following records were also set in 1948: Attendance 118,788, set by Albuquerque; Doubles, 61, by Hershel Martin; triples, 22, by Len Attyd; hits, 232, by Ron Bowen.

As one would expect, pitching stats were less than stellar. Only one pitcher had an ERA below 4.50, although Abilene's Bernie Coapland did register three shutouts. The Lamesa Loboes pitching staff did manage some impressive figures - not good figures, but figures impressive in their magnitude. With a considerable "assist" from the defense (373 errors) the lamentable Loboes gave up a hard to imagine 10.3 runs per game - an all-time high in the league's run-filled history.



CRUES, Amarillo

The Bob Crues led Amarillo Gold Sox were not a one man team, by any means, as three other regulars and one reserve hit over .350 in an offense which averaged better than nine runs per game. Nevertheless, despite outscoring competitor Albuquerque by 101 runs, the Gold Sox finished a full four games behind the first place Albuquerque Dukes. The Dukes finished first despite a notably less potent offense thanks to their better defense and pitching. The results of the pennant race showed once again that while hitting and offense are extremely important, they are not by themselves sufficient to always bring home the bacon.

In the playoffs, it was quite a different story as Amarillo prevailed over Lubbock in six games, and blew Pampa away 4 games to 1 in the finals. Pampa defeated league leader Albuquerque in the first round.

As to the season itself, Borger and Lamesa jumped out to an early lead; but by June 17th the first four teams were only separated by four games, with Pampa slightly ahead. Gradually, however, Albuquerque proved to be the best team over the long haul, pulling away to a 6 1/2 game lead by August 19th, and coasting home to a final 4 game lead over Amarillo.

The West Texas-New Mexico League was not the only league that put up great numbers that year. So, after the 1948 season, the National Association, at their annual meeting, decided that all minor leagues would introduce for the 1949 season a baseball of "uniform resiliency".

With the introduction of the new ball in 1949, offensive numbers subsided a bit in the West Texas-New Mexico League: the league's batting average dropped to .296 (from .310, and home runs fell 23% from the record level of 1948. Still, the league managed to produce two .400 hitters and saw one of the all-time minor league home-run-slugging performances by D. C. "Pud" Miller of Lamesa. Miller smashed 52 home runs for Lamesa in only 109 games. (Miller joined Lamesa after they had already played 31 games and didn't miss a game the rest of the season.) His marks of an .866 Slugging Percentage and hitting homers in 13.4% of his at bats were league records that would never be approached in subsequent years. His batting average of .404 was good for second place in the batting race, trailing Abilene's Roberto Fernandez's mark .408 mark. Miller also drove in 135 RBIs.

As would be expected, pitching improved to a great degree: Six pitchers achieved ERAs of below 4.00, led by Cuban native Rene Vega of Abilene with 2.95, though he went only 11 and 10 for the season. Pampa's Roy Parker only posted a 4.51 ERA, but that turned out to be good enough to notch him 23 wins against only 10 losses.

The league reached a peak in attendance in 1949 with a total regular season attendance of 674,465 fans. One should note that this peak attendance amounted to only 1213 per game, which is very modest when compared to the minor league attendance figures of the 1990s. Lamesa continued on with its reputation as "the biggest little town in baseball" by drawing over 76,000 fans (population had only grown to 11,000).

Attendance might have been even greater, had there been a pennant race of some sort during the second half of the season. Attendance outpaced that of 1948 by a small margin, when only 4 1/2 games separated the first four teams (with Albuquerque closely followed Abilene, Lubbock and Lamesa). Unfortunately for the league, Albuquerque gradually pulled away from the pack, and finished 10 games ahead of both Abilene and Amarillo.

In the playoffs, Albuquerque showed, once again, that they were the class of the league by defeating Amarillo 4 games to 1 in the finals after having eliminated Lamesa in the first round 4 games to 3.

The 1950 season saw hitting rebound, with the league as a whole achieving its second highest batting average with a composite league mark of .306. Home runs also increased with a total of 1026 in the regular season, recouping about half of what it lost the season before. Five batters posted averages of .389 or better, and a future major-leaguer, Harry Bright of Clovis, won the batting championship with an impressive .413 mark. Good hitting was widespread in the league that season, with nearly three-quarters (47 of 64) of the regulars compiling averages of .300 or better. In fact, three teams (Pampa, Albuquerque, and Borger) had every one of their regulars in the lineup hitting .300 or better.

The top ERA was posted by Ed Carnett of Borger with a 3.15 figure. This same Ed Carnett also happened to be a slugging outfielder when not on the mound, who two seasons earlier had a .409 batting average and .725 slugging percentage. While this was an exceptional case, the league had a tendency to blur the distinction between position players and pitchers. Another outstanding pitcher/hitter for the 1950 season was Roy Parker of Pampa. Besides leading the league with 27 victories and 256 strikeouts, Parker also played part-time in the outfield, where he compiled a .346 average and .703 slugging percentage. As to pitching records there were a total of 5 pitchers who won 20 or more games. All except Lubbock's Bob Clodfelter posted ERAs well above 4.00. Record setting Roy Parker (27-12), for instance had a 4.55 ERA, and Ron Cantrell of Albuquerque (20-6) posted an unbelievable (for a twenty-game winner) 5.75 ERA.

The pennant race was won by the Pampa Oilers by four games over the second place Albuquerque Dukes. Pampa though, didn't have an easy time of it. In fact, the Oilers didn't take over 1st place until the beginning of August. For the first two months of the season, Borger led the league. Then Lubbock tied them for the lead before falling back. After that, Lamesa took the lead until Pampa came on.

The post season playoffs were won by Albuquerque 4 games to 1 over Lamesa with one game ending in a tie. In the first round the Dukes beat Lubbock, also 4 games to 1, while Lamesa defeated the pennant winner Pampa in seven games.

Attendance for the league declined by nearly 100,000 from 1949 - the start of an ominous trend that continued through the 1954 season. This was part of an overall

trend as attendance for the minors as a whole was down 17% for the season, which was one of the greatest one-year drops in history. The only bright spot was Lamesa which set another season attendance record with 87,438 going through the turnstiles, though Lubbock and Pampa did have slight increases. But on the debit side, Amarillo came in with a decrease of 45,854 fans, Abilene down 42,854, Albuquerque sliding 22,306. Borger and Clovis posted slight declines.

Eight leagues that had played in 1950 decided to suspend operations before the 1951 season began, the largest one-year decrease in leagues since the 1914 to 1915 decline (with the exception of the war year declines during the First and Second World Wars).¹⁸ Attendance in the minors for 1951 decreased 20% from the total achieved in 1950. While attendance woes are generally thought to be the cause of the decline in leagues, the Korean War probably had as great, if not greater, effect on the existence of individual leagues. During the Korean conflict, fully 1600 players from organized ball had been or were in service by the start of the 1952 season. The West Texas-New Mexico League's attendance held up better than most leagues with 43,574 decline, but the long-term picture did not appear good. The 1951 season also was notable for the fact that blacks appeared in the league for the first time.

The 1951 season saw the West Texas-New Mexico League experience another drop-off similar to the 1949 slump. While the league posted a healthy .292 batting average, that mark was down 14 points from 1950, and home runs declined by a whopping 25%. In fact, while the West Texas-New Mexico League was still very much a hitters league as far as batting average was concerned, the league that season averaged 10% fewer home runs per game than the majors; the WT-NM averaged 1.36/game, the major leagues 1.51/game.

The Abilene Blue Sox - with 90 victories and 51 losses-won the pennant was by some 8.5 games over the second place Albuquerque contingent. Abilene jumped out to a 9 and 2 record in the early going – and never looked back, clinching the pennant before the end of August. The Blue Sox pennant drive can be mainly attributed to their league-leading pitching rotation. The staff was led by Isasoro Leon who posted the league's best winning percentage (.895) winning 17 and dropping only two. He was joined by two 20 game winners on the Blue Sox pitching staff, Fred Schmidt and James Melton, with 22 wins apiece.

In the playoffs, Abilene again demonstrated its superiority by defeating first Lubbock and then Lamesa in successive playoff rounds. After going the distance with Lubbock in the first round, they blew away Lamesa in four straight after having lost the opening game of the series.

For the first time the West Texas-New Mexico League and Longhorn League planned to get together for a championship of West Texas after each league determined its playoff winner. But Odessa, the champion of the Longhorn League, declined to meet Abilene at the last moment.

By contrast with prior years, only one team - Lamesa, achieved a team batting average above .300. Still, in what was for the league a sub-par year offensively, three teams topped the thousand mark in runs scored.

Glenn Burns of Lamesa - an outstanding minor league hitter (.337 lifetime BA) - headed up the list of notable individual achievements for that season. Burns led the league in batting (.392), slugging (.647), and RBIs. His RBI total of 197 in only 141 games, was the fifth highest RBI total in minor league history. Les Mulcahy of Amarillo led the league with 35 home runs, the lowest total since the war-shortened season of 1942. On the other hand, 35 players who appeared in more than a hundred games hit .300 or better.

Pitchers of note included Jesse Priest of Albuquerque who went 19-4 with a league leading 3.15 ERA. Former National Leaguer Fred Schmidt tossed 5 shutouts for Abilene on the way to 22-5, 3.17 season. Ed Arthur tied the league record for wins (27), but had a 4.53 ERA.

After the season finished, the league's only president Milton Price decided to retire, announcing in early October that he would not seek re-election. It would take a couple of votes before Lubbock Business Manager, Ray Winkler, was voted in as new league president.

The 1952 season saw the Clovis Pioneers run away with the pennant as they finished 17.5 games ahead of 2nd place Albuquerque. Abilene jumped out to the lead after the first week, but by the end of the second week Clovis had moved into first with an 11-3 .786 record. From there on, it was all Clovis. The Clovis Pioneers led all teams in offense, scoring 1028 runs in 141 games, and finished second in both team fielding and ERA. Amarillo pounded out a league leading 216 home runs. Despite this impressive accomplishment and a .305 team batting average, Amarillo came in only fourth in runs scored. The league as a whole had a tidy .300 batting average-the fourth and, as it turned out to be, the final time the West Texas-New Mexico League reached the .300 mark in its history. Despite an increase in both league batting (up 8 points) and home runs (an increase of 163) over 1951, total runs scored actually decreased (7043 versus 7194). The explanation may lie in improved defense and control by the pitching staffs. Total league errors declined by 127, walks by 489, and hit-by-pitchers by 56, which more than offset the increase in hits (240).

Though both Lubbock and Abilene had the largest opening night crowds seen in years, league attendance declined for the third straight year to 493,707. This amounted to a drop of more than 25% from the peak year of 1949. In a region where population was growing rapidly, the trend in attendance was ominous. No doubt the lack of a pennant race had an effect on the numbers, but still, the trend in attendance was ominous. The most troubling decline, however occurred at Lamesa, where the season's attendance (41,541) came in at less than half of the total only two years earlier. After the season finished, the league shifted the Lamesa franchise to Plainview Texas, a small city located between Amarillo and Lubbock. Plainview, while not large, still had about a

50% larger population base than Lamesa, and it was hoped that attendance would improve.

Attendance in the playoffs also dropped from 51,520 (2,862 per game) in 1951 to 35,684 (2,378 per game), despite Clovis going down in the first round to Amarillo, 4 games to 1.

The batting crown that year was won by Patricio Lorenzo, an outfielder/third baseman with Lamesa and Borger, with a .415 average. Despite lacking the 369 AB required to qualify for the batting crown, Lorenzo was awarded the batting crown as his average would, by adding the At Bats required (under rule 10.18a of the Official Baseball Rules), still produced a batting average (.390) that exceeded the runner-up, Jim Eldridge of Borger who *only* hit .363. His league-leading average (.415) was also the best in all of organized baseball.¹⁹

An indication of the nature of the WT-NM League can be found in Lorenzo's overall record that season. In addition to leading the league in batting, he led all WT-NM third basemen in errors with 35. This in itself was not remarkable, as third basemen in the WT-NM League would often be charged with as many as 50 or 60 errors over the course of a season. What, at first blush, appeared remarkable about Lorenzo's record at third base is that he played, according to the guide, only 15 games at third!²⁰ What a great piece of trivia that would be - until one figured out that Lorenzo's range factor would come out to a 9.5²¹ (34 putouts, 73 assists). In a call to Bill Weiss, who became the league statistician the following year, he confirmed that the leagues sheets also had Lorenzo playing in only 15 games at third base, but was positive that the number games played represented a typo of some sort. Weiss speculated that the true number was 45 or 54 games played.²² (If Lorenzo played in 45 games, his range factor would have been 2.6. Lorenzo had 2.1 TC/G in the outfield that year. On the other hand, his batting record indicates he appeared in 85 games; therefore he would have had to play in 11 games where he split time between 3B and the outfield, and 3 games if the figure were 45 games played at third.)

Carroll "Red" Dial of Clovis won 20 games, the second of five straight seasons he achieved that distinction in league play. Dial won 27 games to lead all hurlers (which also tied the league record for most wins in a season); he also ranked among the top five in W-L Percentage (.730), strikeouts (170) and innings pitched (269). The only two negatives that season were his 111 walks, and his 5.09 ERA. Jesse Priest won his second ERA title with a 3.06 ERA to go along with his 19-9 record an league-leading 5 shutouts.

Between seasons, five leagues (including the West Texas-New Mexico) in the southwestern United States met a couple of times to discuss possible realignment/consolidation of these leagues, but nothing came out of these meetings.

The 1953 season saw the new Plainview team (called the Ponies) contend for the pennant, and the franchise enjoyed a marked increase in attendance over the 1952 to-

tals at Lamesa (79,780 versus 41,541 the previous year in Lamesa). The Ponies that season had not one, but two, .400 hitters. Outfielder Don Stokes led the league in batting on the way to setting a new league record with an average of .426. And his teammate 3B/1B Frosty Kennedy came in second at .410. Stokes and Kennedy combined to knock in 343 runs to go with their .400 plus batting averages. Stokes clubbed 27 round trippers, while Kennedy, who in 1956 would hit 60 HR, hit 38 HR.

Despite the nearly 100% increase in attendance at Plainview (over Lamesa's totals of the year before), total regular season attendance for the league dropped 1% to 489,852, with Borger drawing only 35,335. (Borger had drawn 74,999 in 1949 with a 7th place club). The league was still surviving but the attendance situation had become worrisome, especially at small town like Borger and Clovis. And the nearby Class C Longhorn League - which also operated in the New Mexico and West Texas area - had two teams fold during the 1953 season.

The 1953 season saw the Albuquerque Dukes win the pennant by seven games over Clovis, Plainview, and Lubbock, all of whom tied for second. As the season began, Lubbock appeared to be the team to beat. The Hubbers led throughout the first half of the season, only being overtaken by the eventual winners near the end of July. Clovis, Plainview, and Lubbock all finished 7 games back, though Clovis finished second by one percentage point.

The Dukes then prevailed in the playoffs, defeating first Lubbock 4 games to 2, and then overcoming Clovis in seven games. Plainview lost to Clovis in six games in the first round. Attendance in the playoffs increased from 35,684 to 37,903; however, that increase only served to mask a per game decline from 2,378 in 1952 to a paltry 1,994 in 1953.

The Dukes had a fine hitting team as every regular - and two of the reserves - had a .300 or better average. The Albuquerque pitching staff was led by George Socha, who was unbeaten in 14 decisions, and Grover Blacksher, who led the league with a 2.84 ERA.

Individual accomplishments included Jim Matthews of Amarillo, who led in home runs, slugging percentage, on-base percentage, and walks. His 50 home runs were the fifth highest in the league's history. Don Stokes set a new record for hits (242) and also with 64 doubles broke the old record of 62 set the year before by I. B. Palmer; however, he was surpassed by Doug Lewis of Pampa, who finished the season with the new league record with 66 two-base hits. Left-handed hitting Win Eldridge of Borger finished in third place in the batting race with a .407 average.

The 1953 season also marked slugger Bob Crues retirement from the game. Crues was released by Borger after having appeared in only 11 games. His batting average had been .195 at the time. Crues injured his back while jumping for a line drive, and was unable to continue in the lineup, so he had been given his release.

Pitchers were again led by Red Dial of Clovis, who established a new league record 28 wins in a season, and by Jack Venable of Amarillo who set a league record by striking out 295 batters (*and walking 172!*). In all, seven pitchers topped the 20 win mark in 1953 and an additional four struckout over 200 batters. Former Negro Leaguer (with the Birmingham Black Barons from 1950 through 1952)²³, Sad Sam Williams of Pampa, went 25-12, which got him named as the league's Rookie of the Year, despite his 5.13 ERA and 124 base on balls.

In 1954 - for the first time in history - no club in the West Texas-New Mexico League had an affiliation with a major league club. The 1954 season also saw the first franchise failure in the post-war era as the Borger team suspended operations on 16 July. Borger, never a large market, drew 35,335 in 1953 (the worst in the league). For 1954, Borger was holding last place in the standings, and had a total home attendance of 22,500, when the franchise folded after 86 games. The league finished the year with only seven clubs competing. Six of the eight Borger regulars and six of the team's pitchers would be picked up by other teams in the league.

Pampa came home first in a close race for the pennant, beating out the second-place Clovis club by a half game. Clovis led most of the season, but Pampa - after sweeping three doubleheaders in three days - took the lead in early August. For the remainder of the season, the two teams see-sawed back and forth for first place. Pampa, by winning 7 of its last 8 games, finally edged out Clovis for the pennant.

Pampa also prevailed in the playoffs, defeating Abilene first and then knocking off Clovis.

