
Honoring and Preserving the Sports History of Chautauqua County



Chautauqua Sports Hall of Fame

15 West Third Street - Jamestown, NY 14701

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Baseball Tales from the 1880s



When sports fans hear the name Amos Alonzo Stagg (1862-1965, photo), they usually recall that he was a legendary football coach and innovator at Springfield College (1890–1891), the University of Chicago (1892–1932), the College of the Pacific (1933–1946), and Susquehanna University (1947-1952). He was known as “The Grand Old man of Football.”

However, former Post-Journal sportswriter Scrubby Olson, a 2015 inductee of the Chautauqua Sports Hall of Fame, noted that before he became an icon in the sport of football, Stagg was a pretty decent baseball player. In a July 8, 1964 article, Olson recounted a tale about a visit Stagg made to Chautauqua Institution and his encounter with a local ballplayer by the name of Emmett Flanders.

***Flanders Was The Man...
He Caught Stagg's Buzz-Balls Barehanded***

In a recent Post-Journal sports feature on baseball at Chautauqua Institution, it

was mentioned that a catcher for Amos Alonzo Stagg reportedly caught barehanded
The story said "details were lacking" in regards to the catcher's name and whether he did catch Stagg minus a glove.

A few days after the story appeared a letter arrived from an Ashville resident who related that the late Emmett Flanders from the Chautauqua area was Stagg's catcher back in 1889.



The athletic trails of Stagg and Flanders crossed five years later when Stagg, vacationed at Chautauqua, accompanied by a group of Yale students (photo). Stagg had been a great pitcher at Yale where he was instrumental in the school winning five national baseball championships.

The Yale boys decided to form a team at Chautauqua and Stagg, naturally was handed the

pitching assignment. Stagg, however, could not get a catcher to handle him.

Historian Floyd L. Darrow's book, "History of the Town of North Harmony," tells of how Stagg and Flanders became battery mates.

"Eventually, the team organizers heard of Flanders and Stagg himself visited the Cheney's Point man in the hayfield where he was working. Flanders, was urged to report the next day for a tryout and agreed. About a thousand people were on hand to see what would happen. One of the Mayville players, who knew Flanders, called him aside and urged him to forget it. "Seven have tried already and no one can hold this fella," he revealed.

Regarding the actual tryout, Darrow's book said: "Accordingly, they got in position and Stagg said how he would throw a few balls and see what Flanders would do. A dozen or so balls were thrown which Flanders caught easily.

"Then Stagg said: 'I'll really throw a few.' He doubled up and shot one through, his speed unbelievable. When Flanders had caught five or six of these balls, Stagg came running down and said: 'Don't they hurt, boy?' Flanders said, 'No, they don't.' Stagg looked at Flanders' hands to see if they were smashed and, lo and behold, they were not.

Stagg then said, 'I guess you'll do, all right.'"

John F. Jones, in a July 19, 1949 *Post-Journal* story, told another baseball story that involved Emmett Flanders, this one from five years before Stagg and Flanders met at Chautauqua Institution.

"Besides Winfield S. Carnahan, there were two outstanding pitchers in the local field who could throw a wicked ball to catch and strike in those early games. They were Ed Ross of Ross Mills, who was a left-hand pitcher, playing mostly with the Falconer team, and Tom Chambers of Jamestown, father of George Chambers, present proprietor of the Town Club at 210 Pine Street, who used his right hand and arm in the service of the Jamestown Club.

