

PRE-1925

A SPORTS ALBUM OF THE PAST



Area was baseball hotbed in early days

The Cleveland Indians push past the Brooklyn Dodgers and win the World Series, five games to two. Headlines announce the probe into the previous World Series — the Black Sox scandal.

Locally, beneath October skies, the fledgling football and basketball seasons watch as the curtain draws on the 1920 baseball scene. Nearly 3000 ardent fans are on hand to watch Dover's America Sweepers defeat Dennison's Panhandle Athletic Club team in the spacious PHAC park.

It is the first of the Sweepers' three-year dynasty as champs in the county. It is a grand time for county and area baseball — local teams play host to baseball aggregations from as far away as Columbus, New Castle and Pittsburgh. It is a time just prior to the formation of the county Class A league.

It is also the apparent apex of many baseball seasons which saw horses, buggies and freight trains carry tough ballplayers from coal mines, farms, pipe and steel factories and rail yards to such illustrious diamonds as the beautiful PHAC park in Dennison, Sunnyside Park in Farris, Riverside Park in Stillwater, Tuscora Park in New Philadelphia and the Tuscarawas County fairgrounds.

MORE THAN A HANDFUL of locals from those early days saw ac-

tion in the major leagues — among them, the great Cy Young and his one-time batterymate, Shoddy Shaw, who were umpires in that 1920 game at PHAC park.

Many, many more were talented enough to play in the big leagues, but professional baseball contracts around the turn of the century were far from comparable to today's big-money deals.

Finances and homesickness held many able diamond stars to the mines, farms and local sandlots instead of the far-away glamour of the big cities. Even Cy Young got homesick during the all-day trip from Newcomerstown to Canton when he tried out for a team there before signing with Cleveland.

Though many of the area's first diamond stars were not immune to homesickness, most were hardened enough to ignore the pain of a spike wound — a chew of tobacco strapped to the leg with a red bandanna and it was back into the game.

"They were tough," John L. Marstrell of Stillwater recalls. He said men would get out of the mills or up from the mines at 4 or 5 in the afternoon "and play a helluva game of baseball."

MARSTRELL, FIRST president of the Tuscarawas County Oldtimers Assn., saw a lot of action in those

early days. "Any town of any size — even Stillwater — had two teams," he said. "A first nine and a second nine."

The town pride that produced those teams contributed to the development of intense rivalries. The Roswell-Wainwright rivalry continued almost to the present. "Friendship ceased when they got on the ballfield," Marstrell said. "It was an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. Then afterwards maybe they'd all get drunk."

Prohibition attempted to halt post-game drinking about the same time Sunday ballgames became legal. Until the end of World War I, players could be — and periodically were — fined for playing ball on the sabbath.

The threat of fines did not keep many of the local boys from the diamonds, however, and weekend games in the area sometimes lured professional ballplayers to Tuscarawas County parks. Such greats as Honus Wagner, Rabbit Maranville, Heinie Groh and Max Carey played under assumed names at the PHAC field.

The Cleveland Indians and Pittsburgh Pirates occasionally played exhibition games in the area. According to one local legend, an owner of the Cleveland team near the turn of the century wanted to fire his

players and hire a bunch of coal miners from Somerdale after the home town squad crushed the Indians.

IN OCTOBER of 1921, the Indians visited Tuscarawas County and took two games from the America Sweepers. The first game, at PHAC park, "proved to be a lively swatfest," according to the Daily Times. Following that 16-9 loss, the Sweepers were silenced 7-0 at Tuscora Park.

Featherweight boxing champ Johnny Kilbane umpired the brief series which saw home runs by Elmer Smith for Cleveland and Jim Edwards for Dover. Orve Rea and Cy Marshall took the mound for the locals while Ray Caldwell and Jack Graney were among the visiting hurlers.

The Sweepers and PHACs were not the only outstanding teams, though. The area was rich in baseball talent. The Heller Brothers team in Newcomerstown, the Dover Sadrons, American Sheet and Tin Plate and the Sherrodsville SBCs were all tough teams.

When the county "A" league was formed in 1924, the eight towns represented were Wainwright, Dover, New Philadelphia, Newcomerstown, Sugar Creek, Stillwater, Midvale and Zoar.

