



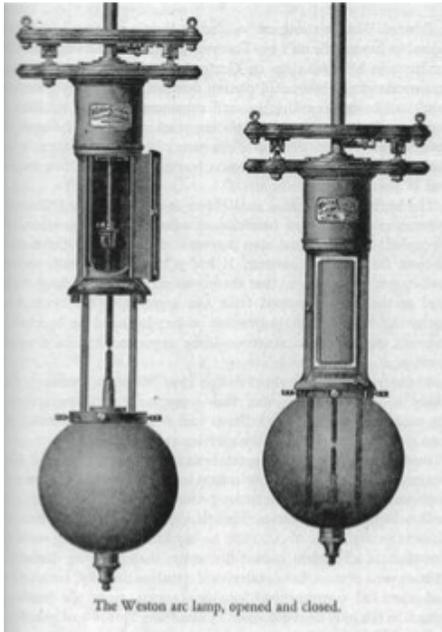
Chautauqua Sports Hall of Fame

15 West Third Street - Jamestown, NY 14701

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Under the Lights: A Brief History of Night Baseball *Night Game Played at Celoron Park in 1902*

Who among us has not watched a baseball game at night? Whether it is major league, college, high school or even youth league games, nighttime and baseball is as common to us as peanut butter and jelly. But it wasn't always the case.



The Weston arc lamp, opened and closed.

The first ever game of baseball played at night was contested on September 2, 1880, just one year after Thomas Edison invented the incandescent lamp. Teams representing two of Boston's prominent department stores, Jordan Marsh & Co. and R. H. White & Co., played under lights on the lawn at the rear of Nantasket Beach's Sea Foam House in Hull, Mass.

The game itself was not the main attraction. The event was held to showcase an elaborate lighting display staged by the Northern Electric Light Company of Boston to demonstrate the feasibility of illuminating large areas.

Three wooden towers were erected holding 12 electric lamps with a combined strength of 30,000 candlepower. Two engines with three generators, one for each tower, powered the array. The *Boston Post* reported, "A clear, pure, bright light was produced, very strong and pleasant to the sight." Jordan Marsh and R. H. White played to a 16-16 tie in the history-making contest witnessed by 300 spectators.

One would think that night baseball became an instant success and that professional leagues would embrace the possibilities with much interest and enthusiasm. Such was not the case.

Although other exhibitions of night baseball were played following the Hull debut, it took another 50 years before the first official organized professional baseball game was played after dark. That game occurred in Independence, KS on April 28, 1930 in the Class C Western Association. The Giant Manufacturing Company of Council Bluffs, Iowa erected 6 permanent steel towers that stood 60 feet tall. The Muskogee Chiefs defeated the hometown Independence Producers 13-3.



Night baseball then spread like wildfire. By the end of 1930, 38 minor league teams would be playing night games on their home fields and game attendance exploded. Also that year the famed black ball team, the Kansas City Monarchs used a portable lighting system mounted on trucks to play at least 42 night ball games. By 1934, 15 of the 19 minor leagues had one or more parks equipped with lights.

The first night in major league history was played at Cincinnati's Crosley Field on May 24, 1935. President Franklin D. Roosevelt, seated at the White House, pushed a button and over a million watts of electric power from 632 lamps turned night into day. The hometown Reds defeated the visiting Philadelphia Phillies 2-1 in the National League.

The last major league team to install lights at their stadium was the Chicago Cubs, who finally played a night game at home on August 9, 1988, more than 100 years after the first baseball lighting experiment in Hull, Mass.

Under the Lights at Celoron Park

As mentioned previously in this article, other exhibitions of night baseball were played in the 50 year period between the Hull debut in 1880 and the first official organized professional baseball night game at Independence in 1930. One such exhibition was played at Celoron Park in Chautauqua County in 1902. A preview of the contest was printed in the *Jamestown Evening Journal, Saturday, June 14, 1902*:

A game of baseball in the evening between Jamestown and Ashtabula will be the attraction at Celoron Monday evening at 8:30.

While many will wonder how the baseball diamond can be made light enough in the evening for a good fast game the fact that the thing has been done, and done successfully in other places, is sufficient guarantee that it can be done here.

Alfred W. Lawson of Scranton, a player and manager of 15 years' experience with the Boston, Pittsburg, Atlanta, Detroit and Albany teams, is in the city today making preparations for the installation of the plant, which consists of a high speed Shepherd engine, boiler and an Onondaga dynamo directly connected with the engine, all on a truck similar to a huge fire engine. Eighteen arc lamps, having a total of 3,600 candlepower, will be attached to 20 foot poles placed in stakes so arranged about the field that they are entirely out of the way of the players.