While three teams had batting averages above .300, no team managed to reach the 1000 mark in runs scored for the first time in the postwar era. Total runs scored in the league dropped to the lowest level for a full season since the pre-war 1941 season. Don Stokes of Plainview won the batting crown for the second year in a row, once again with a .400 plus season (.405). The dominant pitcher was Lubbock's John Isenhart with the league's all-time best ERA of 1.81. Isenhart also led the in W-L Pct. (.786), while on his way to striking out 164 batters in 124 innings. An indication of the decline in hitting that season was the establishment of a league record for shutouts by Leonard Ruelle of Amarillo, who notched 6. Another notable achievement was attained by Red Dial of Clovis, as he led the league in wins (25) for the third straight season - and he even found time to hit .366 as a part-time outfielder.

For the 1955 season, the West Texas-New Mexico League became a Class B league when they added El Paso to replace the failed Borger franchise. The selection of El Paso proved to be a success as the new franchise's attendance of 71,771 more than tripled the level recorded for Borger in 1954. In total, 1955 league attendance (659,817) was up a whopping 45% over 1954 totals, and was within 2% of the league record set in 1949. In addition to the increase due to the replacement of Borger with El Paso, five

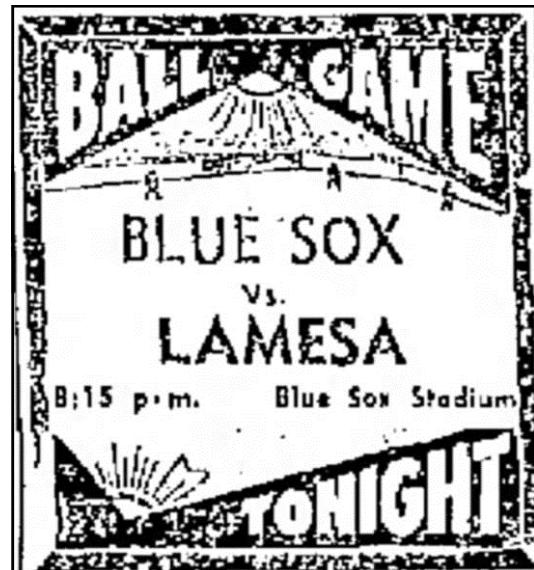
other clubs enjoyed attendance increases, with first place Amarillo up more than 150%.

Obviously, a tight pennant race contributed to the upsurge in attendance. In that race, Pampa took the early lead, but lost it to Amarillo when they were swept in a three game series by the Gold Sox in late July. Amarillo then held on to edge Albuquerque by 1/2 game (the second straight season the WT-NM race had been decided by that margin). Pampa finished in third place, 4 1/2 games back, but went on to win the playoffs, knocking off both Albuquerque and Amarillo. Pampa then moved on to represent the West Texas-New Mexico League at the Little Dixie Series, where Corpus Christi of the Big State League swept them in four games.

Hitting increased over the prior season as the league average reached .294 and home runs increased nearly 25% to 1210, the second highest in league history. Pampa, which hit 225 homers in 140 games, broke the team home run record. The Pampa Oilers were led by a trio of home run sluggers: first baseman Joe Fortin (41), third baseman Curtis Hardaway (43), and outfielder Paul Halter (37). The batting crown was won by Plainview catcher I. B. Palmer with a .406 mark. Palmer also finished as the league leader in total bases, slugging pct., and extra-base-hits. Among pitchers, Red Dial of Pampa turned in a 20 win season for the fifth year in a row, and combined that with a league-leading ERA of 3.55. For good measure, Dial also led the league in innings pitched, games pitched and shutouts thrown.

DEMISE OF THE WEST TEXAS-NEW MEXICO LEAGUE

Total 1955 regular season attendance for the league had been only 2% below the league record set in 1949. This attendance total was considered quite good for minor league baseball in the mid 1950's, as the West Texas-New Mexico League topped all other Class B leagues, and in



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addition exceeded the attendance of all Class A leagues as the table shown below indicates:

Table 1 1955 Regular Season Attendance

LEAGUE	Class	Teams	Attendance
Eastern	A	8	633,484
South Atlantic	A	8	616,640
Western	A	6	497,437
Big State	B	8*	415,211
Carolina	B	8	414,557
Northwest	B	7	395,557
Piedmont	B	8	421,490
Three I	B	8**	460,776
Tri-State	B	4	173,785
West Texas-NM	B	8	659,817

* Two teams withdrew during season

** One team withdrew during season

This success turned out to be short-lived. By the following season, the apparently popular league no longer existed. Half of the league's former teams had taken refuge, along with six teams from the Class C Longhorn League, to form the short-lived Southwestern League. What caused such a well known - and apparently successful minor league - to suddenly disappear?

In 1955 the West Texas-New Mexico League consisted of franchises in eight cities, five of which were located in markets of (by Class B standards) moderate size and three in small markets as shown by the market size and attendance data in Table 2.

TABLE 2 WT-NM League Market and Attendance Data

City	1955 Attendance	1955 Population*
Amarillo TX	132,128	118,300
Abilene TX	125,714	102,900
Albuquerque NM	78,432	145,700
El Paso TX	71,771	254,500
Pampa TX	65,931	28,100
Clovis NM	64,017	28,000
Plainview TX	63,269	33,000
Lubbock TX	58,555	128,700

* Metropolitan Area or County Population estimated for 1955; interpolated between 1950 and 1960 Census

Several unrelated events occurred in distant parts of the baseball world after the 1954 season that would have a devastating impact on the West Texas-New Mexico League. At the winter meetings in December 1954, the sale and transfer of the Philadelphia Athletics to Kansas City was approved. This resulted in the move of that city's American Association franchise to Denver. Concurrent with that announcement, the St. Louis Cardinals shifted the Columbus franchise in the same league to Omaha after years of declining attendance. Both Denver and Omaha had been long time members of the Western League, which was then reduced to six teams. The league operated with this reduced number of clubs in 1955, but would be seeking two additional cities for the 1956 season.

During the same 1955 season the Big State League, a Class B league operating in central and eastern Texas, fell upon hard times with two of its franchises ceasing operation during the season (Galveston on June 12th, and Tyler on July 11th). The Big State League finished the 1955 season with six teams, and like the Western League, was looking to return to an eight team operation for the 1956 season. Several WT-NM League clubs indicated an interest in joining the Western League. Eventually, Albuquerque and Amarillo - the two northern most of the five moderate sized WT-NM markets - were selected and the teams posted the necessary bonds with the Western League. On November 19, 1955, West Texas-New Mexico League (at a meeting originally scheduled to discuss realignment) granted permission to Albuquerque and Amarillo to become members of the Western League, and for Lubbock and Abilene to enter the Big State League. The following day - at a joint meeting with the Longhorn League - the four remaining members of the West Texas-New Mexico League voted to merge the two leagues, creating a ten team Southwestern League for the 1956 season.

What became of baseball in the cities of the West Texas-New Mexico League?

Minor league baseball in Lubbock soon ended as the Lubbock team failed to finish the 1956 season in the Big State League. What a sad end for the town that had been by far the best drawing city in the West Texas-New Mexico League during the 1940s and early 1950s. Baseball in Abilene continued for two more years, both of which were spent in the Big State League. The team folded with the league's demise after the 1957 season. Amarillo and Albuquerque continued in the Western League until the league ceased operations after the 1958 season. Minor league baseball continued in Amarillo - missing only two seasons - as a member of the Texas League until 1982. Baseball in Albuquerque fared better than any of the other cities that had been members of the West Texas-New Mexico League. Fast-growing Albuquerque became a member of the Texas League in 1962, and continued in the league until 1971, whereupon it joined the Pacific Coast League. Albuquerque remains a member of the PCL.

Pampa, Plainview, and Clovis remained in the Southwest League until it stopped operations after the 1957 season. This proved to be the last gasp for baseball in Pampa and Clovis. As for Plainview, it survived a further two years as a member of the Sophomore League. El Paso also was a part of the ill-fated Southwestern League (1956-57). Baseball in El Paso, however, survived the demise of that league.

In summary, the demise of the WT-NM League was due not to declining interest and attendance, but was caused by the departure of four clubs for the “greener pastures” of the Western and Big State Leagues, neither of which survived past 1958.

NOTES

1. Bill James. *The Bill James Historical Abstract*
2. *The Sporting News*, Feb. 28, 1937
3. Population data are for the counties or in later years the metropolitan areas in which the league cities were located. Interpolated from data in *Population Abstract of the U.S.*, John L. Andrist, Androit Associates
4. Baseball Blue Books, 1937-42
5. *The Sporting News*, May 13, 1937
6. *The Sporting News*, October 12, 1939
7. “Unknown and Phenomenal: Minor League Batting Champions”, SABR Baseball Research Journal, Vol. 16. John E. Spalding
8. *The Sporting News*, September 21, 1941
9. *The Sporting News*, May 22, 1942
10. John L. Andrist. *Population Abstract of the U.S.*
11. Lloyd Johnson, ed. *The Minor League Register*
12. Attendance taken from Official Baseball Guides 1948-56
13. *The Sporting News*, October 8, 1947
14. *The Minor League Register*. Op. Cit.
15. *The Sporting News*, August 8, 1948
16. *The Minor League Register*. Op. Cit.
17. *The Sporting News*, December 22, 1948
18. Bob Hoie. “The Minor Leagues” in *Total Baseball*.
19. “Unknown and Phenomenal: Minor League Batting Champions”, op. cit.
20. Charles C. Spink & Son. *Baseball Guide and Record Book*, 1953
21. Range factor calculated including errors, or Total Chances per Game
22. Phone conversation with William J. Weiss. March 26, 1996
23. Dick Clark and Larry Lestor. *The Negro League Book*

ANDY NEAL RABE

BY TOM O'TOOLE

How many umpires have been honored by being given a night by a baseball team? And how many of those umpires can say they played on one team that won 66 games in a row and on another team that set a league record for consecutive losses, all part of a baseball career that included roles as manager, business manager, owner and league umpire-in-chief?

That career belonged to Andy Neal Rabe, who was captain of the legendary Waxahachie, Texas High School team of the mid-1920s – the same team that rostered Paul Richards, Jimmy Adair and Art (The Great) Shires. Rabe went on to become an integral part of the West Texas-New Mexico League from the league’s beginning days through the late 1940s, encountering many setbacks but always maintaining an optimistic outlook and a love of baseball.

From 1925 through 1927, the Waxahachie high school baseball team won 66 straight games, giving them state honors for those three years. A catcher, Neal became the captain of the team in 1927. In addition to his baseball success, he lettered in football and excelled in the classroom. He and Richards had all A's as of January 1925; Rabe's high scholastic average plus his baseball playing resulted in his being presented an annual “loving cup” that May by local businessmen.

In May of 1927, Neal Rabe set off with his high school teammate Paul Richards for Crisfield, Maryland, where they began their professional baseball careers in the Class D Eastern Shore League. Richards led the league in home runs with 24; Rabe batted .265 with three homers in 76 games. Richards went on to have a successful major league career as a catcher and later as a manager with the Chicago White Sox and Baltimore Orioles. Richards' former high school teammate Jimmy Adair was a coach on those Chicago and Baltimore teams after a career as a minor league player and manager. Another high school



1925 Waxahachie High School team

Top row (standing), L - R: Tirey Wilemon (assistant coach), Houston Humphries, B.B. Welborn, Joe Dobbs, Art Shires, Peck Jones, Fred Cason, A.A. Scott (coach).

Bottom row (kneeling), L - R: Neal Rabe, Paul Richards, Jackson French, James Aubrey Adair, Wilbur Faulkner.

Courtesy of the Ellis County (Waxahachie, Texas) Museum

teammate, first baseman Art Shires, played in 259 games during 1928-1932 for the White Sox, Washington Senators and Boston Braves.

Rabe never reached the major leagues but his career took him to many locales, with varying degrees of success. For the next three years after 1927, he remained in Class D leagues: 1928 with Corsicana (Lone Star League), 1929 at Big Spring (West Texas) and 1930 with Hagerstown (Blue Ridge). He was named to the 1929 West Texas League All-Star team as a catcher after hitting .288 in 114 games for the Big Spring Cowboys.

With the Cowboys (although he was only reported to be in one fight), he was known as a fighting ball player according to the June 14, 1937 Big Spring Daily Herald. The fight in 1929 occurred when John King, "probably the most colorful player the West Texas league produced, was playing for Midland and slid into Rabe with what would have been the tying run. Ump Lee Ballanfant called King

out. King shoved Rabe into the dugout and walked away." King later went on to become a wealthy man in the oil business.

The *Frederick (MD) News-Post* of July 19, 1930 stated that Hagerstown owner Joe Cambria was trying to sell Rabe to the Baltimore Orioles. Cambria said of Rabe "he can think; he can throw; he knows how to handle his pitchers; he is only a fair hitter . . . but has heart and is great in the pinches. He has more pep than three average players." Those comments from the future Latin scout for the Washington Senators would hold true for years down the road for Andy Neal Rabe.

A bit of misfortune dogged Rabe that same year. In August, Rabe suffered a fractured nose while warming up a pitcher. The accident happened when both players turned their attention to action on the field; the pitcher resumed throwing to Rabe but Neal was still watching the field when the thrown ball hit him.

For 1931, Neal Rabe was in Caracas, Venezuela, managing a semi-pro team for the son of the nation's president. After the season, Rabe took a team of barnstorming players to Venezuela, playing exhibition games against teams of native players. This was the third (of five) time Rabe had made a trip to that South American nation, having been on barnstorming teams after the 1928 and 1930 seasons.

Mr. Rabe bounced around various ballparks and cities from 1932 through 1936, his batting average varying from .188 to .266. He only played three professional games in 1933, opting to join the Claude (Texas) team, a fast semi-pro outfit. That year Rabe was awarded a wrist watch for being named most valuable player in the annual Amarillo Globe-News Semi-Pro Baseball Tournament.

There were some good moments, though, for Neal in 1936 at San Antonio. Called up from Palestine (East Texas League) in early June he became the regular catcher for the Missions. "There is nothing but praise for the ability, the courage and the actual work of Neal Rabe since he joined the club" (from the June 11 *San Antonio Express*). The *San Antonio Light* on the 13th of June reported that Rabe threw out four would-be Dallas base stealers. And the June 14 Light "Sportlights" column proclaimed "When the roll is called for the Missions' troubles..., little Neal Rabe ... will not be present. He's done a remarkable job behind the bat, has hustled his head off under far from ideal circumstances, and has batted better than expected." (The Missions finished sixth with a 73-77 record.)

With the reorganization in 1937 of the West Texas League as the West Texas-New Mexico League, Neal Rabe's baseball career took on a turn that would later get him recognized for his contributions to the league.

That inaugural season for the WT-NML saw Rabe as catcher and manager at Roswell, finishing fourth and losing to Wink in the finals. He had thirteen players at Roswell, all except him no more than 21 years old, eleven of whom were 19 or younger.

In 1938 controversy threatened Rabe's future. Neal was suspended in March by the holder of the Roswell franchise, Mr. Jim Payne, who had submitted complaints against Rabe to President William Burnham of the National Association of Professional Baseball Leagues (i.e., the minor leagues). Hank Hart's "Sports Parade" column in the *Big Spring Daily Herald* indicated that "several parties are attempting to shove Payne out and put Rabe

in charge of the organization". Rabe was alleged to have announced a franchise shift to Hobbs, which was a surprise to Payne. Payne indicated that Rabe had tampered with the Roswell players.

The hullabaloo subsided later in March. At a league meeting, league president Milton Price indicated that Hobbs had been accepted into the league after Payne relinquished his rights over the telephone.

At Hobbs, Rabe added business manager and owner to his titles. "I had lots of authority but little money", he said. The team finished eighth.

How bad was the team? One player actually tried to distance himself from the proceedings in the middle of a game. In that August game at Big Spring, Hobbs pitcher Francis Hogan walked five successive batters in the first inning of a 17-1 loss. He was so disgusted with himself that he started to walk to the dugout and Rabe had to call him back.

The 1938 season ended for Rabe with cakes. Yes, cakes. The final home game at Clovis was a fan appreciation night and the visiting Hobbs Boosters were cut in on the festivities. Described as the "league cut-up", Neal had stated beforehand that he wanted a cake from the fans. He got six of them.

The way the cakes were given to him delighted the fans. Umpire Pettigrew seemingly became irate at Rabe's jibes when the manager was on the bench and eventually summoned two officers of the law. The policemen roughly hauled him up into the stands, where he was presented with the cakes. (Rabe had been coached to squawk at the ump but thought the joke was going to be pulled on the two officers.) One cake had coins embedded in the frosting because Rabe took up a collection on every possible occasion during ball games.

However, Rabe was so disillusioned by the overall experience at Hobbs that he moved the franchise to Amarillo for the 1939 season. There New York Giants outfielder "Suitcase Bob" Seeds put up the money and Neal caught, managed and handled the business affairs. For the season, Rabe batted .330 in 70 games and was selected for the league's mid-season All-Star game. An injury kept him out of the game but he suited up as the first base coach and "His clowning antics delighted the mob" (according to the *Big Spring Daily Herald*).

"As a manager [according to the *Abilene News-Reporter* in a 1947 article], he was the loop's top showman. Here

in 1939 he used to climb the wire after Bill Ward, the hefty justice of the peace, who was a prize heckler of visiting managers and umpires." Apparently his antics - while designed to entertain the crowd (and perhaps entice more fans to attend) - were not always appreciated. One newspaper called him "Neal 'Monkey' Rabe". Another - commenting on Big Spring manager Tony Rego's ejection from a game (which involved umpires, police and a circuit judge) - opined that "Rego's antics are getting older than Neal Rabe's clowning."

