



Chautauqua Sports Hall of Fame

15 West Third Street - Jamestown, NY 14701

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WHO IS JACK HARPER?

Last month's CSHOF newsletter featured an introduction to former major-league baseball pitcher Jack Harper who was inducted posthumously into the Chautauqua Sports Hall of Fame in 2019. Harper, who had died in 1950, had no direct descendants, any distant relatives were unknown and thus was unrepresented at the induction ceremony. Although there can be no argument that his induction was not warranted, he is arguably one of our least known enshrinees. This newsletter continues to shine the spotlight on Jack Harper with a reprint of an interview and subsequent article by legendary *Jamestown Post-Journal* sports editor Frank Hyde from December 30, 1946.



Bobby Wallace, Not Wagner, Greatest Shortstop, Says Harper;

Tells of 1 to 1 Duel With McGinnity

The spring of 1906 found Jack Harper reporting to the Cubs only to run afoul of the cruel prank of fate that robbed him of his only chance to participate in a World Series and was a big instrument in closing out his baseball career.

A player hit back through the box during spring training, the ball tearing off part of his right thumbnail. Several days later the Cubs went to a nearby town to play an exhibition and started Big Ed Reulbach, whom Harper had tutored when the giant fire-baller was a rookie. Big Ed, who won the National League pitching crown that year and also in 1907 and 1908 didn't have his stuff that day and the bushers quickly drove him to the showers. Harper went in to finish and his efforts were not exactly beneficial to the injured member.

Several days later the Cubs opened in New York, starting the campaign which was to see the “Peerless Leader,” Frank Chance, guide the Bruins to the National League pennant. Harper was nominated as the starting hurler. Dan McGann, the third man up and an old teammate from Harper’s St. Louis Card days, drove a line drive back through the box that caught the sore thumb and literally smashed the end off, leaving the bone exposed on top. The days dragged into weeks before the lean right-hander could return to the mound.

Cubs Win Pennant

“And on my first day out, a cold damp day, something let loose in the ‘old boy’ right here,” and Harper held up his long right flipper to designate a spot near the elbow. “It got so sore I couldn’t lift a cup of coffee. Guess they call it a chipped bone in the elbow. Chipped bone operations were unheard of then, so I was on the way out.”

The Cubs rushed to the National League pennant by 20 games with the immortal “Tinker to Evers to Chance” double play combination clicking like a machine; a pitching corps composed of Miner Brown, Reulbach, Jack Pfeister and Orvie Overall caught by the matchless Kling and with sluggers like Harry Steinfeldt and Manager Chance.



That one was the only all-Chicago series in history and through it all Harper grumbled and nursed his broken thumb as he watched from the bench.

The White Sox, managed by Fielder Jones and called “The Hitless Wonders” copped the playoff in six games for one of the better known World Series upsets – an upset in which Nick Altrock, later famous as the “King of Baseball Clowns,” played an important part for he was a 20-13 winner for the Chisox that year.

Quits Baseball

“The next year they cut my salary,” Harper continued, “so I told my wife, ‘Mary, I’m going to take a trip and forget baseball for a while. Guess I’ll go out to Jamestown.’”

“That was in 1908. We liked it here so I bought the Oak Café, now Old Hickory Inn, and operated it until prohibition came. My arm improved until I felt I could return to baseball, but somehow the old fire was lacking and besides we liked the quiet and peace of Western New York.

“Later the Berry Brothers, Charlie and Jim, offered me a job with the Quaker State Oil Company. I was on the road with this firm for two years, eventually quitting to buy out the Rapid Transit Delivery Service, which I operated until 1937.”

Harper's next business venture was the purchase of the old Murray Grill, which he renamed Harper's Grill and operated until Sept. 30, 1945, when he retired to the present home on Hall Avenue.

Although he likes to talk baseball, the baseball he knew, Harper has none of the contempt for today's players demonstrated by so many old timers.

"I've never seen Feller, but I did see Ted Williams. That boy is a ball player. He'd hold his own with the best we had in the old days... Who was the greatest pitcher I ever saw?,, Well, I'd have to go along with Christy Mathewson. My second greatest choice, if he behaved himself, would be Jack Powell, my St. Louis team mate.

Wagner Not Greatest

I saw Honus Wagner in his prime. He wasn't the greatest shortstop in my opinion. Bobby Wallace was."

We sat bolt upright. To hear someone sit and calmly state Wagner was not the daddy of shortstops took our breath away.

"Of course, I never saw Marty Marion and some of the modern shortstops," he continued, "but Wallace was the most terrific piece of ball player to ever roam a major league infield, I am sure. I'm speaking of Wallace strictly as a shortstop, not as a hitter. He played with Cincinnati in the early years.



"Pitchers are just as good on an average now as they were then, I guess, except for the slow ball. Very few modern hurlers know how to throw it with control. Clark Griffith, now owner of the Washington Senators, taught me how. He came along one day in Montgomery when he was with Pop Anson's Cubs. "You look pretty good,' he said, 'but you ought to learn the best way to throw the slow ball.' Then he showed me the grip, the trick of lifting the forefinger just as you turned loose of the ball. It came down at you, like a squash with all the seams showing but just try to knock it over the infield. I worked on it two years before I got it down pat, control and all.

McGinnity Clash

"My toughest game was a 10-inning affair with Joe McGinnity furnishing the opposition. That was in 1904. I had won my first nine games with Cincinnati and Joe had won his first 10 for the Giants. We were slated at the old Polo Grounds and the newspapers gave it a terrific play, booming up the fact two pitchers with 19 wins and no losses between them were to meet. The game drew 50,000 paid admissions, a record in New York up to that time.

“Old Iron Man Joe won 35 and lost 8 that year, won the National League pitching crown and hurled McGraw’s Giants to the National League pennant, so you can see what I was up against. That was the season you know, that there was no World Series. The event was cancelled following a prolonged row between the heads of the two leagues. The National Commission controlled the classic the next year and the first official World Series was played between the Giants and Philadelphia Athletics.

Higgins Blows Up

“Well sir, the boys gave me a run and I went into the 9th with a 1-0 lead when Devlin singled. McGann advanced him and Bresnahan doubled to tie the score. We had a chance to win in the 10th but the dumbest ball player I have ever known, God rest his big-hearted soul, cost us the game when he was trapped off second. The next man up doubled, so his would have been the winning run.

“Who was the dumb player? Oh, that was Miller Huggins, who died while managing the New York Yankees. He was one of the grandest fellows that ever lived, but known from one end of the circuit to the other as “Bonehead” Huggins.

“Well, we battled through the 10th. Darkness was settling and the New York crowd was getting unruly. Thousands were standing around the outfield and they kept moving in, finally lighting newspapers and waving them when I delivered to confuse me. Hank O’Day was the umpire. He walked out to the mound in the 10th and said, ‘get the side out and if they don’t score I’m calling it.’ So it ended in a 1-1 tie, my toughest game.”

Tinker Toughest

Every pitcher who has been under the big tent has his nemesis batter, a guy he can’t seem to get out. Joe Tinker was Harper’s.

“Do you know that fellow couldn’t hit a curve with a flat bat but he was a pull hitter. He’d stand in there, take a couple then peck one just over the infield. None of the others ever bothered me too much, not even Wagner.”



The Harper’s, Jack and his wife Mary, live quietly now. They have been married 45 years and have resided in Jamestown 39 summers and winters. The greatest defeat Big Jack suffered was not on the mound but was a dual slap at both him and Mary – the loss of their only daughter, who died at 24, a few months after her marriage to Fred Dahlstrom of the Dahlstrom Metallic Door Company.