Soph Davis, Dick Beamer Sr., Sam Swaggerty, Jack Kolp, Harry Goette, Lefty Price, Bailey Reese, Harry Ickes, Huck Wilson and Eddie Krocker Sr. were some of the prominent names from the early days of that league.

Marstrell likes to tell about a game during those first years in which a fight broke out after two stuttering ballplayers each thought the other was making fun of him. In another game, he said, the only man willing to umpire didn't really know the rules. With the bases loaded, the batter drew four straight balls. "You're out," the ump supposedly said. "There's no place to put you."

THERE IS A rich baseball tradition in Tuscarawas County. It is impossible to mention all the names who made contributions, but here are a few more of the early stars:

Van Adamson, Tom Qualley, Jack Earsome, Chick Evans, Peg Evans, Fred Kirshnick, Burton Brown, Bill Batch, Tom Geary, Lefty Matthews, Johnny Tobin, Ray Ramsey, and Eddie Collins.

Other local pioneers of the game included Bud Long, Dale Steffey, Ray Muelhoffer, Benny Sullivan, Harry Hill, Jack Singerman, Charlie Simonetti, Jimmy Amicone, Warner Lorenz, Ed Pettay and E.J. Marshall.



CY YOUNG (MIDDLE OF TOP ROW) WAS A MEMBER OF THIS 1896 CLEVELAND INDIANS TEAM

Indians' fans await another 'missionary'

By BRIAN WILLIAMS

John Heckewelder was the first missionary to stand on the banks of the Cuyahoga River at what is now Cleveland.

A second missionary, according to the late Franklin Lewis, former sports editor of the Cleveland Press, appeared 150 years later when Bill Veeck bought the Cleveland Indians in 1946 and turned them into world champions two years later.

Halfway between the coming of the missionaries, the Cleveland Forest City and the Cincinnati Red Stockings clashed in the first professional, inter-city baseball game ever played in Cleveland. The year was 1869. Cleveland got trounced.

Over the next 15 years, several ill-fated baseball aggregations dotted the Cleveland colors and then in 1886 a streetcar operator named Frank Robinson bought the Cleveland franchise. Four years later, he signed a youthful pitcher named Cy Young from Tuscarawas County.

Young wore the blue of the Cleveland Spiders, so named because Robinson thought they looked so "spindly" in their dark suits.

THE TEAM had a few brief years of glory in the 1890s after moving into League Park, but Robinson bought the St. Louis club in 1898 and transferred Young and other stars to his new team. The

Spiders were caught in a tangle.

In 1901 entered Tuscarawas Countyman entered the Cleveland baseball scene. In fact, he saved it. Charley Somers, a Somerdale coal magnate who later operated out of Cleveland, not only financed the team but sent money to the Comiskey for completion of their ballpark in Chicago and to Connie Mack to support his team in Philadelphia.

It is said that Ban Johnson could never have gotten the American League off the ground if not for Charley Somers' help.

The Cleveland team was known as the Blues and the Bronchos before becoming the Naps when Napoleon Lajoie, Elmer Flick and Bill Barnhard, lured to the new league from their National League clubs, came to Cleveland in a cloud of courtroom controversy.

Addie Joss, the sensational pitcher, was another star of the day and Ty Cobb would have joined the Cleveland team, too, if not for his reputation as a troublemaker. For that reason, Nap management turned down a Detroit Tiger offer of Cobb for Flick, even up.

IN 1916, Tris Speaker, a holdout after several successful seasons with the Red Sox, came to the Cleveland team (by this time known as the Indians) where, four years later, he led them to their first world championship as a player-manager.

During that eventful 1920 season, tragedy struck before the pennant was clinched. Popular Indian sloopster Ray Chapman, batting .303 at the time, was hit in the head by a Carl Mays pitch when Cleveland played the Yankees on Aug. 16. He died the next day.

Joe Sewell replaced Chapman and the season went on. Jim Bagby won 31 games. Stan Coveleski won 24 and Ray Caldwell added 20. Catcher Steve O'Neill and outfielder Charlie Jamieson were among seven .300 hitters. In the World Series, Elmer Smith banged the first grand slam in Series history. Bagby became the first pitcher to homer in a series game and Bill Wambegans pulled an unassisted triple play.

The following years saw such stars in League Park as pitchers Mel Harder, George Uhle and Wes Ferrell, first baseman Hal Trosky, catcher Frank Pytlack and outfielder Earl Averill. Then Johnny Allen came along and posted a 15-1 record in 1937, two years before a youngster named Bob Feller had his first 20-game season for the Indians.