In early August of 1939 Rabe was replaced as manager of the Amarillo Gold Sox by another player. Owner Bob Seeds indicated that Rabe was not fired and Rabe remained with the club as a catcher.

In 1940 Rabe focused solely on being the business manager until an injury to the regular catcher forced him to take over. One of his duties as business manager was to plan for the league All Star game, which was held in Amarillo. After the season, he handled the ticket sales for an exhibition game that featured Carl Hubbell and Bob Seeds.

For 1941 Neal Rabe took the defaulted Midland franchise to Wichita Falls, where he had a grandstand built and lights installed. Once the home of a Texas League team and out of Organized Baseball for nine years, Wichita Falls did not support the new Class D club. The home games drew only 6,000 fans (or 13,000 according to another report). In the middle of August, Rabe announced that the team would play its remaining games on the road.

Despite this lack of attendance, Rabe thought he owed some of his backers another shot in 1942. Rabe functioned as team president, secretary and treasurer, as well as catching. (How many players have been president of the team?) However, even opening day failed to make enough money for the \$50 guarantee for visiting clubs. The Spudders played four home games, then - after a failed attempt at moving to El Paso - transferred to Big Spring.

The team's troubles continued despite the move to Big Spring. Rabe made payroll one time only because - according to the May 16 Lubbock *Morning Avalanche* - "sportsmen and fans contributed enough money to meet the payroll and purchase a part of the franchise." However, the team didn't draw there either (one game attracting only 150 fans) and the league took over the club in early June. Retaining Rabe as manager, the team operat-

ed as a road club (known as the "Pirates") until June 20 when the club withdrew from the league. At that time they had lost 24 games in a row, a league record.

Rabe then caught on with Lamesa; however, the league folded after the Fourth of July as many players had departed to join the armed forces or to take defense-related jobs.

Walter Buckel, third baseman for the Pampa Oilers, recalls that there were more players than fans at the games in Wichita Falls, despite having one of the best fields in the league. (It wasn't until 1947 that Rabe finished paying for the lights he had installed at Wichita Falls, part of the \$25,000 - \$30,000 he lost over a three-year period.)

The Pirates had a 12-man roster and traveled in two station wagons. Occasionally the Oilers and the Pirates would chance to meet on the open road as they traveled to their next game. The rival players would chat for a time; then one of the Pirates would say "Gotta get going now. Mr. Rabe is buying cheese, crackers and bread for our supper before the game." (Officially the Pirates were known as the "West Texas-New Mexico League Baseball Club", but sportswriters dubbed them "President Price's Pirates," named after league head Milton Price.)

Joining the Army Air Forces in 1942, Rabe never got overseas during World War II, instead spending time at various airfields doing mechanical work on planes. Released from the service before the end of the conflict (probably because of his age), Neal managed a team called the Amarillo Dodgers in 1944, playing occasional games against local service teams such as the Amarillo Army Air Field Bombers and the Pampa Army Air Field Fliers.

As with other managers of amateur and semi-pro baseball teams during WWII, Rabe was often at the mercy of the employers of his players in determining the lineup for the game that day or night. In one case, Neal was forced to use his reserve catcher (Rabe was the usual receiver) as the starting pitcher until two of his pitchers got off from work. By the time they showed up, the Fliers were up by four runs, the eventual difference in a 5-1 Dodger loss.

After the war, the West Texas-New Mexico League resumed play in 1946, with Neal Rabe taking on a new career as an umpire. A year later came probably the highlight of his life: being recognized for his long service to the league.

How did that night honoring Umpire Neal Rabe come about in 1947? In his "Speaking of Sports" column in the July 10, 1947 *Abilene Reporter-News*, Hal Sayles indicated the event was suggested by *Lubbock Avalanche-Journal* editor Charley Guy. "The Lubbock fans say they want to publicly recognize someone who's done a lot for the league." Opponents (such as Amarillo sports writer Harry Gilstrap) said it didn't look right for one team to be giving gifts to a league umpire.

Sayles indicated that league president Milton Price thought that Neal Rabe had done more for the league than any other man and that he (Price) would attend the festivities at Lubbock.

Gilstrap kept up his criticism of the Rabe night in Lubbock. Reporting on a game at Lubbock ("umpire heaven" according to Gilstrap) with Lamesa wherein it took three carloads of highway patrolmen to guarantee the umpires safe conduct from the park, Gilstrap concluded "Maybe Neal Rabe should be assigned to all the Lubbock home games."

Gilstrap's criticism of Rabe may have been colored by two occasions during the season when decisions by Rabe in games at Amarillo drew a shower of pop bottles one night and "a Niagara of boos" on another night. Yet in March Gilstrap had described Rabe as a competent umpire.

Lubbock, apparently, was complimentary of Rabe right from the start of his umpiring career. Witness this excerpt from the May 27, 1946 edition of the *Lubbock Evening Journal*: "we're going to guess that Ncal 'Peter

Rabbit' Rabe will turn out to be the very best arbiter the West Texas-New Mexico league has ever seen. ...[H]e knows and loves baseball. ...Raging managers or players aren't going to make anything off Rabe. He doesn't scare and when it comes to repartee, he's the loop's Leo Du-rocher."

Rabe himself indicated that in the two years he had been umpiring that he had never been assaulted by a fan, player or manager; had not ever needed police help to finish a game; and never required a police escort to leave the field safely.

At the event – a sellout – Rabe was presented a chronometer watch (purchased with funds donated by fans) "for his efforts in the 10-year history of the league". League president Milton Price offered his appreciation, specifically referring to "the years in the beginning [of the league], when the going wasn't as easy as it is now". (At

this time in 1947, Price and Rabe were the only two individuals who had been part of the league in every year since its inception.)

Broadcast over radio station KFYO, the 15-minute tribute ended with Rabe stating "I'll remember this night as long as I live. I want to thank you fans from the bottom of my heart and especially the people who made this night possible." Rabe did not umpire the game that night, instead sitting in a box as a spectator.

As generous as the fans were to Neal Rabe, he was generous to one ballplayer who broke his leg. Albuquerque outfielder Val DeFazio suffered the injury sliding into second base in an early season game at Lamesa. The next night, the fans there passed the hat to help defray his medical expenses, with Rabe contributing \$5. DeFazio said he'd never again question one of Rabe's decisions.

How did the players feel about Neal Rabe as an umpire? Veteran Buck Fausett might have felt let down on one occasion. In a late season game in 1947, Fausett was picked off first by a rookie catcher. Fausett was so mortified that he protested mightily to umpire Rabe, who had a hard time trying not to laugh.

Ike Palmer, catcher for the 1946 Lamesa Lobos, indicated that Neal Rabe was "a good umpire" who would let you "argue some". Palmer "got along real well" with Rabe and "considered him a friend".

Neal Rabe continued to umpire in the West Texas–New Mexico League in 1948 and may have retired from baseball after that year (I found no further references to his name in league box scores.) Mr. Rabe's nephew believes that Neal did retire; it's thought that Neal's wife ran a restaurant in Amarillo. That stands to reason since she had responsibility for concessions at the Amarillo ball park in 1939.

Rabe's name was in the newspaper in 1950 when his car was hit by another car "driven" by a two-year-old girl. The youngster turned the ignition key in Grandma's car, putting it in motion. And a 1956 application for a liquor permit indicates that Neal Rabe was owner of a business called the "Drive In Market".

Mr. Rabe passed away in Amarillo, his home since 1939, on the 16th of May 1962 at the age of 57, thus ending an interesting and varied life. He was buried in Ennis, Texas.

BADE MYERS—BELLEFONTAINE'S BASEBALL

MYSTERY MAN

By Jim Holl

Like Judge Crater, D.B. Cooper and Jimmy Hoffa, Bade Myers literally dropped off the face of the earth. Unlike these more celebrated figures of the past, little notice has been given to the disappearance of Myers. He seems to have been one of those unfortunates who chose to vanish for various reasons - to escape the clutches of the law, angry ex-spouses or pesky bill collectors. His whereabouts may have been known to a few, but with the swirling mists of passing time, he is largely forgotten. Still, he manages to pique the interests of baseball researchers, if only because after a long and productive career he simply walked away from baseball and family and friends who knew him well in Bellefontaine, Ohio.

By most accounts, Bade Myers was a very good ball player, although he never played an inning in the major leagues. He played on five minor league championship teams, and in 1897 won the Interstate League batting title with an astounding .411 average. He was a teammate of Roger Bresnahan and Rube Marquard and played against Addie Joss and Elmer Flick, future Hall of Famers all. Pretty fast company. His big year in 1897 attracted some attention. According to newspaper stories, Cleveland was reportedly offering \$3500 for his contract. Myers had a brief tryout with the New York Nationals in the spring of 1898, but nothing came of these inquiries, and in April of that year he was back playing in Toledo.

Myers enjoyed a baseball career that spanned more than 20 years. He began in 1894 as a catcher with semi-pro teams in Delaware and Lima, Ohio. In 1896 he joined the Jackson, MI team in the Interstate League, where he batted .341 in 41 games. He made subsequent stops in Toledo, Dayton (twice), Columbus, Canton (twice), Fort Wayne (twice), and Quincy, Illinois. In over 2000 minor league games, he had a respectable lifetime batting average of .287.

We know a good deal about Myers' life during his playing days. Sports pages in the newspapers of the era were filled with his baseball deeds. He was widely respected as a smart baseball man, a good manager and shrewd judge of talent, recommending several players, including Ray Chapman, Bobby Veach and Bill Rariden, to major league owners. After his active playing days ended, he continued to manage in the Central League at Muskegon in 1916 and Richmond, IN in 1917 when he disappeared.

The puzzles surrounding Myers are legion. Where did he acquire the name "Bade", which was almost universally

used in newspaper stories? With his apparently successful career underway, why was he unable to break into the majors? Was he just not good enough, or did other factors play a role in limiting his opportunities? Finally, what happened to Bade Myers after the 1917 season?

His early years were somewhat murky. He was born Frederick Myers in Bellefontaine, Ohio, one of eight children to Benjamin and Ellen (Starrett) Myers on December 21, 1872. There is no birth record on file with the Logan County Probate Court officials who point out that many births in rural parts of the county were not recorded in the 1800's. (The December 21, 1872 date is from Myers' World War I draft registration card.) There is no record of Myers graduating from high school and very little is known of his formative years. By his own recollection, he noted, "My first experience as a ball player was secured at my home in Bellefontaine, Ohio and I was always boasting of the town." (*Bellefontaine Daily Examiner*, April 5, 1907). A Columbus newspaper on Myers' start in professional baseball identifies him as Bade Myers, late of the Bellefontaine Greys."

The unusual name "Bade" remains a mystery. Most early newspaper references use his name without parentheses or quotation marks, suggesting that this may have been a given name, possibly an early family relative surname. Later on, the name is usually Fred or Frederick Myers, in official documents (marriage license, draft registration card, divorce records). Whatever its origins, Bade was a name used extensively throughout his baseball life, to the point where few knew his given Christian name. To add even more confusion, the Minor League Register (1994) identifies him as William (Bade) Myers, with no accompanying biographical birth or death information, and the 1916 Canton (OH) City Directory lists him as "Bade F. Myers".

The marriage records of the Logan County (OH) Court of Common Pleas, Probate Division, show Frederick Myers and Mary E. Bullard were married October 31, 1894 before magistrate William C. Hull. The birth records of the same court show a daughter, Delores Irene, born August 23, 1900 in Bellefontaine to Fred Myers and Mary E. Buller. The corrected maiden name of spelling of Myers' wife is consistent in later divorce proceedings and in the obituary of Mary Estelle (Buller) Myers appearing in the *Bellefontaine Examiner*, November 2, 1967.

The 1900 Ohio Census contains a listing for Fred Myers. It gives his birth year as "December 1874", birth place "Ohio", occupation "league baseball player" and home address "521 Center Street". The 1910 Census adds his age "37 years", occupation "baseball manager" and a new address "605 Main Street". Even here questions remain about Bade's age. The 1900 census implies his age is 25, but 10 years later he is 37, a gain of 12 years in a decade. In 1916, the Muskegon *Chronicle* (April 16, 1916) in a

summary of the team roster for the upcoming season gives his age as 39, a gain of only two years in a six year period! It is not unheard of for old-time ball players to shave a year or two off their ages to help their careers at some stage. Given all the differences, it seems probable that Myers was born sometime between 1870 and 1874 which would have made him in his mid-40's when his baseball days ended.

If his early years are murky, Myers' later years are downright dark. Fired at the end of the 1916 season after a feud with Muskgeon owners, Myers began the 1917 season as manager of the Richmond (Central League) team, but soon ran into trouble. The Sporting News (June 9, 1917) noted that he was released "for the good of the club". The reported reason for his dismissal was his overly harsh treatment of veteran catcher George Texter, who was accused by Myers of malingering over a minor injury, which triggered a player revolt.

Two letters to Myers from Louis Heilbroner, the owner of the Fort Wayne (IN) baseball team, provide some additional clues to his growing problems. The first letter, dated March 9, 1917 (incorrectly addressed in its introduction to Myers in Richmond VA), is unsigned but presumably written by Heilbroner. In it, he claims that Myers misappropriated funds advanced to him by the Fort Wayne club. The final paragraph adds tellingly, "I have done more for you than you ever did for me in protecting you from exposure while you did not hesitate to make untrue statements in your testimony to the National Commission regarding myself and the Fort Wayne club."

The second letter, dated April 17, 1917 and signed by Heilbroner, states that in the absence of any effort by Myers to settle the dispute, action would be taken in the courts. Heilbroner concludes by warning, "It is up to you to do what is right in this matter." No further record on this dispute has been found.

There are obvious warning signs here of Myers' increasing instability, although it is not exactly clear why Myers chose to burn his bridges so decisively. Where he went from Richmond is not known. An uncontested divorce was granted to Mary E. Myers in Stark County OH on July 1, 1918 on the grounds of gross neglect. In his decree, Probate Court Judge Herbert C. Pontius awarded all household goods and property as well as custody of a minor daughter to the plaintiff. A copy of the divorce papers was forwarded to Myers' last known address, c/o Rich Hotel, Fort Wayne IN.

In a bizarre turn of events, Myers turned up back in Muskgeon in October 1918 where he is listed as a "saddle maker" working for Rice and Sorin on Western Avenue (according to his World War I draft registration card). Welcomed with front page headlines in the Muskgeon paper as the new manager of the town's baseball team

only two years earlier, his return went unnoticed.

Here the trail goes cold. Local Bellefontaine residents have little or no information to share. Myers apparently paid a few visits to his old hometown and was estranged from his family. In an undated letter to the author in December 1998 from Myers' grandson, John F. Blackwood of Springfield OH, he recalls a visit from Myers sometime around 1939 or 1940. He thought Myers may have been living in the Chicago area at the time and added in a sad footnote, "he was the grandfather I never had." If this was a late attempt at a family reconciliation, it failed. An obituary for Myers' older brother George, in the Bellefontaine paper on January 29, 1929, noted that he was survived by a brother "Bade" Myers of Chicago. The 1930 Illinois Census shows a Frederick Meyers (note spelling difference), a single lodger residing at 1442 Adams Street (an inner city Chicago address), occupation "factory woodworker" which fits Bade's description.

Recently SABR member Bruce Allardice found an Illinois death certificate for a Fred Meyers, dying at Manteno State Hospital, Manteno, IL on December 12, 1947. Myers is buried in the state hospital cemetery. His birth date is listed as December 24, 1870 in Ohio with no known living relatives (or at least none who came forward to claim the body. Hence the burial at state expense). His last known address was 508 South Peoria Street, another inner city address which no longer exists as it is part of the University of Illinois-Chicago campus complex.

Many signs point to this man as Bade Myers, the old time ballplayer. The age and birth information are close and within an acceptable range of probability. The Ohio birth location and divorce status fit what we know. If true, Bade didn't entirely "disappear". He was living in plain sight as "Fred Meyers" with at least minimal contact with his family over the years. He was working at various laboring jobs and living in boarding houses and hotels that catered to Chicago's transient population. He had dropped the name "Bade" and added an extra "e" to his surname, and apparently had no wish to make his former baseball connections known.

As Myers/Meyers grew older and his health began to fail, and with no one to care for him, it was not uncommon at the time for an indigent person to be admitted to a state mental hospital, even when there was no evidence of disabilities such as senile dementia or chronic alcoholism. Records show that Myers/Meyers was only at Manteno State Hospital 20 days before he died. He was not alone when he burned his last bridge, but in the company of other of God's tortured souls who, like Bade, neither knew of or cared anything about his long forgotten baseball past.

CHUMMY GRAY'S NO HITTER IN THE HOME OPENER FOR THE 1899 BUFFALO BISONS

By Brian M. Frank

The 1899 Buffalo Bisons of Ban Johnson's Western League started the season surprisingly well, sweeping the league favorite Indianapolis Hoosiers on the road in four games. However, the Bisons were then swept in three games in Detroit, before splitting two games in Columbus. The 5-4 Bisons looked good to start the season. As the *Buffalo Courier* stated, Buffalo "displayed snappy, vigorous work even in their losing games and well deserve the hearty support of the local fans." After their third game in Columbus was rained out, the team took the Lake Shore Train out of Columbus at 10:00 PM. The Indianapolis Hoosiers boarded the same train later in Cleveland, and both teams arrived in Buffalo around 7:40 AM the day of the home opener.

