

## "True Grit": *All-Stars 13, Cow Tippers 12*

By Deacon Massengill

In my many years umpiring and reporting on the National Game, I have seldom seen a finer display of ginger, muckle, and true grit as that exhibited this Saturday past by the Territorial *All-Stars* in their tussle with the *Idalia Cow Tippers*.

Eleven ballists, two cranks, and yours truly made the long stagecoach ride to within a few miles of the Kansas border with our territory. The occasion was the annual "Idalia Days" cerebation, which had originally wanted to host some of our nation's finest in some demonstrations of the martial arts (not the Oriental variety); but with the Civil War still raging there were none that could be spared. As a consolation, a local minister remembered seeing the Colorado *Columbines* a number of years back playing at the Four Mile House in southeast Denver, so the invitation was issued to our Association instead. I doubt that the locals were disappointed in the second choice (despite the ultimate outcome).

[NOTE: this *Columbine* match had to have been at least eight, maybe ten years ago, as it has been about that long since the *Columbines* last played -- you never know when making a good impression might pay dividends.]

The local contingent came loaded for bear. It seems every current and recent member of their highly successful high school base ball program signed on in hopes of an easy victory. They fielded 17 strapping lads mostly in the range of sixteen to twenty-four years, and one winsome lassy nicknamed "Miss America" -- which could certainly have been the case back in the days when the titlist needed talent and well as looks. It is certain that their average age measured at least 20 years younger than the visitors. In short, the conditions were primed for a "whuppin'" which the home cranks fairly anticipated.

The field was a good one, and vast. I jokingly invoked a ground rule that if any ballist hit the sphere beyond the outer garden tree line I would award a homerun (it was at a distance of probably 200 yards). I was informed the field at one time had been a 9-hole, 3-par golfing link -- evidently the Scottish game did no catch on among these German and Scandinavian settlers. However, that background made the field nearly level and gave mostly fair bounces. The mown prairie grass did provide an occasional "Fort Logan hop" and there was one minor obstacle -- a copse of small trees in the right garden which would factor into the game's outcome.

The *All-Stars* got off slowly, failing to tally in the first three innings, mainly due to the youthful range and lightning arms of the *Idalia* boys. However, the visitors returned almost as much, holding the *Cowmen* to only two tallies. After spotting that small lead, the visitors would tally at least once in every remaining frame, while the home club generally would respond with one or two to stay barely in front. But the local boys (and girl) couldn't quite break free due to the fine hurling of *Rube* and *Old Hoss* Foster backed by an excellent defense. Of special note was the tandem at behind of *Digger* Hadix (doing his normal "*Digger* woulda had it" impression) and *Bugler* Christensen (making a rare game day musical appearance); mid-scout *Cannibal* Tinney, who was all the defense needed in the sixth frame when all three pitches were sent flying his way to die; and second basetender *Hustler* Nunez whose hustling cost the *Idalia* club several base runners.

One of the rarest half-innings in CVBBA history occurred in the *All-Stars'* second, when the five strikers recorded a strikeout, walk, strikeout, walk, and strikeout.

Otherwise, there were several offensive highlights for the *Eclectics*. *Digger* had several key hits, drove in a couple of runs and scored once. *Crush* Sumner went three for four at the plate and also scored. *Hands* Phelan, *Rattler* Gallegos, and *Hustler* each tallied twice -- as did *Rube*, who had a towering blast to right in the fourth inning after having warned the right scout to back up (and he foolishly did not). The biggest hit, though, was by rookie *Lefty* Valaika, son of teammate *Irish Tom*. Trailing by one in the eighth but with two in scoring position, Captain *Old Hoss* instructed *Lefty* to "put it in those trees" -- the aforementioned right-field hazard -- and he delivered! Although the right scout positioned himself well, the wide carom scored both *Cannibal* and *Rattler*.

When both *Lefty* and *Hustler* followed them home, the *All-Stars* had the lead and perhaps some breathing room, too. However, it was short-lived as Idalia came right back with three of their own to knot the tallies at eleven apiece heading into the ninth.

After circling like sharks for seven innings, the men from the Front Range were moving in for the kill. *Bugler* almost beat out a throw to first, but both *Hands* and *Digger* did. *Cannibal's* bug-bruiser then moved them over, allowing *Rattler's* poke to left-center to bring them home. In their last chance, the *Cow Tippers* threatened and rang the bell once, but it was not enough, so the visitors' had big smiles and fond memories on their long journeys home.

For Idalia, standouts included *Shorty*, *Lightning*, and *Sid Viscous*, each with two tallies. And, though she didn't tally, *Miss America* made a fine impression not only in comportment, but as a ballist. She got on base in both attempts, hitting the ball hard both times (including her first at-bat using our biggest bat that very few gentlemen ever dare to try), and at behind where she corralled a couple of foul tips and tagged a runner who unadvisedly attempted to score. Before departure the Idalia folks were already talking up the need for a rematch in the not-too-distant future.