

Barker House Notes: Albemarle League Baseball Players Recalled



BASEBALL—(from l. to r.) Jim Partin, Frank Suttentfield, Carlyle Webb and Fred Fearing were all members of teams which played in the Albemarle League in the 1920s and 30s.

by
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A new dimension had been added to ball parks by the time the Albemarle League reactivated in June 1946—lights.

"Hertford was the first team to use lights," Fred Fearing told me. "And you know something, it was the toughest ball park I ever played in. They had the lowest lights in the league. I think, instead of being 80 foot poles, they were 60 foot, and they were too close together behind the centerfield. They'd come together on you. Sometimes, and I've had it to happen, the ball would be hit; and you'd know about where it was going—as I say, instinct—but you never saw it. You'd hear it hit the ground with a thud-d, but sometimes it never got out of the lights."

Frank Suttentfield didn't appear too dismayed that he never played "a single game under lights."

"Well, Coach," Fred replied, "it would have been a great experience if you had, especially if you'd started in Hertford."

"Speaking of ball parks," Jim Partin lamented, "I won't ever forget the one in Windsor. There was a ditch all the way across left field. You didn't always manage to dodge it."

Carlyle Webb laughed. "Talking about Windsor reminds me of something happened not more'n a year ago. I saw this fellow from Hertford. Told me he was up at Luke McQuire Hospital, and his doctor asked him where he was from. Fellow said 'When I told him Hertford, the Doc wanted to know if I knew the Webb boys from Edenton and their brother-in-law Suttentfield. Doc said he used to pitch for Windsor the same time you all played for Edenton'. That doctor was Jack Jarrett. He's a surgeon at Luke McQuire Hospital."

"Old Jack Jarrett," Fred repeated the name and continued the conversation. "Yes sir. Well, getting back to the lights, all the ball parks soon got them. It was right after World War II that '46 league started. The boys were coming home, and everybody was just hungry for baseball."

Fred was right. People were starved for baseball. With rationing and frugality of the war years behind them, and new cars on the market, folks were ready to travel again if only to a neighboring town to attend a ball game.

"The parks were full every night," Jim said. "You had to get out there before sunset, you wanted to get a seat. The games started at eight o'clock; you had to get out there by six o'clock to get in and get a seat. There wouldn't be a seat left anywhere."

Jim spoke the truth, for fans were ensconced nightly in every available space. I remembered, though, how one well-to-do fan punctually appeared after suspension of admission at the top of the 7th and always managed to find a seat. (Likewise, Mr. John Doe punctually arrived at church, too, after the collection plate was passed.) Strange, I hadn't thought of the gentleman in years. In fact, listening to the recollections of these former ball players, numerous names and events began to vie for prominence in conscious contemplation.

I will never forget the time a rival team's star pitcher's wife put a huge wad of bubble gum on the bleacher where I'd be sure to sit on it. My mother said surely it was an accident. Of course it wasn't! I can still see that wife's smug smile when I flattened her masticated token of self-satisfaction.

Edenton," Jim added, "and Gashouse Parker."

Fred didn't want to leave out Vinnie De Lorenzo, Russ Batchelor, Joe Nowell, or the Castelllos.

"What about Leroy Sires, catcher; Brantley Aycock, catcher; Bill Bergeron, shortstop; handsome Fred Folger, outfield; Moe Bauer, pitcher; Max Eller, Pitcher; and the fastest centerfield alive, Archie Brigman," I inquired, surprising the men and dating myself.

"Goodness!" Frank exclaimed. "She does know something about Albemarle League Baseball."

There was something the men didn't know. The summers of 1946, 1947, and 1948 had been the happiest of a young girl's life. Her mornings were spent with female peers, fishing and taking turns rowing a little boat around the Perquimans River. After lunch, a bath, and "dressing up", the girls congregated in local drugstore, a hangout for the college-hired ball players. Too young to evoke more than a casual nod from the fellows the young ladies, nonetheless, would secure a booth, order cokes which lasted ages if sipped slowly, and proceed to act in an expected adolescent manner. Unless a rain-out was called, evenings were reserved for attending the game.

Greek gods commanded no more adulation than did these

summer heroes. Indeed, barbers were begged for a lock of Archie Brigman's blond tress. More than just pubescent imitation, however, was the atmosphere of excitement permeating an entire community as friends and family members shared a common interest.

An illness in childhood left my father with a weak heart, prohibiting his participation in athletics, but oh, how he loved the ball games. The two of us usually re-played each game before bedtime or during breakfast the next morning. Although we sat separately at the games, each with our own peers, we exchanged frequent, private signals: Right hand raised "I told you Young would get a hit"; left hand raised "Watch Mugsy steal second"; a nod toward the gate "Mr. John Doe has arrived". Without fail, I could spot my father in the crowd by the straw, flat-top, cracker box hat he wore in the summertime.

On January 8, 1949, at forty years of age, Daddy's weakened heart beat for the last time. I experienced no excitement, nor anticipation, when the season began that June. Somewhere, between the age of fourteen and fifteen years, the bridge of carefree, giggling girliness had been crossed to unexpected, premature responsibility. Furthermore, my gods stepped down from their

lofty pinnacles and became quite, comfortingly human as they expressed belated condolences and offered mature conversation. With butterflies stilled and pulse rate normal, I accepted same, infinitely appreciative for the respect these "summer heroes" accorded my father.

What the league of the 1920s and '30s had meant to Frank, Carlyle, Jim, and Fred, the one in the '40s had meant to me. Love baseball? Of course! It was unquestionably more than a summer pastime.

License Plates To Change

RALEIGH—North Carolina vehicle license plates are undergoing a change, officials in the Division of Motor Vehicles (DMV) in the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) have announced.

The plates will now have three letters and four numerals as opposed to the previous configuration of three letters and three numerals.

katner, it was a medium that created a loving, sharing social history, which left fans and players richer for having been participants.

Jim sighed. "Yeah, people started going to the beaches and all. Then television came along, and that just killed league baseball. Just killed it."

Are you sure, Jim? Who knows? Perhaps a new generation is hungering for renewal of a game which promises memories lasting a lifetime.

"To be great is to be misunderstood." Emerson

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