The Bisons entered the game confident after their road trip to start the season. As manager Billy Nash stated, "There isn't a team in the Western League that has any license to beat us if we have the pitchers. I think I've got the finest outfield in the country and the infield is pretty fair too." The Hoosiers, on the other hand, were frustrated at the close games they had lost to Buffalo to start the year. W.F.C. Golt, the Indianapolis team President, expressed this frustration before the game, saying "If we've got to get beaten, do us by more than one run. That one run business nearly set us crazy during the series at Indianapolis... The only satisfaction we got out of the whole series was that we lost the last game by more than one run. Now, for goodness sake, don't beat us by a run this time."

The weather forecast for the Monday afternoon game called for an all-day rain. In fact it did rain in the morning and sprinkled throughout three innings of the game. The weather was so ominous that the nearly 3,000 fans who showed up to Olympic Park, located on Michigan Avenue at East Ferry Street, were issued rainchecks. Fans who entered the ballpark, by Western League rule, paid 25 cents to get into the park, and men paid an additional 25 cents to enter the grandstand if they so choose, a 10 cent increase from the previous season, while women were admitted to the grandstand free of charge. Some of these fans may have been disappointed that Buffalo team President Jim Franklin cut out much of the normal pomp and circumstance that would normally accompany a

home opener at the time, such as a team procession and a band playing before the game, because he believed it was "hoodoo" that had helped to keep the team from winning a home opener for years.

Many of the fans were also looking forward to the home debut of new Bison pitcher, and former National Leaguer, Elt Chamberlain. "Ice Box," as Chamberlain was known, was already a local favorite, having been born in Warsaw, NY, just 37 miles east of Buffalo. His family moved to Buffalo when he was a child, and he had starred on the amateur mounds in the city. He went on to have a solid major league career pitching for the St. Louis Browns of the American Association (which was a major league) and the Cincinnati Reds of the National League. He was a right handed pitcher who once threw two innings of a major league game left handed. The thirty-one year old's best season was with the 1889 Browns, when he went 32-15, with a 2.97 ERA, in 421.2 innings, with 44 complete games in 51 starts. Chamberlain had won 157 major league games, but none since 1896, and now he was attempting to make a comeback with his hometown team. Ice Box warmed up about a half hour before the game as usual, but then Buffalo manager Billy Nash decided to start George "Chummy" Gray instead of the Ice Box. Why Nash made this decision is up for debate, the *Buffalo Evening News* reported that Chamberlain "did not warm up quite hot enough," but the *Buffalo Times* stated that when Nash learned that Frank Foreman was pitching for Indianapolis, he decided to start Gray instead.

Chummy Gray was a twenty-five year old right handed pitcher who won 24 games for the Bisons in 1898 in the Eastern League, and was a 23 game winner for them in 1897. Gray had already defeated the Hoosiers 3-2 in Indianapolis during the season opener, when he went nine innings, giving up two runs on six hits, five walks and no strikeouts. He also pitched and won the fourth game of the opening series at Indianapolis, going nine innings, and giving up three runs on five hits, with three walks and one strike out. Gray also had pitched two innings in the May 5 game at Detroit, and amazingly had pitched a complete game 10 inning win in Columbus just two days before the home opener, where he allowed just two runs on four hits, with four walks and three strikeouts.

Gray's mound opponent, Frank "Monkey" Foreman, was a colorful character who had already played numerous seasons in the National League. The thirty-five year old lefthander had most recently pitched in the majors for

the Cincinnati Reds, where he won twenty-five games combined in the 1895 and 1896 seasons.

Buffalo took the field on the damp afternoon in their new pearl gray uniforms, with dark blue trim and black stockings. The fans had a good laugh in the first inning, when Buffalo centerfielder Jim Garry was presented with a silk umbrella as he came to bat. The umbrella was apparently one that Garry had accidentally left in Syracuse, and a good natured soul had brought it back to present to him in the sprinkles of opening day.

The Bisons got their only run in the third inning as a result of a controversial play. Buffalo shortstop Frank Eustace, who played for Indianapolis in 1897, laid a bunt down the third base line. The slow rolling ball appeared to go foul, but as Hoosier pitcher Frank Foremen attempted to touch the ball in foul territory, he booted it back fair and apparently blocked the view of umpire John Haskell while doing so. Haskell called the ball fair, and Eustace was safe at first. Despite an animated argument from Foreman, in an era before instant replay or even a second umpire, the call stood. Eustace then stole second, advanced to third on Ed Gremminger's groundout to second, and came home when third baseman Eddie Hickey bobbled a Billy Nash grounder allowing Nash to safely reach first.

The closest Indianapolis came to scoring was in the third inning, when Eddie Hickey reached on an error by Bison third baseman Ed Gremminger.

He then advanced to second on Frank

Foreman's groundout to Gray, and went to third when George Hogriever grounded out to third. Hickey, however, was stranded at third when Ace Stewart grounded out to second to end the inning.

The Bisons threatened again in the fourth inning when William Diggins and Frank Eustace both singled, but Ed Gremminger grounded into a 6-4-3 double play to end the rally.

After Hoosier pitcher Frank Foreman's outburst in the third over the controversial bunt play, he settled in and began to entertain the Buffalo crowd. The *Buffalo Com-*

mercial Advertiser reported that Foreman "proved to be one of the jolliest fellows on the field," and that he "had the crowd with him." On one play, the *Buffalo Enquirer* said that after Foreman threw a ball behind Jim Garry, Foreman "pirouetted around on his toes and posed a la ballet dancer. He kidded the fans and he laughed and saluted with hand to cap every Bison who faced him." The Buffalo crowd loved his antics.

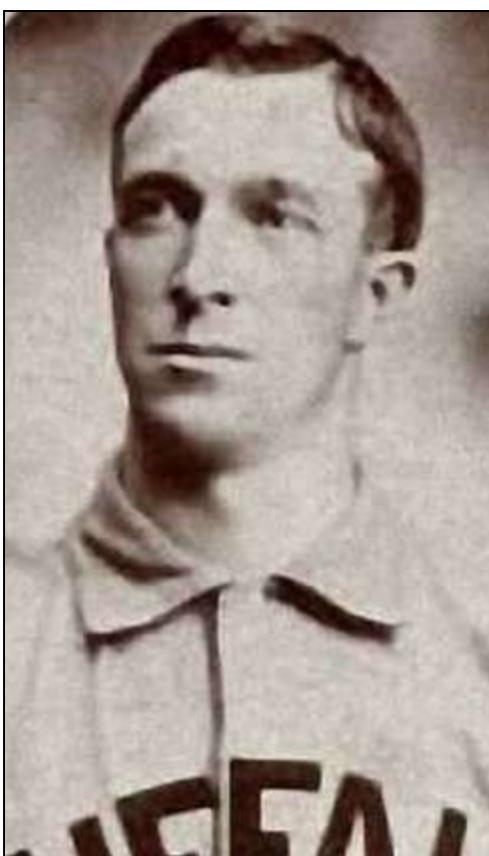
Umpire John Haskell did not have the same effect on the crowd. Numerous newspaper reports stated that the crowd could not tell his long howling strike call from his ball call. The *Buffalo Times* said one fan complained that

Haskell's voice sounded like "a man bellowing down a well," while the *Buffalo Evening News* reported a fan yelling to "Take the marbles out of your mouth."

The excitement of the game also caused a disturbance, when in the eighth inning "some kids who couldn't stand the suspense any longer pulled a board off the center field fence and there was a grand rush for the right field bleachers. After 40 or 50 of the gang had landed safely, the hole was bounded up."

The game was also notable for many great defensive plays. The *Buffalo Courier* described the game as "a fielding battle with a rattling succession of kaleidoscopic plays that electrified the spectators and drove the fans insane." The closest Indianapolis came to a hit was probably a line shot in the seventh inning which, as the *Buffalo Evening News* described,

"went so straight at (third baseman) Gremminger that he couldn't have avoided squeezing it if he had tried." Buffalo's Frank Eustace played a solid game at shortstop. Though most of the balls hit to him "were ugly, he handled them as if they were toys." After the game, the *Indianapolis News* would state that "Buffalo has the cleanest fielding team in the league." Not to be outdone, Indianapolis left fielder George Flynn also made some pretty plays, including a nice catch on a Jim Garry fly ball in the first inning, and a running catch in the seventh off the bat of Billy Nash, which he caught just off the ground after a



Chummy Gray

long run. Bob Allen, the Hoosiers shortstop, was also stellar in the field, as the *Buffalo Enquirer* said, “There has never been seen on local ball grounds a better shortstop than he. Twice yesterday he robbed Buffalo batters of what looked to be sure hits, and his throws to first were marvels of speed and accuracy.”

At the end of the hour and forty-five minute game, Chummy Gray had not allowed a hit. He allowed only one walk, to centerfielder Herm McFarland, while Buffalo’s Ed Gremminger and Billy Nash each committed an error. Gray’s mastery on the day is illustrated by the fact that first baseman Big Bill Massey had 16 putouts. Only four balls were hit to the outfield: one to left, one to center, and two to right. Only one Hoosier got past second base; Eddie Hickey in the third inning. Buffalo managed only five hits and a lone run off Foreman. There was only one double play in the game, which Buffalo’s Ed Gremminger hit into, and not a man on either team struck out. Perhaps most incredible of all, in a time before pitch counts and innings limits, Gray threw a no-hitter just two days after throwing a 10 inning complete game.

The approximately 3,000 fans had to exit through a single turnstile, because Buffalo President Jim Franklin “forgot the keys to the seven barn door exits.” A more discerning observer may believe that the “forgotten keys” had something to do with collecting the rain checks which had been issued before the game. The *Buffalo Times* reported that about a third of the fans managed to get away holding their rain checks.

The fans and press immediately realized what a great game they had witnessed. The *Buffalo Enquirer* called it “probably the best game ever played by any team since Buffalo has been associated with professional baseball leagues,” and that “yesterday’s game will go down as the greatest ever played on a local diamond. It was remarkable in more ways than one.” Even the losing side knew what a great game had been played, as the *Indianapolis News* said “There will probably not be a better contest played in the Western League this season.”

The Indianapolis players and press were complimentary of Chummy Gray after the game. The *Indianapolis News* said “he is not long for this league.” Hoosiers team President W.F.C. Golt stated that “Your man Gray is certainly a wonder. He is plenty fast enough for any of the big league clubs. I wish I had him.” Many of the Indianapolis players who had previously played in the National

League claimed that Gray was better than many N.L. pitchers.

It was Buffalo’s fifth straight win against Indianapolis, with four of the wins by only one run. The *Indianapolis News* reported that this was the first time any team had beaten the Hoosiers in five straight games since the Western league was organized. The win made Buffalo 6-4, and put them in a tie with St. Paul at the top of the Western League Standings. Buffalo’s win streak against the Hoosiers would end the next day as Indianapolis won 11-3. Buffalo fans were disappointed, but good natured in the loss, because, as the *Buffalo Courier* stated, “for a victory like that of Monday covereth a multitude of defeats.” The most exciting event in Tuesday’s loss may have been in the seventh inning when the teams’ dressing rooms briefly caught on fire. Buffalo’s opening day scheduled starter and hometown hero Ice Box Chamberlain finally made his season debut two days after the no-hitter, allowing three runs on eight hits, four walks, and two strike outs in a 3-1 loss to the Hoosiers. The loss would be the last decision of his long career, as his comeback ended shortly thereafter.

The two teams’ fortunes would be quite different after Gray’s no-hitter. Indianapolis went on to win the Western League Pennant, as they often had. They won the Western League in 1885, 1895, 1897, and 1899. The Bisons would end up finishing tied for last place after a tumultuous season. After Gray’s no-hitter, the press showered manager Billy Nash with praise for playing injured and inspiring his team. But he would be fired five days after the game, due to tension with team president Jim Franklin. Buffalo went through four different managers during the season, with team president Franklin even managing them for a short time. The Bisons would also have numerous run-ins with the police throughout the season for illegally playing games on Sundays. Usually, the police would wait for the ninth inning, when the game was already decided, and then arrest both teams. One time, on July 23, police arrested the Bisons and the visiting team in the top of the second inning. Franklin had to bail the teams out on each occasion. By 1901, when the Western League turned into a second major league, re-named the American League, the Buffalo franchise was terminated despite assurances from league President Ban Johnson, so that the Boston Americans, known today as the Boston Red Sox, could be added.

Indianapolis pitcher Frank "Monkey" Foreman went on to win 15 games and lose 12 for the 1899 Hoosiers, tied for tenth most wins in the Western League. He had other great starts against Buffalo, including a 1-0 win on June 15 when he beat Chummy Gray, and a 2-1 loss on July 1, when he again lost to Gray. Foreman ended up pitching for Buffalo in 1900. In 15 games, including 12 starts, he went 7-6, with a 5.42 ERA. He remained a character and a crowd favorite. In a game in Chicago, he coached third base for Buffalo wearing an engineer's hat and carrying two lanterns and a switchman's flag. He would later return to the major leagues, briefly with the Boston Americans and then two seasons with the Baltimore Orioles. He won 12 more games, giving him 96 major league wins.

As for Chummy Gray, he ended up going 16-20 for the 1899 Bisons. On July 6, team president Jim Franklin suspended Gray for the season for refusing to accompany the team on a road trip, because he was going to have to

share a sleeping berth with a team member. Both sides later made nice and Gray was back on the mound for the Bisons on July 25. The suspension illustrates the tension surrounding the team as it plummeted in the standings, with its revolving door of managers. Gray's year ended on a high note as he pitched for the National League's Pittsburgh Pirates from September 14 through October 14. Gray went 3-3, with a 3.43 ERA, in nine games. He completed five of his seven starts for the Pirates, amassing 70.2 innings, with only nine strikeouts. Gray would rattle around the minor leagues for a few more seasons, including getting eight wins for the 1902 Bisons, but he would never again return to the majors. However, he'll always have the glorious opening day of 1899.

For more stories from the history of Buffalo Bisons baseball, follow us on twitter @HERDchronicles and visit our blog at <http://www.herdchronicles.com>

THE MAN BEHIND.

- ◆ We've read of mighty Casey, the man who "wasn't there;"
- ◆ Also about the pitcher who made him fan the air.
- ◆ But there's one man never mentioned, which I think is quite unkind—
- ◆ Now, how about the catcher? for he's the man behind.
- ◆ The man behind the batter and the man behind the mask,
- ◆ The man with twisted fingers, who has a hard old task.
- ◆ He's the man behind the play when they're men upon the base;
- ◆ When the pitcher's getting rattled, he's the man behind the chase.
- ◆ Without the man behind, where would the pitcher be?
- ◆ Now, Casey never would strike out without him, don't you see?
- ◆ So we'll hand it to the catcher, the man behind the mit;
- ◆ He's the man behind the team, and I guess that he is IT.
- ◆ The man behind the window is the man who gets the dough;
- ◆ But the man who wins the games is the man behind the throw.
- ◆ When he pegs them down to second, like a bullet they are lined,
- ◆ Or tags them at the plate, why it's just the man behind.

KELLY, The Fan Poet.

Oakland Tribune June 5, 1907

Independent League Tidbits

By Bob Wirz

'HANDSHAKE AND TRUST' KEY IN GROWTH OF CUBAN INVOLVEMENT WITH CAN-AM LEAGUE

It is much too early to identify which Cuban National team members will be included for the June 9-30 series of games in every Can-Am League stadium although Michel Laplante, the primary architect of the unique arrangement, says the competition "will be competitive for sure."

Might the Can-Am teams see flame-throwing Yaisel Sierra, who already has showcased his 94-97-mile per hour fastball to hundreds of scouts, or shortstop-third baseman Yuliesky Gurriel or his younger brother Lourdes, Jr. (nicknamed Tito), who plays both the infield and outfield?

It will take time before those questions are answered, but Laplante, a former major leaguer and the president of the Quebec Capitales, and the team's manager, Pat Scalabrini, are continuing to do extensive planning on behalf of the league. They also know the fact the Capitales had older Gurriel brother Yuniesky on their roster two years ago and he was joined by three other Cubans last season has heightened the interest to a point "many countries are knocking on their (Cuba's) door" in an effort to lure players from the island.

Laplante identified Colombia, Mexico, Japan and Korea as among the interested countries, but he likes the way the relationship between Cuban officials and the Can-Am League has developed. "It is with a handshake and trust" which is "getting bigger", and without involvement of lawyers, he said Monday.

Scalabrini follows players on the internet daily, and is able to see games in that manner, said Laplante, who admits he is not as computer savvy as his associate, who led Quebec to four championships in his first five years as manager. The pair were scheduled to go to Cuba once more January 3 where they will see games and continue building the relationship, emphasizing the scouting involves "more than just looking at stats."

"I didn't think it (the three weeks of play by the Cubans) was a (particularly) big deal at first," Laplante said, and when I asked if the interest was only coming from the French-speaking Canadian world he said it is "almost bigger on the English side."

A team from Japan's Shikoku Island League will visit all six Can-Am cities at the same time as the Cubans, which will make for an eight-team league during those crucial, mid-summer weeks.

CHAMPION TROIS-RIVIERES KNOWS EXACTLY WHEN, HOW AIGLES JELLED

It is not always easy to pinpoint the time or reason that a team starts putting it all together after a few mediocre months on its way to a championship, but that is not the case with the Trois-Rivieres Aigles' march to their first--and improbable--title in three years in the Can-Am League.

