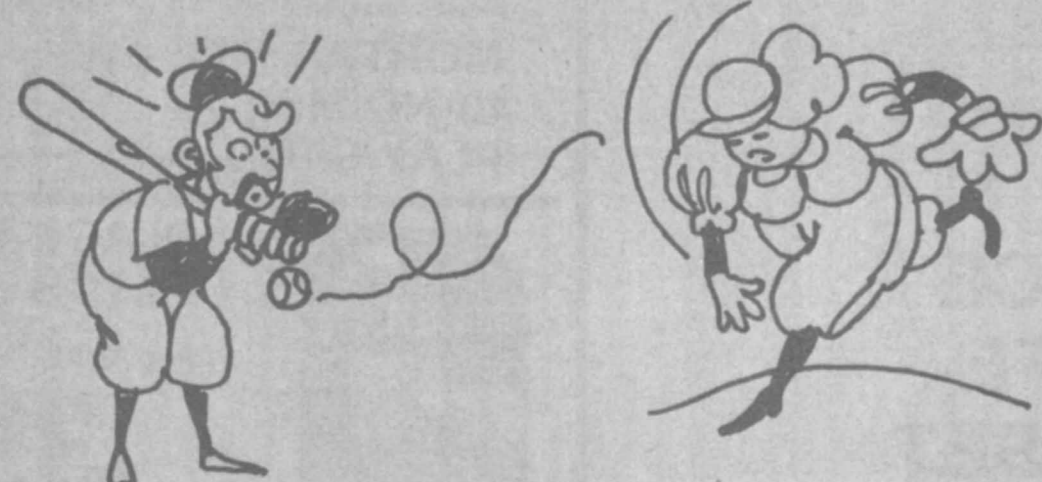


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ALTA WEISS (CENTER) AND HER BASEBALL ALL-STARS

Ahead of her time . . .

By BRIAN WILLIAMS

Jaws dropped and voices rose a few years back when girls were first allowed to compete in Little League baseball. Girls? Playing ball? With boys? "Preposterous!" opponents scoffed.

But the idea of coed baseball was not a new one. It was not common at the turn of the century, but neither was it unheard of.

Alta Weiss mowed down many of her male counterparts, frequently pitching her Ragerville baseball team to victory. In October of 1907, her notoriety began to spread across much of Ohio when Cleveland newspapers marvelled at her abilities.

Dr. George Weiss fostered his daughter's talent after, as the story goes, her abilities were recognized when she threw a corn cob at a cat with considerable accuracy and speed at a young age. As Alta grew older, Dr. Weiss added a heated room to the barn so she could train during the winter months.

BY THE time Alta was 15, her father felt she was ready for competition and he unleashed her on the growing Tuscarawas County baseball world. She more than held her own on the mound and guarded first base when she wasn't pitching.

In 1907, Alta's junior year at Ragerville High, she and her sister traveled to Vermillion near Lake Erie. One morning, while she had nothing else to do, she asked a couple of boys on the beach if she could play catch with them. After convincing them that she could catch, she astounded them with her throwing arm.

Word spread and within a few days Alta was on the mound beating a reputable Vermillion semi-professional team. Newspaper coverage heralded the novelty and she spent part of her summer going back and forth between Ragerville and Vermillion, pitching games in both towns.

The Daily Reporter's Oct. 2 edition of that year said Alta passed through Dover on her way to Cleveland "where she will pitch today in a game in League Park." League Park was the Cleveland Indians' home stadium in those days.

The Cleveland Press, the same day, said, "The girl is a phenomenon — nothing more or less."

The next day, the Reporter carried a Cleveland Plain Dealer account of the game, but did not report the outcome: "She had an inshoot, an outcurve and a 'spitter' that worked well. She fanned five of her opponents and held them to eight hits, two of which should have been easy outs."

ALTA'S FINAL game of the 1907 season was at the Tuscarawas County Fair on Oct. 18. "MISS WEISS PUTS UP GREAT GAME," belted the Daily Reporter headlines the next day.

Her Ragerville team was defeated by Mineral City, 12-1, but Alta pitched just four innings, allowing one hit and striking out five batters. The paper said she was the only real attraction at the fair and that she played before probably the largest crowd ever to see a game in the county.