At Scranton, Philadelphia, Chester, York, Harrisburg, Trenton, Hartford, Syracuse, Binghamton and other places the innovation made a decided hit. Mr. Lawson says that the ball may be distinctly seen at all stages of the game.

A careful reader of the *Evening-Journal* preview will note that the 3,600 candlepower of the Celoron lighting equipment is considerably less than the 30,000 candlepower of the Hull lighting equipment thirty-two years earlier. So how did the Celoron exhibition fare? An article from *Jamestown Evening Journal, Tuesday, June 17, 1902* tells the story:

BASEBALL BY ELECTRIC LIGHT

Not Strictly Professional Playing but an Interesting Exhibition Monday Evening

For the past week or ten days Jamestown baseball fans have been talking about the game to be played by electric light at Celoron Park between the local team and Ashtabula. Monday evening a crowd of 700 assembled with more or less doubt as to what kind of game could be played at an hour long after an ordinary game would be called on account of darkness. Upon entering the field the first thing to attract attention was a large engine resembling a steamer used for fire purposes. This supplied power for 20 arc lights which were arranged about the infield. When the game was called about 8:45 the players took their regular positions except the outfielders who remained close behind the bases.

A ball, such as is used for indoor baseball, was thrown onto the diamond and the fun began. The first batsman made one or two ineffectual efforts to land on the white object and then met it with a terrific swing. Instead of sailing out of sight, the ball landed only a few feet in front of the plate, where it was easily fielded by the pitcher.

As a rule the ball was merely passed to the batsman who had little difficulty in hitting it and reaching a base. From there on the trip around the bases was easy as the catcher did not care to chance a lost ball in the darkness back of second base.

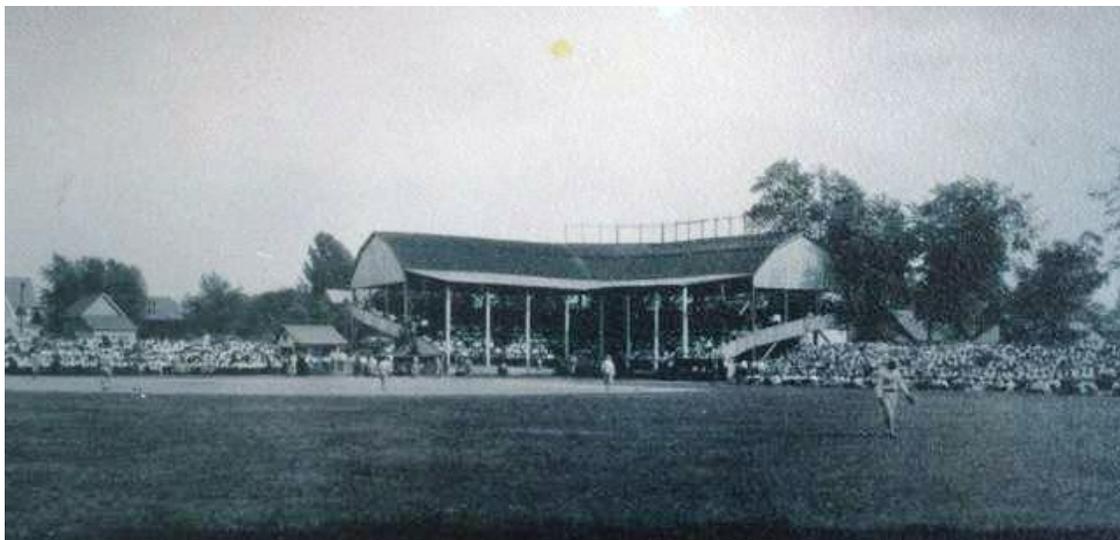
Of the two teams Jamestown played by far the better game. While the local players made the circuit 11 times, Ashtabula could not net a man across the plate, although it had three men on bases several times.

On account of the chilly breeze which invaded the grandstand, the crowd showed no sign of displeasure when the last man had been retired in the last inning. Taking everything into consideration, the game was well worth witnessing.

The Jamestown and Ashtabula teams will play a game by electric light at Warren this evening.

Although one could argue that what was presented that night at Celoron was not baseball in its purest form, the fact that it was the first local attempt at playing the national pastime under lights makes this a significant event in the sports history of Chautauqua County.

Special thanks CSHOF inductee Greg Peterson for the research documents used in preparing this article.



Celoron Park