General Manager Rene Martin was very definitive about the change in the Aigles.

It came on August 9 when Trois-Rivieres was getting ready to host Sussex in a Sunday evening game. And, an assertive hockey player deserves a huge assist.

The team's president, longtime NHL star Marc-Andre Bergeron, made a suggestion to Martin, who passed it along to manager Pete Laforest.

The idea was that instead of players training on their own during the day that they would meet at 11 a.m. five days a week and work out as a group, doing such things as weightlifting and cycling. The sessions would only last for 45 minutes, but everyone would work together; be on the same page. Oh, and a curfew was instituted. It was not like players had to head to bed immediately after a night game, but they had to adhere to a specific curfew.

One rookie pitcher questioned the plan, argued with Laforest and he was given his walking papers, even though Martin made a point of saying the young man was not a bad person.

Trois-Rivieres had lost something like seven or eight games in a row, and was in a position where it could easily miss the four-team playoffs.

"We won that night," Martin remembers clearly, and "it was like a playoff attitude" the rest of the season, with Laforest's contingent winning every series and taking 21 of 28 games.

"We peaked at the right moment," the general manager added, cutting down on mistakes and playing with better team chemistry.

"We swept three games in Ottawa (the last three days of the regular season to get into the playoffs), and I think that is why we beat Rockland (the regular season champion)" in the first round of the playoffs," Martin explained. Trois-Rivieres then outlasted New Jersey in a tight Championship Series.

"Our stadium was packed (during home playoff games); it was incredible," he concluded.

Bergeron, only 34 and still under contract to a team in the Swiss National League, was well known throughout his lengthy career with seven NHL teams as a power play specialist, with more than half of his points coming when his team had a man advantage.

I did not hear that the interaction with the baseball team was considered to be a "power play" although that seems clearly to have been the way it worked out.

A HEALTHY HOLDZKOM READY FOR SPRING TRAINING, ALTHOUGH NOW MUST DEAL WITH BROTHER'S SUDDEN DEATH

John Holdzkom, who authored one of the American Association's great stories in 2014 when he went from the league to the bullpen of the Pittsburgh Pirates in a matter of weeks, has been looking forward to a healthy start in the new season, but now must deal with tragedy in his family before spring training starts.

Brother and fellow professional Lincoln Holdzkom, another onetime American Association pitcher, has had his

life end at the age of 33 in an automobile accident in California.

It was only earlier this month when John Holdzkom told a home country media outlet in New Zealand, 3news.co.nz, "me and my brother are extremely excited to get back and see all the boys again." What he meant was to re-join the New Zealand Diamondbacks for their World Baseball Classic qualifying tournament in February. Both brothers have been key members of the team in the past. Lincoln, five years older, was the "heart and soul" of the New Zealand pitching staff, manager Chris Woodward told MiLB.com while other reports said he was likely going to be captain this season.

Lincoln Holdzkom, whose career had topped out at Class AAA in the Boston farm system in 2007-8, was a reliever in 40 games for the Wichita Wingnuts (2-4, one save, 3.72) in 2013.

John Holdzkom pitched at both Sioux City and Amarillo that same season, then he limited American Association opponents through a 1.17 earned run average in his first nine appearances at Amarillo the next season before the Pirates acquired his contract. Weeks later he was in the National League where he collected 14 strikeouts in nine innings while winning one game, saving another and posting a 2.00 ERA for the parent Pirates. He also pitched in the wild-card playoff game.

"I was in a bit of a hot streak in June (of last season) and this little scrapper laid down a bunt on me," John Holdzkom told 3news.co.nz recently. "I went to make the play, landed awkwardly on my shoulder, and that was pretty much all she wrote for the season." He worked only 24.1 minor league innings before the injury, but has been healthy this offseason, working out at Bradenton, FL where the Pirates train and looking forward to spring training with Pittsburgh.

That still should happen, though it obviously will be with a heavy heart.

Previously the chief spokesman for Commissioners Bowie Kuhn and Peter Ueberroth, Bob Wirz has been writing extensively about Independent Baseball since 2003. He is a frequent contributor to this site as well as writing his own blog, www.IndyBaseballChatter.com.

How far down on the farm?

Determining distances between MLB clubs and their affiliates

By Dan Cichalski

When my wife and I travel during the summer, we always make sure to check the schedules of any local baseball teams where we're visiting, whether it's a Major League or Minor League city. My "home parks" in affiliated ball are in New Jersey, Lakewood and Trenton, but I'm always interested to see what local flair ballparks around the country feature, the neighborhoods they inhabit, what regional beer is offered at the game. And it's always fun to see the Major Leaguers of tomorrow playing in the bush leagues today. Last summer, our trip to Portland, Ore., happened to be a few days after No. 1 overall pick Dansby Swanson made his debut for the nearby Hillsboro Hops.

But if any Arizona Diamondbacks officials wanted to see Swanson take his first swings as a professional, they had to get on a plane in Phoenix and travel nearly 1,300 miles to do so. Closer to my home, if any Yankees higher-ups wanted to see Aaron Judge get his first taste of Double-A, they merely had to drive 71 miles down the New Jersey Turnpike to catch the Trenton Thunder. And if Phillies brass wants to check in on a prospect in the upper Minors (Triple- or Double-A), the drive is even shorter and doesn't involve crossing state lines.

These are the things I contemplate on my own drive to the ballpark or when I study a map of Minor League franchises and their parent clubs. Soon, I wondered: Which club has the closest collection of affiliates? Which has the farthest? Which farm team is closest to its parent club? And so on...

Determining the answers first require some parameters. Do we measure direct distance – "as the crow flies"? That could be done if measuring the distance, say, from Flushing, Queens, to Las Vegas, but wouldn't be as accurate in determining how far Lakewood's FirstEnergy Park is from Philadelphia's Citizens Bank Park. Besides, if someone in the front office is going from his desk at the Major League park to see a prospect in action in Double-A, he's not taking a helicopter from parking lot to parking lot.

To be consistent -- but admittedly not scientific -- I settled on driving distances between ballparks according to

Google Maps. If multiple routes were offered (which they were in nearly all cases), I went with the shortest by mileage (converted from kilometers for the distances out of Toronto). Anything within 100 miles returned a distance to the tenth of a mile (99.4 miles from Cincinnati's Great American Ball Park to Louisville Slugger Field) but anything more than 100 miles was listed as whole miles. Granted, Dodgers GM Andrew Friedman isn't driving the 1,330 miles from Dodger Stadium to Oklahoma City's Bricktown Ballpark, but at least we're getting an idea of the distance he has to travel, minus the drive to and from each airport.

The answer to my questions? The Orioles have the most compact farm system in Major League Baseball, with their five affiliates an average of 92.56 miles from Oriole Park. The most spread out? The A's, whose farm clubs are an average of 1,789.92 miles from the East Bay. Oakland also has the single farthest affiliate in the Short-Season Vermont Lake Monsters in the New York-Penn League: The University of Vermont's Centennial Field is 3,021 miles away. The closest affiliate to its parent club is the Indians' Lake County Captains, just 17.1 miles northeast in Eastlake, Ohio. The average for all affiliates is 760.24 miles away.

Does any of this matter? In some cases, yes. A nearby affiliate makes it easier to send a player out on a rehab assignment and to allow the GM to drop in to evaluate that veteran's progress -- or to see a top prospect in person. On the flip side, the farm teams can benefit from an All-Star making a rehab visit and from its alumni reaching the big leagues just up the road. And having a Triple-A club in relatively close proximity makes it easier to call up a replacement when a player goes on the disabled list -- at least when the affiliate is at home.

I don't know how much this plays into the negotiations over Player Development Contracts when the affiliation shuffle occurs every two years. Would the Mets rather have their Triple-A club in the International League than the Pacific Coast League? Sure, but that doesn't mean it's the case for every club. I'm sure the quality of the facilities and other factors come into play, too.

Below is the list of organizations, listed from most compact to least, and including each franchise's closest and farthest affiliates. I used these listings on MiLB.com, so the only Rookie level affiliates listed are those in the Appalachian and Pioneer leagues -- no "complex

listings, some franchises have five affiliates listed, some have six.

A few other things that popped out to me:

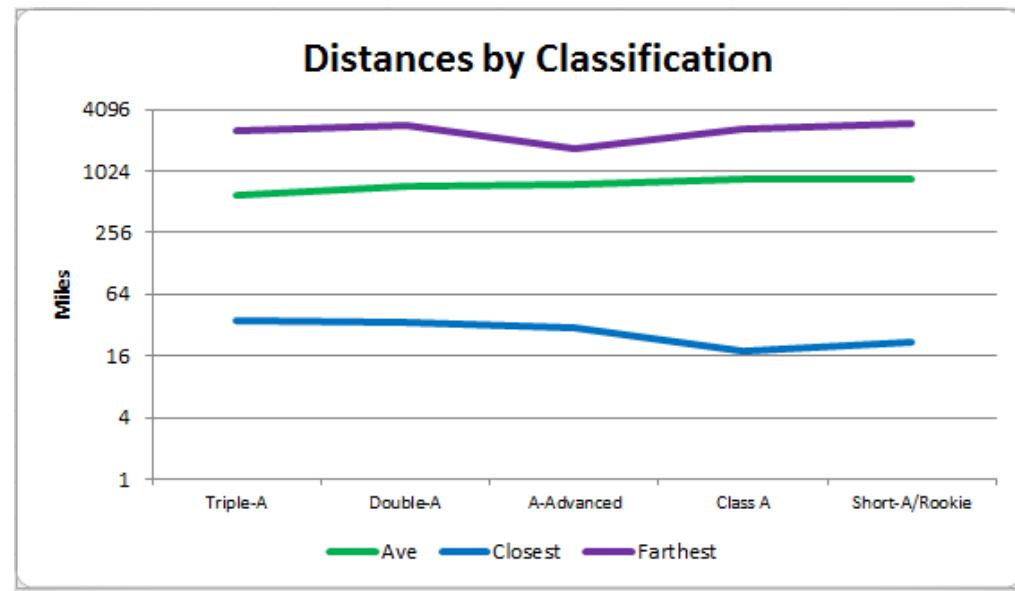
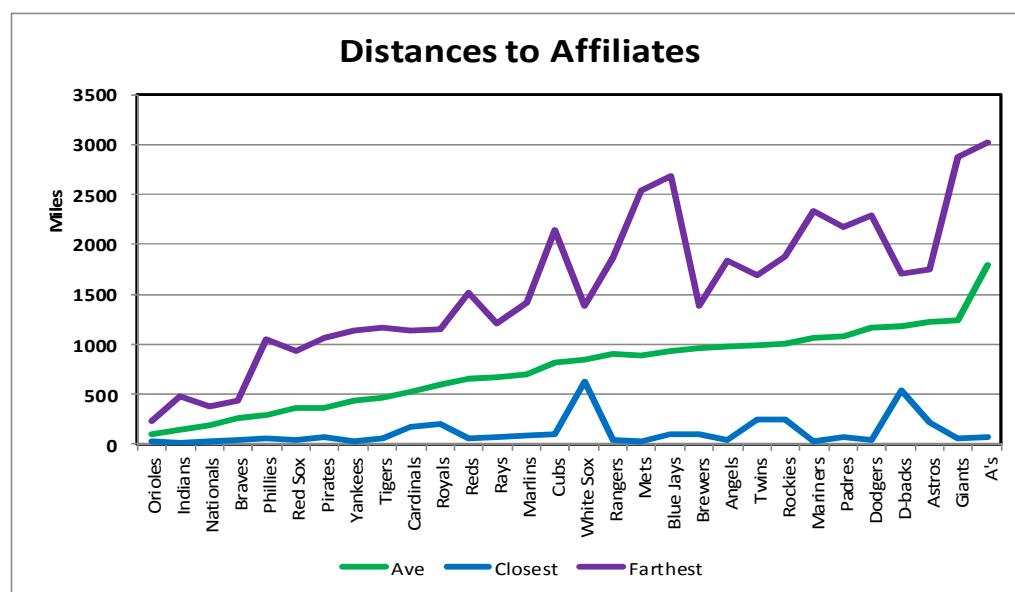
The 10 teams in West divisions all fall into the bottom 13 overall, including the last eight slots. The Northeast has the nine or 10 most compact footprints, depending on if you want to call Detroit in the Northeast (since it is definitely north and somewhat east).

The White Sox are the greatest distance from their closest team, in Birmingham, Ala. The Orioles are the closest to their farthest team.

The Orioles' farthest affiliate, 233 miles away in Norfolk, is closer than the closest farm club for four organizations: the Rockies (246), Twins (251), D-backs (544) and White Sox (629).

And below, the average distances by classification grow longer the further you get from the Major Leagues. Triple-A, the closest to the big leagues, is also the closest geographically, on average. Double-A is next, and so on.

These charts reflect two Minor League franchise moves this offseason. The Rockies' Double-A Eastern League affiliate moved from New Britain, Conn., to Hartford, increasing the distance from Denver by a few miles. And in the South Atlantic League, the Mets' full-season Class A affiliate moved from Savannah, Ga., to Columbia, S.C., bringing it closer to Citi Field. I first posted this study a year ago on my site, njbaseball.net. To see that entry, including a chart listing distances for every affiliated team for the 30 MLB franchises, visit <http://bit.ly/njb-farm>.



The Stars Shine Brightly in Akron

By Joseph Wancho

The matchup may not have been one of biblical proportions. But for those who turned out at League Park in Summit County on June 1, 1937, they may have been expecting a David and Goliath type affair. The World Champion New York Yankees were in town, taking on their Class C affiliate, the Akron Yankees of the Mid-Atlantic League.

The Bronx Bombers had defeated the neighboring Giants in six games to capture their fifth World Championship in 1936. They had just split a doubleheader at Fenway Park on May 31, leaving them 3 1/2 games over Cleveland. The Yankees took a charter bus from Cleveland to Akron on their off day, and would return right after the exhibition to start a 12-game western swing with three games against the Tribe.

The Yankees had a roster filled to the brim with six players whose careers would be honored with enshrinement in Cooperstown: Bill Dickey, Tony Lazzeri, Joe DiMaggio, Lou Gehrig, Lefty Gomez and Red Ruffing. They were managed by another future member of the Hall of Fame, Joe McCarthy. For Gehrig, June 1 marked the twelfth anniversary of when his consecutive games-played streak began. The total had climbed to 1,843 games.

As for the "little Yankees", their roster was stock-piled with players who may never rise above Class C ball. A total of six players eventually made their way to the big leagues: Pitchers Steve Peek, Ralph Hamner, Don Fredrickson, catcher Tony DePhillips, shortstop Claude Corbett and outfielder Jack Graham. But only Peek would see action with the parent club, in 1941. They were managed by Leo Mackey, a career-minor league player and coach.

League Park was located on Lakeshore Blvd, near Summit Beach Park on West Crosier St. The ballpark had a capacity of more than 5,000. But on this day, only 2,000 patrons turned out for the 4 PM start. The *Akron Beacon Journal* reported that the cheers for the ballgame clashed with the screams of the roller coaster enthusiasts at the amusement park.

It was a homecoming of sorts for Yankee outfielder Tommy Henrich, who hailed from the tradition-rich football town of Massillon, Ohio. Henrich was initially signed by Cleveland, but was mired in their minor league system until signing on with New York earlier that spring. Mr. and Mrs. Edward Henrich were part of the 100-person contingent who traveled 30 miles north to take in the ballgame. A collection was taken and a traveling bag was presented to Tommy before the start of the game.

The starting pitchers were Johnny Broaca for the visitors and Ray Moffett for the home team. As exhibitions go, there were plenty of offensive fireworks. So too, some players were given the day off. Akron sat second baseman Claude Taylor, Corbett and DePhillips. The Bombers kept Frank Crosetti, George Selkirk, Lazzeri and Dickey in the dugout.

"The game was a wild-scoring affair with Akron taking an early lead and holding it until the sixth when the New Yorkers got four runs to make the score 7-6. Akron came back in its half to take an 8-7 lead. It went that way until the ninth when New York took a 13-11 lead," wrote Henry Andrews of the *Akron Times*. Indeed the base paths must have resembled a track meet. Akron chased Yankee starter Broaca after six innings. He surrendered eight runs on 13 hits and issued six free passes. He was relieved by Joe Glenn for the final three frames. Glenn had never pitched in the majors before, but there he was toeing the rubber at the behest of Marse Joe.

Moffett, the Akron starter, fared about the same statistically, although he for sure had the tougher task. He was relieved after seven innings by Jack Cahill. Moffett surrendered eight runs on 15 hits, walking four. However, Cahill had a rough time with the Bombers, surrendering his club's slim lead in the eighth inning when the Yankees crossed the plate four times.

In the bottom of the ninth inning, Bill Svilich singled and Jack Graham doubled. There were two out when Paul Bearint stepped in the box. Glenn whistled two strikes past the third baseman. But Bearint slammed his next offering over the center field fence for a 14-13 Akron win. It was a rare show of power for Bearint, who hit only two home runs in 25 games for Akron in 1937. "As far as pitching is concerned, Mr. Joe Glenn of the New York Yankees is still a mighty fine catcher," wrote Bob Elliott of the *Akron Beacon Journal*.

It capped a big day for Bearint, who with the home run had hit for the cycle and also walked once. Graham had three hits and Harry Ashworth had two triples, two singles and a walk. Henrich did not disappoint the hometown well-wishers, as he led the varsity with three hits.

Indeed David had again slain Goliath.

The Akron club finished the year in fourth place of the Mid-Atlantic League with a 64-61 record. The Yankees compiled a 102-52 record, and again dusted the Giants in the Fall Classic.