SOON AFTER Veeck completed last-minute arrangements to buy the Indians in 1946, attendance record that year by winning 111 out of 154 games.

— excitement to Indians fans: fireworks, promotions of all kinds and, most important, a world championship.

Player-manager Lou Boudreau and his .355 average led Cleveland to the world title in 1948. Ken Keltner, Larry Doby, Dale Mitchell and Joe Gordon provided batting punch and Bob Kennedy boasted an amazing arm in the outfield. Feller, Bob Lemon, Steve Gromek and knuckleballer Gene Bearden headed the mound staff.

The season and the series saw attendance records — many crowds over 80,000 — shattered with astounding regularity.

The lineups changed but the baseball mania continued in Cleveland into the 1950s. Al Lopez piloted the team to a pennant and five second-place finishes in his six years on the Lake Erie shores.

Though the Giants silenced the Indians in the 1954 World Series, Cleveland set a modern day record that year by winning 111 out of 154 games.

Bobby Avila led the league with a .341 batting average and Al Rosen hit .300, but for the most part, averages were comparatively anemic. Pitching was the key for the 1954 Tribe. Bob Lemon and Early Wynn, with 23 wins apiece, paced the American League. Mike Garcia added 19 and Art Houtman 15. The righty-lefty relief combination of Don Mossi and Ray Narleski was superb. Jim Hegan handled all the pitchers.

During the 1950s, Lemon, Wynn and Garcia were frequent two-game winners. Herb Score was destined to join them as a great pitcher until he was hit in the face by a line drive off the bat of Yankee Gil McDougald in 1957.

NEAR THE end of that decade, Frank "Trader" Lane got rid of unknown Roger Maris and Norm Cash — who soon became stars — but the outcry didn't come until the fans' favorite, Rocky Colavito, was traded to Detroit at the beginning of the 1960 season.

Since the early 1960s, the Indians have been involved in an annual rebuilding process. Two strong years, 1965 and 1968, have stood out during that period because of impressive pitching staffs. Sam McDowell, Sonny Siebert, Luis Tiant and relievers Don McMahon and Vicente Romo received guidance from catcher Joe Azcue.

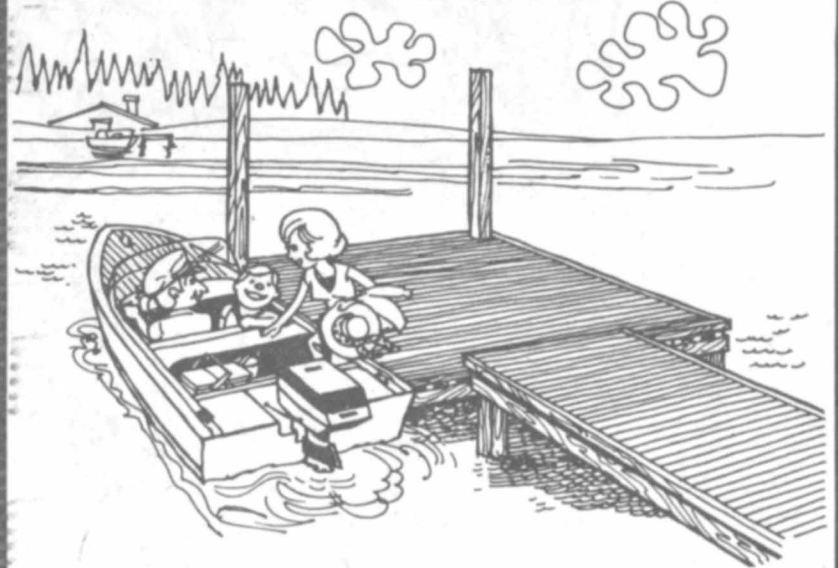
Colavito returned to Cleveland in 1965 to join Leon "Daddy Wags" Wagner and Vic Davillio in the outfield. A few years later, Ray Fosse made himself known by toppling under Pete Rose in the 1970 All-Star game. The 1970s also brought Gaylord Perry to the Indians and then Frank Robinson became their first player-manager since Boudreau.

In the meantime, the roster continues to change and Indians fans continue to cry, "Wait 'til next year!"

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