



Manchester: Past Places, People



'GOOD OLD DAYS'

Old timers in Manchester still like to recall the "good old days" in baseball when the series between Manchester and Rockville town teams caused a general shutdown of business affairs in each community in the early 1920s.

With major league baseball outlawed in Boston on Sundays, numerous big league players picked up some loose money on the Sabbath by playing with "local" teams, many winding up in Rockville or Manchester uniforms.

When Manchester and Rockville teams met, the rivalry was always intense.

Lou Breckenridge was the playing manager of the Silk Town entry which provided most of the fireworks.

Three members of Connie Mack's famous "\$100,000 Infield" played here, first baseman Stuffy McInnis and shortstop Jack Barry with Manchester, and second baseman Eddie Collins with Rockville. Danny Murphy, the fifth infielder with Mack's great Philadelphia Athletic teams of that era, was also a wearer of Manchester colors.

The greatest name pitcher to ever work for either side was the immortal Christy Mathewson with Rockville. It was strictly a big money game, staged in Rockville, and the great New York Giant right-hander was up for the occasion and completely stifled the Manchester batters.

Jimmy O'Rourke, leading off for Manchester tripled to left-field in the first inning against the important star. Manchester fans went wild but their joy was short lived. Matty bore down, retired the side and didn't permit another hit all afternoon.

Batting Hero

It was Mathewson, too, who was the batting hero. Coming up in the bottom of the ninth inning with a runner on base, Mathewson lashed out a base hit which drove in the game's only run.

Manchesterites like to recall the feats of Chubby Joe Casey, a great catcher. One afternoon, he threw out seven base runners attempted to steal, no mean feat. Casey later went up to the American League with the Detroit Tigers.

Barry and Collins played here while attending Holy Cross and Columbia respectively. Both played under assumed names to protect their eligibility. By playing weekends in "mill towns", like Rockville and Manchester, the pair was able to pick up some money to help further their education. Barry, after his major league career, coached at Holy Cross for better than 30 years. He played third base in Manchester.

No longer a ball park in Manchester now was the Flower St. diamond, completely enclosed. Bleachers and a grandstand helped make up the spacious park which could accommodate crowds of 5,000 and more, and few were non-payees.

It was while playing with Rockville that Bill Lush recommended him to Connie Mack.

McInnis played but one game for Manchester. He was imported with Joe Casey for a weekend series. Following the Saturday game, a major fire broke out in town that night. Two men were badly burned, one died and McInnis, having witnessed the blaze, took sick and vanished from the scene, never to return.

Hall of Famers

Other Hall of Famers, besides



Pride of the North End before World War I was the Trumps. Home games were played at Hickey's Grove with the chief rival the South End Athletics. Squad members above, back row, Hap Hapenny,

Ed Wilson, Manager Bill McGonigal, Roy Griswold. Middle row, Bill Brainard, Ed Titus, Breck Wilson, Herman Schendel, Sam Massey. Front row, Whack Coleman, Joe Glode.

Mathewson and Collins, who played here or against Manchester diamond teams in the golden era included George Sisler and Big Ed Walsh. Manchester's Herman Bronkie, the first native to reach the major leagues, Hughie Duffy, Hank Gowdy, Owen Carroll, Johnny Cooney, Chief Meyers (Mathewson's battery-mate with the Giants), Chet Nichols, King Bader, Jigger Stutz, Doc Gautreau and Sam Hyman.

During Breckenridge's managing days, a major battle was upcoming with Rockville, managed by Bill Lush, former St. Louis Cardinal star. Manchester brought in Bill Holland, a Negro pitcher of the famed Brooklyn Colored Giants, as insurance in the event of an emergency. After five innings of play and with Rockville leading, 1-0, Holland was inserted into the game. He had earlier defeated both Manchester and Rockville for the Colored Giants.

Rockville refused to play once they saw Holland unbutton his jacket. Prior to the game, Rockville had threatened to call its team off the field if Holland played. Feelings were running high in the stands and several fights broke out.

When Holland stayed on the mound, Manager Lush ordered the bats picked up and the team assembled around their leader. Play was halted. Rockville wanted its guarantee and Manchester refused to post it under the circumstances.

Fresh fruit and sticks and stones pelted down on the players of both sides from irate fans.

After hot and heavy arguments for nearly an hour, Rockville agreed to play and went on to win the game.

This marked the start of the split-up and the end of the in-

tense rivalry between the neighboring towns.

Used Assumed Name

Brought in from the New York Yankees to play centerfield on Sundays was Bert Daniels, who was known locally as Bert Whistle, and Charles Messenger of the Chicago White Sox played rightfield.

Another memorable game recalled pitted Manchester against Willimantic. The Thread City squad was second only to Rockville as Manchester's bitter enemy.

Willimantic loaded its lineup with professional ringers. The starting battery consisted of Johnny Cooney, who starred both as a pitcher and outfielder in the National League, and Hank Gowdy, the No. 1 catcher with the Boston Braves.

The locals imported Jack Scott, also of the Braves, to pitch.

A special train of seven coaches was hired to transport fans from one community to the other. More than 5,000 paid their way inside the gates.

Scott pitched a one-hitter, that by Gowdy, won going away in an argument-infested game. Scott was paid \$50 for his services to show and \$100 if he won. He had a habit of taking his guarantee before the game and then going into the crowd to bet on himself.

Managing the local team was Tom Chambers, and he beat the bushes, bringing in only the top teams plus the available pros on Sundays when their clubs were due in Boston.

The year George Sisler of the

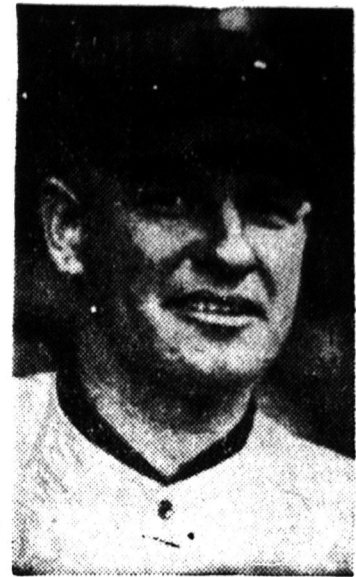
St. Louis Browns batted over .400 and won the American League's most valuable player award, he came to Manchester one afternoon with the Hartford Poli's.

Mt. Nebo was the site for Sisler's appearance and before the game he put on an exhibition of hitting to all fields. Later in the season he joined the Manchester club for one game.

The most successful Manchester pitcher was Sam Hyman, a southpaw from Hartford, who reeled off 16 straight games and won a promotion to the Detroit Tigers.

Local Talent

Home towners added much to the attack. Some of the home grown talent that held its own included little Sammy Massey, big Jerry Fay, Boggy Muldoon,



Herman Bronkie

Joe Madden, Art Johnson, Breck Wilson, Eddie Munson, Bill Dwyer, Bronkie, Fred Warnock, Pop Edgar, Bill Schiedge, Tommy Sipples, and numerous others.

Perhaps the two best teams in later years were the North End Shamrocks in the late 20s and then the Bluefields of the 30s.

There will never be a Twilight Baseball League the caliber of the circuit that operated successfully for many years at the West Side Oval, especially at the close of World War II.

Those are only memories now, as were the "good old days" in the 20s.

Note: The "Manchester Past, Places and People" has been prepared by the Manchester Historical Society, under the direction of its Public Information Committee. This article was written by Earl W. Yost, Herald sports editor.