On July 13, 2016, a different set of stars will descend upon the Rubber City. For the first time in their 20 seasons at Canal Park, Akron will host the Eastern League All-Star Game. For many fans of minor league baseball, the lure of being able to see an organizations' phenoms up close is worth a trip to the ballpark several times in a season. The All-Star game multiplies that opportunity in one evening.

Who knows? An All-Star in Akron one day; a Hall of Fame member in Cooperstown the next.

SOMETHING YOU DON'T SEE EVERY DAY

By David McHugh

On May 20th, 1998 I attended a minor league baseball game at McCoy stadium in Pawtucket, R.I. My youngest son and I were at a mid-week day game between the Indianapolis Indians and the Pawtucket Red Sox.

It was early in the season, beautiful weather, and I believe it was a special school kids day at McCoy for the local community. The PawSox owner at the time was Mr. Ben Mondor who always made a trip to the park a great experience.

The PawSox were leading 4-0 going into the 5th inning. Starting pitcher Dave Fleming was pitching pretty up until that point. What happened next was I believe a first time happening. I don't think it has ever happened since.

Leading off for the Indians was third baseman Pete Rose Jr. who promptly hit a solo home run. Second baseman Guillermo Garcia followed with a walk and center fielder Pat Watkins hit a single. Next batter was second baseman

Jason Williams who smacked a 3-run homer. He was followed by 2 walks, one to DH Roberto Petegine and another by shortstop Aaron Boone (yeah the Red Sox nemesis of 2003). That was it for Dave Fleming who was relieved by Pat Flury. Next batter was first baseman Mark Johnson who also walked. Leftfielder Glen Murray then hit a grand slam. As the inning went on, RF Ozzie Timmons singled, Pete Rose Jr. grounded to second, and yup, 2B Garcia hit a 2-run homer. The inning finished up with a fly to right by Watkins and a 6-4 groundout by Williams.

Needless to say this made for a very marked up scorecard. It took a couple of minutes to realize what we just saw was a cycle of home runs (solo, 2-run, 3-run and grand slam) all in the same inning. Indianapolis scored 10 runs on 6 hits in that inning.

I will never forget that game. The Indians went on to win 11-4.

My family and I have been going to games at McCoy since the late 80s and we always have a wonderful time, even when it rains. I am retired now, but still manage to take in a few games every season with my wife. Looking forward to another season, and planning to take our grand daughters.

Minor league baseball is great because you never know what you're going to see.

SULPHUR DELL: THE STORY OF BASEBALL IN NASHVILLE

Filmmaker Joshua Maxwell has teamed up with SABR member **Skip Nipper** to create a documentary about Nashville's long-time, but no longer extant, minor league park. As this is written the film is still in the editing stages, but will be released in July of this year, with a premiere in Nashville.

In 2015 Joshua, along with SABR member **Kevin McCann**, created a documentary about the KITTY League. That DVD can still be ordered [here](#), or you can email Kittyleaguedvd@gmail.com for more information.

For more info on the Sulphur Dell project, see [this page](#). You can also contact Joshua at westkyvideo@gmail.com, or Skip Nipper.

RICK LANCELOTTE AND THE EASTERN LEAGUE HR

RECORD

By: Chuck Johnson

The Eastern League was formed on March 23, 1923 at the Arlington Hotel in Binghamton, New York as a six-team circuit located entirely within two states, New York and Pennsylvania. During the first 15 years of its existence the league was known as the New York-Pennsylvania League. On July 2, 1936, the league expanded out of its two state territory for the first time when the York, PA franchise relocated mid-season to Trenton, New Jersey. In 1938, the Scranton franchise moved to Hartford, Connecticut and the New York-Penn League, capitalizing on it's expanded geography, became known as the Eastern League. The League played under different classifications until 1963 when the current Double A format was introduced.

The NYPL operated as an eight team Class B League in 1930 with six franchises in Pennsylvania and two in New York. The Hazelton Mountaineers finished seventh in the league, 16.5 games behind the league champion Wilkes-Barre Barons but had in their lineup a player who would set a record that he would hold alone for 49 years.

Ken Strong is a member of both the College and Professional Football Halls of Fame. As was the case in those days when money was scarce and salaries were small, players would often work during the off-seasons of their sport to make ends meet. During his first three off-seasons as an NFL player, Strong moonlighted as a baseball player.

A six foot, 205 pound outfielder, Strong established the Eastern League record of 41 homers in 1930 while playing in just 117 games. Strong would make the NFL Pro Bowl following each of his first two seasons, (1929-1930) which established him as not only a superstar player but a highly paid one as well. Strong would give up baseball after the 1931 season without ever playing in the major leagues.

Strong's record would never seriously be threatened over the next two decades; it would be 19 seasons before anyone would reach the 30 HR mark (Harry Simpson, 31 for Wilkes-Barre in 1949).

The closest anyone would come to the record came in both 1962 and 1973 when Ken Harrelson of Binghamton and Tom Robson of Pittsfield each hit 38 round-trippers. (Harrelson established the still standing RBI mark of 138 as well during the '62 season).

The Eastern League underwent a major change following the 1977 season when the two Canadian franchises (Thetford Mines and Quebec City) left the league which forced the league to play the 1978 and '79 seasons with just six teams. Following the season, the Oakland affiliated franchise in Jersey City moved to Buffalo and became affiliated with the Pittsburgh Pirates and the San Francisco Giants transferred their Double A affiliate from Waterbury, CT to Shreveport, LA.

These moves left the A's without a Double A franchise and the EL with and undesirable five teams but as it often does, fate would step in and solve both problems.

In December of 1978, a winter storm knocked over two light towers which fell onto the roof behind home plate and since the stadium was made primarily of wood, the upper grandstand areas and press box were demolished. The A's almost immediately struck a deal with the league to place their franchise in Waterbury which re-established a six team league.

Buffalo had been without a team since June of 1970 when they made an in season move to Winnipeg, Canada. Apparently the locals missed the game as the Bisons led the league in attendance in 1979 with 133,478, the first EL team to draw 100,000 fans since Quebec City in 1973.

The Bisons would play their home games in War Memorial Stadium, which had fallen into disrepair, then the American Football League's Buffalo Bills moved into Ralph Wilson Stadium in 1971. In 1983 Hollywood spruced up the Stadium for the filming of the Robert Redford movie "The Natural." The Bisons would play at War Memorial until their new Stadium was completed in 1988 after which "The Rockpile" was demolished.

Because it was built primarily for football, it had an oblong shape, similar in structure to the Polo Grounds. Because of this, the area stretching from dead center to the left field line was shortened with an artificial fence, making the dimensions 420 in straightaway center and 330 down the left field line. The rightfield seats were the actual football seats with the foul pole just 310 feet away. To compensate, a 20 foot fence was erected from the foul

pole to right center to cut down on cheap homers, but things didn't work as planned.

Things are much different in the minor leagues today, and not just the attendance. Today, MiLB holds a job fair during the Winter Meetings which attracts hundreds of job seekers looking for primarily unpaid internships or seasonal work.

In August of 1978, I answered a newspaper ad for a promotions company contracted by the league to sell tickets and advertising. Nowadays, the teams do this themselves and have full time staffs to handle the responsibilities.

In 1979 the league absorbed the company, so I became an EL employee. My first official assignment, at \$100 a week plus commission, was in Reading with the Phillies. We got there around March first and sold program and stadium advertising along with season and promotional ticket packages.

Being this was my first real job in sports, my memories of this assignment are better than any other during my four and a half years. Reading is about an hour from Philadelphia, and in addition to the Sixers and Flyers making the Conference finals in their respective sports, '79 was the year of the Magic Johnson/Larry Bird Final Four which included the University of Pennsylvania, the last Ivy League school to make it that far.

After leaving Reading shortly after Memorial Day, I went to Holyoke for about a month and then it was to my hometown of Waterbury and the A's and simultaneously the West Haven Yankees.

By this time it was the first part of August and our boss called a meeting to decide what and where we'd spend the offseason. We had done the AHL the previous off-season and also had done some promotional work with a new college basketball league called the Big East.

During the meeting he floated the need of someone going up to Buffalo to help out with what was now becoming a news story. Rick Lancellotti, a left-handed hitting Buffalo outfielder, was on a hot streak. Beginning on July 20th, Lancellotti homered eight times in an eight game stretch

and when Buffalo left for a brief roadtrip on August first his season total stood at 33.

Remember, this was in the days before cell phones, texting, email and even fax machines. News traveled via word of mouth. News organizations and opposing teams were starting to call the league office in Holyoke to check on Lancellotti's previous days performance but without anyone on site to check it was difficult getting up to date information.

It wasn't as much of a problem when the team was at home, but on the road it was because people would call the park and all the staff was gone traveling with the team and there was no plan in place to relay information.

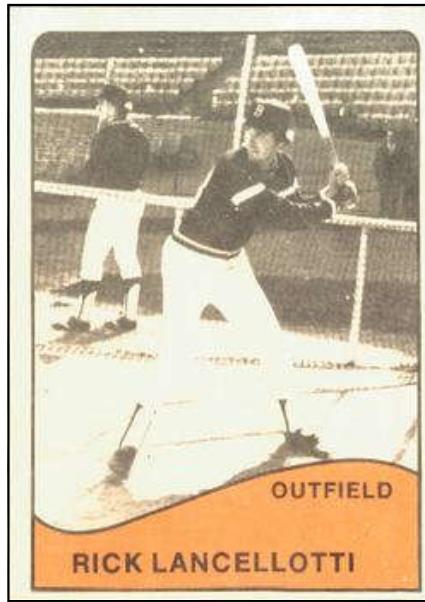
So it was decided the league would send someone up to Buffalo to help keep everyone up to date with what was going on. I volunteered...anything to add three weeks to the baseball season was OK with me.

War Memorial was a big stadium when there was a game going on; when it was empty it was a cavern. There was literally no one in the park except the ticket office and the occasional concessions/maintenance personnel cleaning up from the previous homestand or preparing for the next one.

I drove up in time to meet the team when they returned home from their roadtrip on August 7th. Lancellotti had gone homerless on the trip but homered twice on the homestand bringing his total to 35. The league then decided I should accompany the team on its upcoming road trip, driving myself, of course. I wasn't part of the team so I couldn't ride the bus, thankfully.

Lancellotti tied the record during the second to last game of the season, at home vs. Reading. I remember calling the other two parks hosting games that night, Bristol and West Haven I believe, letting them know. I took some calls the next day despite the fact it was Saturday, but that was it as Lancellotti was homerless over the final two games.

For the season, Buffalo set a still standing team HR record of 198. During the five seasons they played at War Memorial the eclipsed the previous record of 126 four



times. Since then, only two teams have managed to hit 180 in a season, the 2004 Tigers farm team Erie Sea-wolves who hit 180, and the 1997 Portland Sea Dogs (Marlins) who hit 191.

Individually, the record of Strong and Lancellotti was threatened just two years later in 1991 when Ron Kittle of the Glens Falls White Sox hit 40. Others who have come close are Mitch Jones (39/2004), Chris Norton (38/1999), and Matt Raleigh (1997) and Ryan Howard (2005) with 37 each.

Lancellotti went on to have an interesting career although his ML time was brief, playing parts of three seasons with

the Padres, Giants and Red Sox. He hit two career major league homers, both in 1986 with the Giants, both as a pinch-hitter and both in the top of the ninth inning.

During his time as a professional he won HR titles in five different leagues and RBI crowns in four. He played professionally in the US, Mexico, Japan, Italy, Venezuela and Columbia.

Following his career Lancellotti returned to live in Buffalo where he operates a baseball school which he still runs today.

The Life of a Talented but Troubled Man:

Paddy Bolan

By Dennis Pajot

My book "The Rise of Milwaukee Baseball" is dedicated to the ball players of the 19th Century: "The great, the not nearly great, and everyone in between. Those players who set fine examples, and those who led troubled lives." I had Patrick "Paddy" Bolan in mind when I wrote of the latter players. Reading of Bolan during the seasons he played in Milwaukee made me feel sad at the loss of talent, but more important the waste of a good life for this man and his family.

Patrick J. "Paddy" Bolan was probably born in 1869. The first I could find of Bolan was in a March 26, 1890, article in the *Sporting Life* about baseball in Toledo: "Amateur ball in this city has struck a snag. Price, a promising first base player, has signed with an Indiana club, and Picord and Bolan, the crack battery of last year's Hacketts, have signed with Flint, Michigan." Two months later the *Sporting Life* reported "Paddy Bolan, a Toledo boy, now with the Flint, Michigan team, is catching wonderful ball for a yearling, and is running bases and batting nicely. He was formerly of the Hacketts, and it does Mr. Hackett more good to read of Bolan's good work than it does to have a winner on the board."

The Michigan State League disbanded on June 13, throwing a good number of Toledo boys "out on the cold and

cruel world." According to the *Sporting Life* "prominent among them are Paddy Bolan, who is now catching for Peru, Ind. Paddy has created a furore in Hoosier towns by the way he holds runners to the bases, and besides is batting and running the bases well himself. He would make a good man, and the end of the year will doubtless find him in faster company."

I found Bolan catching for Peru as early as June 19. Unfortunately, this Indiana League was in trouble and disbanded in late July. In the *Sporting Life* of October 18, 1890, it was reported Paddy had arrived home for the winter, having done splendid work during the season. "He is a great little catcher, and a few years under an old head will make him a desirable man in any club."

The 1891 season found Paddy Bolan with Grand Rapids of the Northwestern League. The Grand Rapids club disbanded on July 30, putting an end to the Northwestern League. The *Sporting News* reported Bolan would probably go to Minneapolis. However, Paddy did not go to Minneapolis. In early August it was reported he and pitcher Maurice O'Connor had been blacklisted by the Oconto, Wisconsin, club for accepting money and "then sneaked off." I could find no more of Bolan during the 1891 season.

In early April 1892 the *Sporting Life* reported Manager Harpster, of the Genoa Base Ball Club, had been in Toledo the previous week, arranging for the Genoa's tour through Northwestern Ohio, Indiana, Illinois and Wisconsin. A number of players were put under contract, a Bolan being one. If this is Paddy is not known, but being from Toledo it is possible.

The playing season of 1892 found Paddy Bolan in Terre Haute, Indiana, in late April. He played right field for the team, but was not playing good ball. In a dispatch dated May 11, 1892, it was stated Terre Haute was looking to sign Pat Wright for second base, and then move Jack Corbett to the outfield. The dispatch went on: "If Corbett goes to the outfield, Boland [sic] will likely be released. Paddy has not his eye on the ball this season." On May 17 Bolan was released, as the Hottentots had no need for a backup catcher. However, it was stated "Boland [sic] will make a rattling good catcher for any minor league club."

Paddy signed with Memphis of the Southern League, and played in his first game on June 2. The *Sporting News* of June 11 talked of the new Memphis catcher, and related: "This lad has a bright future before him." In July *The Sporting Life* claimed "Bolan is the best catcher that has been in Memphis."

Apparently Atlanta, also in the Southern League, realized Bolan's value to Memphis and tried to have Paddy (and Maurice O'Connor) declared ineligible, due to the two players having been blacklisted by Oconto the previous year. This attempt failed and Bolan finished the season in Memphis.

Hailed as a fine catcher, Bolan's hitting appeared to be light, having hit only .209 for the season in Memphis. However, after the season Manager Graves of the Memphis club said he would re-engage Bolan for 1893.

Bolan was indeed re-signed by Memphis in January for the 1893 season. However, before the season began Paddy got into a bit of trouble back in Toledo. On March 12 Paddy, having missed his train to join the club, was walking along the street with Miss Lizzie Bee. Bolan claimed two men "grossly insulted his lady friend, which he promptly resented by knocking one down." A fight ensued between the three, and "Paddy was pummeling his two opponents in good shape" when the police arrived and arrested all three. The next day the judge discharged Paddy.

Bolan apparently played very well early on for Memphis. The last game Paddy appears in a box score is July 15, but he remained on the team. Emmett Rogers took over the catching position, causing the Memphis *Sporting Life* correspondent to ask in August: "What has become of Paddy Bolan? Has he been lost in the shuffle? He is too valuable a man to permit his remaining idle any length of

time. I'm told he is seriously ill. Aside from Wadsworth's excellent pitching, his timely batting is what strengthens his hold on the public's team." [See *Sporting News* fan poll below.] Bolan's catching appeared to be solid, and he hit .267 in the 57 games he played in.

Whatever the reason for Rogers, "the erstwhile rival of Paddy Bolan," to become the Memphis regular catcher, it became irrelevant when the Southern League disbanded on August 11, 1893. It was reported Bolan, Billy Goode-nough and Charlie Frank were wanted by the St. Louis Browns. Goodenough and Frank signed with the St. Louis club. It was reported the Browns offered Bolan a trial. Bolan, however, wanted \$275 for the remainder of the season, \$200 up front. He said he would wait in Memphis for the Browns to meet his terms. The Browns told the *Sporting News* they had wanted Frank and Goode-nough, but did not particularly want Bolan. In their version, Paddy wanted to join the Browns, but there was no regular place for him, and manager Watkins did not think Bolan "was a world-beater." Bolan was offered a trial at \$175 a month, which was subsequently raised by Chris von der Ahe, but the ex-Memphis catcher refused the offer. St. Louis officials stated: "If he waits in Memphis until he hears from us again, I'm afraid he will live and die in the Bluff City."