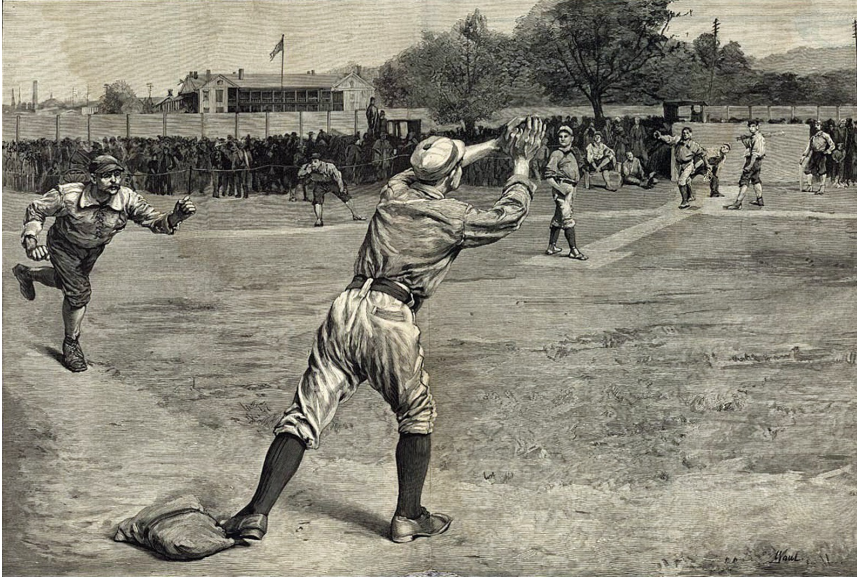
"Both were strong, active and aggressive players. It was a question as to which could out-throw the other. Both were inclined to be 'wild' at times, often sending the ball over everyone's head into the grandstand (when they played before one), instead of over home plate. In those days the catcher had no mask, chest-protector or shin guard and no heavy catching mitt, only a light glove that did not prevent many a broken finger from catching the swiftly-thrown ball.



"Several catchers tried to hold Chambers' throwing, but none stayed with him more than a game or two except Gus Jones, who delighted in grabbing his wildest throws in every direction and suffered only one broken finger from a foul strike. They played many a game in a field on the south side -- the Hall property east of Forest Avenue and south of Newland Avenue -- before any homes were built up there.

"In those days there had been a good deal of rivalry between the Jamestown and Panama ball teams, and Jamestown decided to trim the daylights out of Panama, besides making some money for its supporters. So they sent to Buffalo and engaged a pitcher and catcher, also the champion batter or ball hitter in America at that time, a man named Beerbaugh, who played second base and was sure of winning the game dead easy.

"The manager of the Panama team heard of this move only a few hours before it was time to call 'Play Ball', and while the Panama club had a good pitcher named Frank Lewis, he decided only Ed Ross could do the job that day, with Emmett Flanders, the regular catcher, behind the bat. Ed was finally located at his home in Ross Mills, but he was lame and tired from having pitched three games earlier the same week, and did not relish taking on more work for a while. But, whatever the persuasion, Ed went hastily



and met the manager at Marvin Park, where the game was to be played.

(Editor's Note: Marvin Park was located where present day Chadakoin Park is, between Washington Street and the outlet, in Jamestown.)

"Marvin Park was opened to the public in early September of 1884, and this was shortly afterward. They had no grandstand erected or seats placed in the park at that time and everybody had to stand to watch the ball game.

"Ross was dressed in a white shirt and tight cream-colored pants, in the height of fashion for a young man, and with no time or place to change into a uniform, he stepped into the pitcher's box dressed as he came over.

"The Jamestown crowd, having been tipped off about the important new men that were added, were betting their limit on the home team, but the Falconer crowd which knew Ed's playing were there to back him. But as Jamestown man after man was struck out, Ross was showered and pelted with black muck, beer bottles and other missives to weaken his control. One bottle struck him in the forehead, but he took it all standing and Mr. Flanders, with two fingers broken and in a plaster cast, did not permit a single ball to pass him, and often, in spite of his injury, he threw the ball straight as an arrow to second base -- real team work.

"For seven innings, Ed kept throwing them over the home plate to Emmett Flanders' outstretched hands behind the batter, and not a single run was scored by Jamestown. Then, Ed asked to be relieved -- he was a sight to behold from the stuff that had been thrown at him. Frank Lewis, the regular pitcher, took over the last two innings and Jamestown secured three runs. The game ended 7 to 3 in favor of the Panama "hayseeds" as they had been called during the game.

"An eye-witness, a ball player himself, has stated that 'it was the toughest and hardest fought ball game ever played in Jamestown.'"

"Several thousand dollars changed hands on the result--a lot of money for those days--and many 'sports' were broke.