Far ahead of the women's rights movements of today, Alta Weiss pioneered two fields and must surely have been, as the Cleveland Press said, a phenomenon.

ability to pitch a ball anything like a man were set right with the first ball thrown," said the Reporter. "The first Mineral City man to bat was struck out and Miss Weiss had to her credit the three putouts of the inning."

After graduation from high school, Alta again went to Vermillion, this time with her father, who had purchased the semi-pro team there. Dr. Weiss' flair for showmanship surfaced when he showed the team name to the Weiss All-Stars and outfitted his daughter in a black uniform to contrast with the white suits worn by the rest of the team.

Alta would pitch five or six innings several times each week and then finish the games at first base. She played in three different states besides facing some of the finest clubs in northern Ohio.

Within a few years, however, Alta traded the field of baseball for the field of medicine. Her earnings on the diamond put her through the College of Wooster and the Starling Medical School. She joined her father in medical practice in 1914 in Ragerville, although she still played occasional baseball games in the area.

Alta lost much of her enthusiasm for the medical profession after the 1918 flu epidemic, but practiced for another 20 years in Norwalk, where she and her mother had moved. She died in Ragerville in 1964.



CY YOUNG IN CLASSIC PITCHING POSE
He won record 511 big league games

Cy Young's record may stand forever

Did you know that Cy Young was a holdout his first season in professional baseball?

Yep. He didn't think \$40 per month was enough, so he held out for \$60 after he persuaded his father to let him leave the farm at Gilmore and play ball with the Canton team in the Ohio and Pennsylvania league.

Of course, he didn't last long with that team. After pitching only 36 games for Canton, Young finished the 1890 season with a 9-7 record for the Cleveland Spiders at a salary of \$75 per month.

In 1891, the Spiders moved into the brand-new League Park where Cy Young began to really make his mark. He won 27 games and lost 20 that year, and the next season he was 36-11 and led the National League with a 1.93 earned run average. He went on to win at least 20 games every year until he slipped to 18 in 1905.

AFTER NINE successful campaigns in Cleveland, Young was sent to St. Louis when the Spiders' owner bought the franchise there after the 1898 season.

In 1901, Young started pitching for Boston where, during his first three years, he had three of the best seasons of his career. Winning 33, 32 and 28 games, he lost only 10 in each campaign. In 1903, he pitched in the first World Series game in major league history. He and the Red Sox lost to Pittsburgh, but Boston won the series, five games to three, after Young pitched two later victories.

On May 5, 1904, Cy Young pitched a perfect game for Boston, one of three no-hitters during his 22-year career.

Though Cy Young is certainly the most illustrious ballplayer ever to come off local diamonds, he was not the first area man to make the major leagues.

Albert Mays of Dover was probably the first. He spent six years in the old American Association, compiling a lifetime pitching record of 53-90. His best season was with New York in 1887 when he won 17 games. Unfortunately, he lost 34 that year.

In 1888, Mordcai Davidson of Port Washington managed the Louisville aggregation in the AA to a 37-55 seventh-place finish and became the first local man to be a major league manager. (Young was the second, piloting the Red Sox briefly in 1907.)

FRANK LaPORTE of Uhrichsville batted .281 during an 11-year career, mostly as an infielder for the New York Yankees. Three times he batted over .300. In 1911, with the St. Louis Browns, LaPorte swatted 37 doubles and 12 triples. He finished his career as a second baseman in the maverick Federal League where he drove in 107 runs for Indianapolis in 1914 and retired after the 1915 campaign at Newark.

Four former major leaguers who were not born in the area but played ball in Tuscarawas County were Alfred "Shoddy" Shaw, Cy Marshall, Cy Swain and Eddie Onslow, who now lives in Scio. Shaw was Cy Young's catcher in Boston in 1901. Marshall played one year for the Buffalo Federals under Manager Harry Schlafly of Beach City in 1915 before becoming active on county diamonds beginning in 1920.

Schlafly was a player for four seasons, beginning in 1902, and was a player-manager for Buffalo in 1914, when he led that team to an 80-71, fourth-place finish. He was ousted after 43 games in 1915.

"Schlafly's knowledge of baseball has never been questioned," said the Daily Reporter on June 4 that year. "He is the driving type of manager and has had difficulty with his team."

Other area men said to have reached the majors, though records are sketchy, are Peg Moore and Gene Moore, the father of Uhrichsville's Whitey Moore, a pitcher who played in the World Series for Cincinnati in 1939 and 1940.



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