Bolan--who decided to stay in Memphis--and some other former Memphis players, organized a City League in Memphis. The league consisted of four teams, playing in Memphis. The professionals of the teams would accept challenges from any organization in the south. Emmett Rogers was to manage this team. However, low gate receipts in the few games played, caused the league to be abandoned.

Paddy was a popular player, receiving enough votes to place him 69th on the most popular player list of a *Sporting News* poll--this included both major and minor leagues across the country. He decided to stay the winter in Memphis. Later in the year it was decided Memphis would have a team in the newly organized Southern League in 1894. One of the first players signed was Paddy Bolan.

Paddy's 1894 started off bad when it was reported his five year old step daughter had been sexually assaulted by a young man in Chelsea, a suburb of Memphis. The neighbors' indignation "knew no bounds," and it was reported Paddy tried to kill the boy before police took him to the

station.

The 1894 baseball season started with Bolan again in Memphis of the Southern League. However, on July 8 the league collapsed, and three days later Paddy signed with Milwaukee of the Western League. Bolan's first game with the Blue Ribbons (a name the club was trying out, but soon went back to Brewers) was on July 17 in Detroit.

In this first game it was reported Paddy had taken sick in the fourth inning and replaced by Jacko Fields. When the Brewers returned home, Paddy was again out of the line-up, reportedly still sick. There were some conflicting stories on what actually happened. The *Milwaukee Sentinel* of July 21 reported: "The products of local breweries and Kentucky stills were his friends, and when it came time for him to dress for Thursday's game (July 19) he was swaying like a flagstaff in a gale and wanted to shake hands with everyone he met." Reportedly letters from Southern League owners stated while Bolan was a first-class catcher, he could not be depended to keep himself in condition. Still, "he was signed with the hope that he would take care of himself while here and when he proceeded to take a strong fancy to everything drinkable in Milwaukee before he knew the directions of the compass it was deemed wise to let him go."

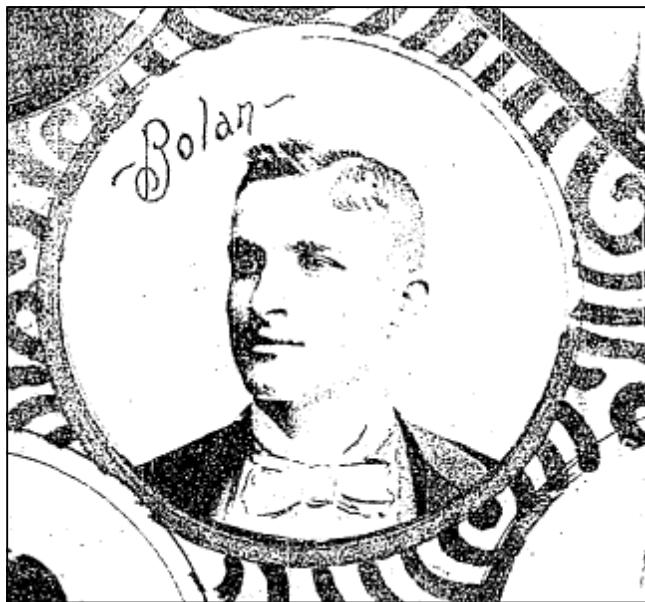
Yenowine's Illustrated News, April 28, 1895
The *Milwaukee Journal* of the same date told pretty much the same story: "Bolan this morning was shipped back south to some town where beer and other things for which Milwaukee is noted are not so plentiful." The *Evening Wisconsin*, tongue in cheek, reported Paddy had been injured crossing Chestnut Street (Juneau Avenue) near 3rd Street when he "accidentally collided with one of the Pabst beer wagons."

But a week or so later the story had changed. It was reported Bolan had skipped town, causing some surprise, and owing the club \$100. Paddy returned to Milwaukee on August 8 and the *Evening Wisconsin* reported he had been in Toledo, attending to his wife, who had been very ill. He was back in the line-up on August 10 and did the

greater majority of the catching for the rest of the season for the last place Brewers. Bolan hit .245 (36 hits in 147 at bats) in 41 games for Milwaukee. In his forty games behind the plate he had a fielding percentage of .882 (9th out of 20 who played the position in the Western League), committing 24 errors, and being credited with 148 put outs and 32 assists.

Milwaukee reserved Bolan for their 1895 roster, and Paddy wrote to Brewer President Matthew Killilea that he was wintering in Memphis.

Paddy did stay the winter in Memphis and had the troubles to prove it. On December 29 he was sentenced \$50 and given 60 days in jail in criminal court for carrying concealed weapons, in addition to \$25 for assault and battery.



Yenowine's Illustrated News, April 28, 1895

In January 1895 Bolan signed with the Brewers. Milwaukee's manager, Larry Twitchell, thought Paddy was one of the best at throwing to second base, "a valuable accomplishment, which all catchers do not possess." In the spring he was late reporting, supposedly because of the bad weather. However, it was thought he wanted to play in the Southern League and would like his release from Milwaukee. But the Brewer manager was said to have had enough with Southern League tactics and said Bolan would play in Milwaukee, or not

at all. Paddy did arrive in Milwaukee on April 22, saying he was in shape as he had been playing ball in Memphis for a few months.

The 1895 Western League season began with Bolan doing excellent work behind the plate, making only 6 errors going into late May, for a fielding percentage of .933. However, he was struggling at the plate. On May 25 he was hitting only .085 in 70 at bats. After this his hitting came around and by the next week he had raised his average to .153.

In a game on June 3 the fans saw a side of Bolan not usually seen on the field. The *Milwaukee Sentinel* described

the incident the next today:

Bolan and Motz nearly came to blows in the 7th inning yesterday. It is something unusual for Bolan to lose his temper, but he had plenty of cause yesterday. In this inning Motz [Indianapolis first baseman] grabbed Bolan by the head as he was going toward the plate and shook him until Paddy got his Irish up and walked about the plate for several minutes looking for trouble with anyone who wanted it. Motz made a show of wanting to get into trouble, but when they got into close quarters near the home bench, and Bolan doubled up a big fist and began to talk to Motz like a father, the latter concluded that he was better off playing ball and attending to business.

Bolan's work behind the plate continued to be outstanding; by the middle of June he had made only 9 errors and had 59 assists. Paddy's hitting continued to improve, raising his average to .219. He also displayed power, as this description of his third home run of the season shows: "Bolan came up in the sixth inning and hit the ball so far over the left field fence that people in Williamsburg [a Milwaukee suburb north of Milwaukee Park] heard something drop, and took up a line of thought of meteors and wondered if all stars were so small and round when they got through falling as the object which struck in the middle of the Silver Springs Road and bounded away to the country side."

The latter part of June became a nightmare for Paddy. In a game on June 16 he split his thumb and was out for a number of games. Then on June 25 his 8-month old child died in Memphis and he went home to attend to the funeral.

Paddy Bolan had become a popular player in Milwaukee with the fans. During the summer an amateur club took on the name "Bolan's Stars". At the last game of the 1895 season in Milwaukee he would be presented with a diamond ring.

As good a catcher as he was, Bolan was apparently not fleet of foot. There was a debate among the team members who was slower, Paddy or infielder Gus Klopf. At one point it appeared the two would meet in a 100-yard dash, but manager Larry Twitchell refused to allow them to run before a game because he said it would take them

so long to run the distance that the game would never get started. The two players finally agreed not to test their abilities mano e mano. Bolan had a talk with the Milwaukeean Klopf, telling him "Now here, there's no use of we's makin' this talk about how fast we's can run. You know as well as I do that me and you can't beat anybody, so what's the use of goin' out there some day and one of us gettin' beat. The one what gets beat is goin' to be marked down as the slowest man what lives, and I know you don't want that kind of a rep. following you around. Say, the best thing what we's can do is to keep quiet and say nothin'." Gus agreed.

After the family funeral Bolan re-joined the team on July 4 in Kansas City. However, by the end of the month he had "taken a sudden slump in his work." His game was bad enough that he was taken out during the game on July 19. The *Sentinel* reported: "Bolan's catching of late has been the poorest of the season." Bolan was becoming "exceedingly irregular lately." In late July he was missing the night the team left for St. Paul. The manager and players searched all over for him, but finally the train left without Paddy being found. However, he was later found in one of the sleepers.

On August 1 it was reported the Brewers borrowed Bill Moran, one of the Chicago Colts' catchers. Two days later Bolan was taken out in the first inning of the game in St. Paul, saying he felt sick.

Within a week the truth was coming out. It seems Paddy "ran into another beer wagon" and went on a bender before the Minnesota trip. He was unable to catch the final home game and was fined \$50. But the fine did not accomplish the desired effect, as he continued his drinking in St. Paul. The *Sentinel* of August 6, 1895, gave its readers the previously untold story:

Now that the days of "Paddy" Bolan as a Brewer are numbered, it might be in place to tell a story or two of him that were sacred so long as he was a member of the team. Bolan's worst failing is an intense love for intoxicants. Sometimes he will go for weeks without touching a drop and during the days when he keeps away from John Barleycorn and the extract of hops he is a terror to the base runners. Some days when he has been drinking his catching is also excellent, but it is oftener the case that he makes some very bad play before the game ends. Before he "ran in the

"brewery wagon" the time before the last time, Manager Twitchell warned him that if he drank again before the season closed it would cost \$100 and a month's suspension. For a week Bolan didn't go into a saloon and came around on time every morning for practice wearing a white tie and carrying a light cane and looking like a dapper student. At the end of the week, however, Bolan was missing one fine July morning and Twitchell knew that something was wrong. Knowing about where he would find Bolan, he went to a saloon not more than five or six blocks from the grounds and there sure enough was Bolan sitting at a table with two or three friends and imbibing freely. When Bolan saw Twitchell come in and look at him as though he would cut out his heart if he had half a chance, Bolan said: "Come here, Larry. I want you to see that I don't have to drink if I don't want to. I have been here all night just to try myself and I haven't taken a thing stronger than pop all night." Just then the bartender approached and said: "Paddy, will you have the same kind of brandy that you had before?"

The second story the *Sentinel* reported was from back in Paddy's Memphis playing days:

Bolan once ran a saloon in Memphis, but, though he did a good business, he lost the saloon. A liquor house "staked" him to the saloon, and, after he had been running the place three months without paying in any money, an agent went around to enquire into the progress that Bolan was making. He found the trade very good, but Bolan had no money. He informed "Paddy" that he would have to do something for the house pretty soon or it would close him out and put some one else in charge. Bolan said he wouldn't care to lose the place, and that as soon as one man who had been patronizing the place ever since it started, but on credit, and who was good for what he owed, settled, he would pay the firm something. In two weeks' time the customer would probably pay what he owed. The agent went away to return again in two weeks. He found Bolan, still waiting for the one customer to settle, when he would pay all that he owed.

"Paddy," said the agent, "I don't want to be thought too inquisitive, but who is this good customer?" Well, to tell you the truth," said Bolan, "I am the man." There was a new sign in front of the place on the following morning.

The *Milwaukee Journal* summed it up nicely: "Bolan is a good backstop when he doesn't allow his one great failing to get the best of him."

Bolan was released in early August, and told the press he had several good offers and would accept one. It was reported Detroit was after him, but he would take an offer from Grand Rapids, which was for more money. Then it was reported he had decided to join Detroit after all.

Catcher Bill Moran was having arm problems and Milwaukee manager Larry Twitchell decided to reinstate Bolan, after he promised he would "touch not, taste not, handle not." Moran was returned to Chicago, and from August 18 to the end of the season Bolan was Milwaukee's catcher, without incident. The Brewers finished the 1895 Western League season in 6th place with a 57 and 66 record. Bolan's official batting average was .209 (296 ABs, 62 hits, 32 runs scored) in 80 games. His fielding average was .938, with 24 errors and 33 passed balls. His percentage put him 12 out of 20 catchers listed for the season.

It was said Bolan would be replaced the next season, as his work this year had been "uncertain and not as good as was desired in other respects." However, he was still placed on the Milwaukee reserve list for 1896.

After the 1895 playing season a number of the Brewers went west, and played on a new California League team in San Jose. In an exhibition game in Rockford, Illinois, on September 26 in route to California, Paddy was seriously injured when a foul tip drove a wire of the mask into his head, rupturing a blood vessel. He was taken to a hospital and at first it was thought he would not be able to continue on to the coast. But he recovered and was said to have done all the catching for the San Jose team. By mid-November the league folded, the club finishing with a 9-9 record. Many of the players in the league were left stranded and broke, but the San Jose owner, Milwaukeean Theodore Engel, was given credit for paying his players' salaries in full, getting them all to Chicago, and then buying them all tickets to their respective homes. Bolan left for Memphis on November 27, where it was

said he would play in 1896.

For the 1896 season Bolan was still being discussed as the Brewer's backup catcher to newly acquired Kid Speer. But Bolan's career, and life, took a turn for the terrible. On February 1st in Memphis Bolan's wife was granted a divorce and Bolan was sent to jail for contempt of court. A judge had issued a restraining order against the ball player a few days earlier when his wife filed for separation, telling him he could not maltreat her. Bolan paid no attention to all this and gave his ex-wife a bad beating. He was now charged with assault with intent to murder. A week later Bolan was found guilty and given a sentence of six months in jail for the contempt of court, then 11 months and 29 days in jail, plus a fine of \$50, for the assault and battery. However this was all suspended if he left down and never returned. Paddy left Memphis on the first train.

The Milwaukee club made a deal to transfer Bolan to St. Paul in mid-February. Even though a Minneapolis paper reported Bolan would play for Charlie Comiskey's team, this never materialized. Bolan's days in the Western League were at an end, and the *Sporting Life* put a nail in the coffin when it wrote: "He's [Bolan] a disgrace to the sport; wife beaters ought to be blacklisted; they're as bad as traitors almost. Bolan's place is the gravel pits or stone yard, and no Western League team should have any dealing with him."

At the end of May it was reported the Columbus (Georgia) club of the Southern League was to strengthen itself with three new men, Bolan being one. However, a month later he had not reported, as the *Sporting Life* wrote: "Bolan, the catcher signed by Manager Cushman, seems to have gotten lost since he was furnished ticket and advance money. This kind of thing seems to be getting very common down here, and if the managers would not only blacklist one or two, but handle them under law, it might be stopped."

It is unknown why Bolan did not report to Columbus, but in early August it was reported he was in Toledo, dying of consumption. Paddy was in "destitute circumstances" and a benefit game was scheduled to be played for him in Toledo. Back in Milwaukee the Brewer players purchased 20 tickets, and a contribution box was placed in the grand stand during the Brewer's home stand so Paddy's old admirers would have an opportunity to aid him in his distress. The *Milwaukee Sentinel* had these words about the

ex-Brewer catcher:

Bolan was a big-hearted man, and, like most of such men, he was his worst enemy. He went the pace that kills. He shouldn't have taken up the pace, of course, but he himself is paying the penalty now. In all probability Bolan will receive considerable from here, as he was one of the most popular players with those who knew him that was ever a member of a Milwaukee team.

In Toledo the *Bee* was kind to Paddy, writing "in his prime he was one of the best ball players Toledo ever turned out." The paper only said of his condition: "His health is shattered and deprived him of the means of earning a livelihood." On August 22 a game between the local Ivys and Orientals was played at Toledo's Bayview park. The Ivys won 11 to 4, in front of very few spectators, the weather being threatening.

Patrick "Paddy" Bolan died of consumption in Toledo on December 19, 1896. The *Milwaukee Sentinel* obituary was the best of those I found:

Paddy Bolan, formerly identified with the Milwaukee team as a catcher, died Saturday in Toledo. He was a catcher of considerable merit and when Manager Cushman secured him for the Brewers in 1895 [correctly 1894] from the Southern league he was considered one of the rising players in the profession. His ability as a catcher deteriorated, however, as his indulgence in liquor increased and he was finally released. From Milwaukee he drifted from one club to another, his appetite for liquor destroying his chances for a permanent position with any team.

Reported to be a catcher with better than average skills and a great arm, he never appeared in a major league game. A talented young man, but regrettably a troubled life. Paddy Bolan was only 27 years old when he died.

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How the Expos built the foundation of a strong farm system

By Alain Usereau

For most of their 36 years in the majors, from 1969 to 2004, the Montreal Expos organization was lauded for its strong player development and minor league system. For the last three years, I've been working on how the Expos operated. Here's how they were able to build the farm system from the very first year.

Let's go back to the birth of the Montreal franchise. In late May 1968, against all odds, the National League picked Montreal as one of the two expansion teams to begin operating in 1969. The problem was, they had no owners or ownership group. True, several businessmen had promised to pitch in but most of them believed Montreal had absolutely no chance of luring a team. One by one, most of them eventually pulled out, until the situation was solved when Charles Bronfman took over on his own. But in the meantime, less than a week after Montreal was accepted, MLB was holding its annual June draft...and the Expos were due to select players from the 4th round. So who made the selections? Gerry Snyder, the deputy mayor of Montreal, who represented the Expos at the Chicago meeting where the city won the expansion berth. The very first player picked by the Expos was Michael Swain, a pitcher from Ohio State. But since the Expos had no management, the players picked were left on their own without knowing what was going on. It was only in September that John McHale and Jim Fanning officially took over and then began contacting and signing players. Of the 15 players picked, only five eventually signed (Swain didn't but eventually joined the Seattle Pilots organization). The very first player under contract was pitcher Dave Hartman, from Iowa State. Hartman was the most successfull player signed from the 1968 draft, reaching AA. No one from the first group made it farther.

For the next few months, the Expos signed free agents to fill the organization with players. From the January draft, they signed three players: Keith LeFevre, Steve Angelo and Steven Wagner, all of them reaching at least the AA level.

THE FIRST YEAR

When 1969 began, the Expos had really only one farm team that was entirely tied with the organization: West Palm Beach, in the Florida State League. Their AAA team was in Vancouver in the PCL, in a joint agreement with the Seattle Pilots. Later in June, the GCL Expos began operating. They had to rely on some players from other organizations to fill the West Palm Beach roster, mostly from the Tigers. As for Vancouver, the Expos really made an effort to make the team Canada's own coast to coast. But Vancouver was at the other end of the country, which made it difficult to operate from an organization standpoint. Furthermore, Vancouver was much closer to Seattle (only a two hour drive) than Montreal. The June 1969 draft helped provide the organization with some depth. Their first first rounder was lefthanded pitcher Balor Moore. Scout Red Murff was really high on him, and in his first year, he just dominated the competition in the minors. But he was badly handled, and rushed too soon in his development. He was released in 1975. As for the rest of that 1969 draft, the Expos drafted a total of 76 players! Three of them reached the majors: Moore, catcher Terry Humphrey, and Tony Scott, who was picked in the 71st round!

LOCATION

In the first several seasons, the Expos really struggled with the location of their farm teams. Only West Palm Beach was a constant. The problem was that the Expos always had the last crack. At the AAA level, they had to wait until 1976 in Denver before they could settle somewhere with any kind of stability. After Vancouver, they wanted to go to Winnipeg, Manitoba, but neither the American Association, nor the International League, wanted anything to do with Winnipeg in their circuit. Winnipeg was added in the Expos chain...but in the newly formed Northern League. So the Expos made Buffalo their main farm team, but very early, it was obvious that it was bound to fail. Buffalo only had an old, decrepit stadium, so badly located that the players weren't even bringing their wives for fear of them being harrassed. In early June, the situation was so bad that the farm team was moved to...Winnipeg! The team's name was changed from the Bisons to the Whips. They even played games at Jarry Park in Montreal as the Winnipeg stadium under-

went changes to make it suitable for a AAA team. As for the Northern League, the Expos moved to Watertown, South Dakota. The team remained in Winnipeg for the 1971 season, but after pressure from the International League, and since the American Association didn't want Winnipeg, the Expos had no choice but moved out of Manitoba. The AAA team was then moved to Hampton Roads, Virginia for the next two seasons and then Memphis for 1974 and 1975. Memphis seemed a good fit, but the Expos had run-ins with local ownership, and when it was announced that Denny McLain (yes, the former pitcher) would become president, John McHale expressed doubts about his qualification for the job. The Expos then moved their farm team to Denver in 1976. They came very close to having to move again when the Oakland A's were slated to go to Colorado in 1977, but Oakland eventually stayed put.

As for the AA affiliate, the Expos shared an affiliation with the Milwaukee Brewers in 1970 in Jacksonville. In 1971, the Expos had their first bona fide farm system with Quebec City as their affiliate in the Eastern league. It was the only year the Expos could boast being a true Canadian team, with their main affiliates in Winnipeg and Quebec City. It looked like a natural, since baseball in Quebec City had always been popular. The Expos basically picked up where the defunct Provincial League had left off. Other organizations also set foot in the Belle Province, especially the Reds in Trois-Rivieres. But the overall interest towards Quebec City subsided when the city got a team, the Nordiques, in the World Hockey Association in 1972. The Expos left Quebec after the 1977 season.

At the lower level, Watertown lasted two difficult seasons. In 1971, the Northern League season ended with amateur umpires, as 3 of the 4 regular ones decided to quit before the campaign was over. In 1972, the same four organizations that had farm teams in the Northern League (Montreal, Houston, Cincinnati and Minnesota) decided to launch the Florida East Coast League, based in Cocoa and Melbourne, under the same model as the GCL. The league lasted only one season, with the Expos affiliate showing one of the worst records in modern pro baseball (9-47). They still fielded the most future major-leaguers in the league though, most notably Gary Carter and Ellis Valentine. In 1971, the Expos started a long-term relationship with Jamestown, in the NY-Penn League, thanks to John McHale who knew of Jamestown from his years

with the Atlanta Braves. That first experiment with Jamestown lasted only three seasons as the Expos wanted to add a long-season team in 1974. They then fielded a team in the Carolina League in Kinston, NC. The team was overmatched as the Expos really underestimated the caliber of play in that league. It lasted only one year. In 1975, the Expos made their way to Lethbridge, Alberta for 2 years before establishing for good in Jamestown in 1977.

PLAYER DEVELOPMENT

Mel Didier was the architect of the farm system from 1969 to 1975. He and the Expos really had a plan they didn't want to divert from. First, they wanted to mold their own players, which meant that they put their focus mostly on high school players. That also meant that college players had two strikes against them when signing with the Expos. Of course, there were exceptions, like Steve Rogers, but he was picked in the college draft, not in the regular June selection. Second, the Expos wanted strong and big athletes. It's not by chance that the nucleus of the late 1970s teams were all from that same mold: Larry Parrish, Gary Carter, Ellis Valentine, Andrew Dawson and Warren Cromartie (the latter was shorter in size but was stockily built). And third, they stacked their farm teams with catchers, believing that they had a better chance in getting something in return at a position that was in demand. After the first year, Terry Humphrey was considered among the best prospects in the organization, but early on, he was under pressure to perform. In 1971, the Expos made Barry Foote their first round pick. In 1972, the Expos picked another catcher, Bobby Goodman, in the first round. Not only that, Gary Carter, the 3rd round selection, was moved behind the plate. Later, Bob Reece and Bobby Ramos would join the organization and Jerry Fry also would move to catching. Foote took over for three years with the Expos (1974-1976) before Carter became the face of the franchise.

Usually, it takes five years for an expansion team to be on par with the other organizations. That's what it took the Expos to reach close to .500 at the major league level. From the player development standpoint, it took a little more than that. There were a couple of reasons for that. One was manager Gene Mauch's tendency to trust veteran players to the detriment of rookies, and thus, to the development of players from within. Also, the Expos had to cope with some discipline problems in Quebec in 1971,

which led the organization to release several players who otherwise could have been moved up in AAA or stayed another season in AA. Yes, seven players from that team made it to the majors, but the impact was still felt in all levels.

Overall, the Expos did a great job in terms of player development. They were the first organization to field coaches at the minor league level. It was a hard sell with John McHale to begin with, who was concerned with the financial considerations. But Mel Didier, still ingrained with that football-like mentality with multiple coaches, convinced him to go ahead with a new concept: the player-coach. One of the first such employees was former major league pitcher Billy Wynne, who pitched with West Palm Beach in 1973 after playing in the majors from 1967 to 1971. Marcel Lachemann, Bob Gebhard, Dave Leonhard and many others followed that path in the Expos system.

But you can see that most of the energy was put into position players. The Expos would have to wait until 1976 before drafting what would become the nucleus of a very good pitching staff of the late 1970s and early 1980s with Bill Gullickson, Scott Sanderson, Charlie Lea, David Palmer, Dan Schatzeder and Bob James, among others.

The Expos failed to provide some depth in the middle infield. Relying on football-type players certainly didn't help, but the Expos struck out on a couple of instances. One player they relied on was Condredge Holloway, the first round pick in 1971. But Holloway elected to go to college to play football and eventually had a seccussfull career in the CFL. In 1975, Art Miles was the Expos' first pick. But in August 1977, he broke his neck while diving. He recovered some of his mobility but never played ball again.

CANADIAN CONNECTION

The Expos made an effort to sign Canadian players in the early years. They had an advantage in that they were not subjected to being drafted. The first Canadian ever signed was Quebecer Gaetan Groleau, who had established all kind of records in the Montreal junior league. He had signed with the Angels the year before but homesickness prevented him from playing one game. Same thing happened in 1969 while in training camp and he never appeared in one game. Several local players signed with Montreal, including two from the same junior team,

Denis McSween and Michel Dostaler. Both did fairly well in the minors, especially McSween, who won the Eastern League ERA crown. But they quit when the Expos didn't let them advance as they expected. Some of them were badly managed. In their first year in the organization, McSween and Dostaler barely pitched and the same situation occurred with other Canadians. When came time to sign, the Expos were active, but once on the field, there were no favorites. Bob Murray was a perfect example of that. A very good athlete from Calgary who could also play hockey at a high level, Murray was let go in the spring of 1972 after a very strong season in West Palm Beach the season before (Murray and another Canadian, Jim Chapman, led the team in OPS in 1971!). On the mound, Bill Atkinson and Larry Landreth were the first Canadians groomed in the system to play with the Expos. From Didier's words, Atkinson was not the kind of player the Expos would normally sign (he was listed at 5'7"), but had a very efficient wicked curve and was not afraid to throw strikes. Landreth was one of the best pitchers in their system in the mid-1970s. In 1976, he allowed only 128 hits in 155 innings with Denver, one of the best ratios ever in that hitting-friendly atmosphere. But Landreth never got the chance to establish himself with the organization.

The Expos stopped signing Canadians in bunches in 1973. Their main catch was, of course, Larry Walker, who ironically was very close to being released early on, but was kept at the urging of Jim Fanning.

GOOD SUCCESS BUT....

Overall, the Expos did things the right way in terms of teaching and developing players. But nobody's perfect and the Expos sure were not. As stated earlier, they had a plan and they obstinately stuck to it, to the detriment of players who should have been given a closer look when performing. Two examples of that were Brent Foshie and Don Koonce, both of whom never reached the majors. Foshie boasted a 3.21 ERA in relief with Winnipeg in 1971 (the team's ERA was close to 6.00), but never got the call in the bigs. Koonce was dominating AAA in relief for Peninsula in 1972, but the Expos never moved him up. Canadians Denis McSween and Bob Murray were two more players who dominated their leagues without rewards.

THE LAST YEARS

The last 10 years of the Expos existence in Montreal, from 1995 to 2004, were pretty much unlike their first 26 seasons. Of course, the team underwent major ownership struggles that culminated with MLB taking over in 2002. Significant cuts were made in the player development department from the moment Charles Bronfman sold to a syndicate in 1990. Yes, they had success from 1992 to 1994, but these teams were built with players developed

BEFORE 1990. And it's not by chance that things began to go awry five years after the team changed hands and the cuts were felt. Like any other business, one just can't neglect ones research and development department (scouting and developing players in baseball parlance) and hope that other organizations won't catch up to you. In short, investing in player development is THE way to keep contending.

Vic Picetti

By Alan Cohen

The *San Francisco Chronicle* reported that on August 2, 1944 at 10:13 AM that Vic Picetti had smashed out his first double in a practice session at the Polo Grounds, and predicted stardom for the youngster from the Rincon Hill section of San Francisco, who had attended Mission High School.

To select its representative to the Esquire's Game, the *San Francisco Chronicle* sponsored an All-Star game featuring 30 of the area's finest players. Picetti, who was about to enter his senior year of high school, had come out on top. Bill Leiser of the Chronicle, who oversaw the balloting of the 14 judges, summed up his feelings about Picetti. "The dumbest judge of baseball talent, merely noting his conduct on the field, his flawless handling of all chances, his presence in the right place at all times, his full game without a sign of a bobble or a wrong play, and his two sound doubles in four trips, would know that as a high school kid, he's a champion."

Vic was not only the West team's first baseman, but also served as a correspondent of sorts for the *San Francisco Chronicle*. He was accompanied on the trip by Leiser of the *Chronicle* (who referred to himself as Picetti's bat boy) and Leiser used his column on August 11 to convey Picetti's thoughts as he was heading home by train after the trip East. Picetti became friendly with several of the players including Virgil Jester, Roger Brown of Minneapolis, Leo Reming of Boston, Herb Pollock from Columbus, Ohio, and Pat Wohlers from Portland, Oregon. "It seemed I had known them for years. They were all fine ball players and fine friends. The best part of the trip was meeting them and going around with them in New York."

And there was one other player with whom the West team players became friendly. Although only 18-years-old, Cal McLish was already in the big leagues pitching with the Dodgers. He had signed with the Dodgers fresh out of high school and since many players were in the military, he went straight to the Dodgers. Two weeks after the Esquire's Game, McLish was in the Army.

Picetti went on to write that he, "almost missed the game on Monday. We were ready to leave the hotel for the Polo Grounds. I had forgotten some of my equipment and hurried back to my room to get it. I told the man in charge of our trip, but probably he didn't hear me. When I got back downstairs, everybody was gone. I started out alone but didn't know how to go in the subway. Instead of going to the Polo Grounds, I was going to Ebbets Field in Brooklyn. I asked people about it and finally got turned around. I had to change trains four or five times, and I just got there before game time."

Within a week, Picetti signed with the Oakland Oaks of the Pacific Coast League and played parts of three seasons of minor league ball. In 1944 and the first part of 1945, he played for his hero, Dolph Camilli, who had been a star first baseman in the National League for 11 years and was the MVP with the Dodgers in 1941. In 1944, with a squad laden with left handed first baseman, on August 22, Vic was given the position and the others were relegated to the outfield or dugout. In 1945, Vic put together a 13 game hitting streak early in the season, and batted .282 for the Oaks. On April 26, readers of *The Sporting News* got a glimpse of Picetti in a feature article. The 17-year-old was still in high school at the time, and war or no war, he was considered the most promising young player on the West Coast. During his hitting streak he batted .407 (22-for 54). Although he slugged 46 extra

-base hits in 1945, only one was a home run. It came, along with three singles, in a May 15 win over Sacramento. That homer would be his only PCL four-bagger. Oakland finished at 90-93 in 1945 and, looking to rebuild, brought in manager Casey Stengel for the 1946 season.

After starting 1946 with Oakland, and playing seven games for new manager Stengel, Picetti was reassigned to the Spokane Indians in the Class-B Western International League. He was still young, and Oakland was looking to move veteran Les Scarella from the outfield to make room for Wally Westlake, who was returning from service during World War II. Scarella (.332) and Westlake (.315) would be the Oaks' leading batters as they finished second with a 111-72 record.

I am the shadow sinister called Fate ... I am the Master Umpire, and I call the plays the way I see them. I have raised my arm, and nine grand boys are out.- Spokane Indians memorial program, 1946

Vic was playing well for Spokane and batting .285 after 57 games. On June 24, the team's bus was traveling from Spokane to Bremerton, WA, and was four miles west of the summit of Snoqualmie Pass Highway in the Cascade Mountains, 50 miles east of Seattle, at about 7:30 PM. A drizzly rain was falling, the driver lost control of the vehicle and it went over the side of a mountain, falling 300 feet on the muddy terrain and bursting into flames. Investigations revealed that the bus driver had swerved to elude an oncoming car that was traveling in the wrong lane. Manager Mel Cole, whose charred ruins were taken from the bus, and eight of his players perished. Six men were dead at the scene, one died en route to the hospital,

and two players perished at area hospitals, George Lyden died 16 hours after the crash, and Chris Hartje died Wednesday evening.

Sixty years after the crash, writer Howie Stalwick recounted the details of the accident.:

The bus began skidding, slamming into the guardrail, demolishing concrete posts holding cables in place. Suddenly, the bus hurtled into hell, flipping again and again and again down the mountain. The men inside were thrown violently against the walls, floor and roof. Some were sent crashing through windows as the bus burst into flames.

An eternity later, there was silence, except for the crackling of flames and the groans of dazed, injured men trying to escape the wreckage. Six players lay motionless; they were dead. Another died en route to the hospital. Another died the following day. Still another died the day after that.

Vic Picetti was carried from the scene to a waiting ambulance, and was declared dead on arrival at King County Hospital. His funeral was held on Saturday, June 29. He was only 18-years-old. Oaks manager Casey Stengel said, "Picetti was a very good player and there is no doubt he had major league possibilities. He hit .300 (his average with Spokane was .306 as late as June 16), had a good pair of legs and was a good runner." Before the 1946 Esquire's Game in Chicago, the crowd stood in silence to honor the young man.

Member Notes

Kevin McCann has published a book about Ken Boyer and includes extensive coverage of his time in the minors. More info at kenboyerbook.com

Cliff Otto has been researching 1907 New Hampshire leagues. He thinks the guides confused the New Hampshire State League with the Southern New Hampshire League. Anyone that can offer help can email Cliff at otoc.bb/etc+sabr@gmail.com

Gary Fink has been compiling stats for the 1939 Interstate League. He's got full names for all but six of the Al-

lentown players, and none of them were listed in The National Association of Professional Baseball League official bulletins. Anyone with access to Allentown newspapers of 1939 that would like to help can contact him at gcfink@charter.net

David Malamut continues to work on building an online Midwest League archive. Ideally, he'd like to create a Retrosheet-like site for the league, but he needs help converting boxescores into the appropriate format. He'd also like to make the site an overall history of the Midwest League. Anyone willing to help can contact him at dmalshere1@gmail.com

Beating the Bushes

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Email the Committee

Do you have a question about minor league baseball, or would like assistance on a project you're working on? You can send an email to the entire membership of the Minor Leagues committee through the SABR website.

To do so, log in to your account at [SABR.org](https://www.sabr.org), then go to the [Members' Home](#). From their, click on your [Profile](#). From the left-hand menu, click on the [Admin Tools](#) from either the Chapters, Committees, or Chartered menu. Then under Administrative Tools, click on the first link, [Send a group email announcement](#). You can then select the Minor League Committee (or any other committee or chapter you belong to) and compose your email. After clicking the send button, it will need to be approved by someone at SABR HQ (unless you're an admin for that committee/chapter).

Another Spring Opening



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