

Sandlot Ball: Territorial *All-Stars* 14, Sterling B.B.C. 9

I have to admit, I can't remember if I ever played "sandlot ball" as a kid. But veteran sandlot-baller *Old Hoss* Foster assured me that this was, indeed, sandlot ball. Although he also didn't remember there being quite so many "sand-burrs" to deal with.

What might be the most lasting memory years from today were all the goat-heads (and their various cousins): especially for *Red Dog* Wickett who picked up some in both knees and hands crawling to make an out at home; or every behind who had to pick one out of every hurled pitch; or every striker who pulled them out of the bats; or anyone else, like *Magic* Piccolo, who took one (or a dozen) for the team by hitting the ground to make a play.

[Although I, as umpire, had no such difficulties, it was indicative of the hazards that when I went to change back into my sneakers that I had worn to set up the field, I had to remove a total of 142 stickers from the soles! Honestly!]

Otherwise, it was a great July 4th for the national game. While warm, it wasn't hot, and the almost daily afternoon thunderstorms didn't arrive until the ride home. [For anyone who didn't hear, on Sunday a tornado set down less than five miles from the museum grounds -- so we dodged that bullet.] The diminutive field provided a cozy feel and the match began with probably 300 or more eager cranks on hands. I would suspect that in the course of the match a majority of the announced 3400 festival-goers moseyed over to take a peek. At least 50 stalwarts remained throughout the entire match.

As the locals did not supply their own club, the visitors divided themselves thusly -- those donning the new patriotic jerseys represented the Sterling Base Ball Club captained by *Old Hoss*, while the remainder carried the *All-Stars* banner under the direction of *Bike Mike* Roberts.

The *All-Stars* got off to the better start, tallying in each of the first five innings, while hurler *Crush* Summer and friends kept the lid on the "home" boys, leading 13 to 3. From the bottom of the fifth on, the *star-spangled ballists* took control, but their 6 to 1 advantage in the second half of the match couldn't overcome their early hole.

Because it was a small-ish field, the clubs played with the rag-balls generally reserved for Rounders play. Even with the softer balls, it was feared beforehand that yonder targets such as the restored railroad station, caboose, and displays of farm equipment would regularly interfere with play -- but they didn't. The cranks gathered too closely on the outer-garden periphery did hinder a play or two, but eventually they got the hint and backed off.

The right-field fence, though, was very short at about 150 feet, so most times the right scouts played "outside the box". When very few balls went over the fence in the early innings this prompted a brief abandonment of that strategy. However, *Wheels* Harris made the Sterling club pay by punching one out there, *sans* defender, resulting in a 3-run 4-bagger.

Wheels led all scorers with 4 aces, followed by *Shark* Renker's three, and *Cannibal* Tinney, *Hands* Phelan, *Dutch* Morris, *Bicycle*, and *Magic* (in a rare appearance) had two each. The bell was rung once each by *Hustler* Nunez, *Rattler* Gallegos, *Crush*, *Skinny* Timme, *Digger* Hadix, and *Irish Tom* Valaika. Rounding out the two nines (or really, tens) were *Tiny* Heine, *Rube* Foster, *Mad Dog* Mason, *Fast Eddie* Phelan, and rookie Justin *the Breeze* Case. *Cherokee* Sharon kept the tally, and with Ann Massengill staged a short suffrage disturbance rally. A number of other ballists were also accompanied by familial rooters.

On Monday, the local Sterling *Journal-Advocate* didn't have any detailed coverage of the match, but in general the Overland Trail Museum (our host) director said: "I don't know how we'll top this year's (Heritage) Festival." Then the first noted activity said: "One of the highlights of the day was a vintage 1880s baseball game played in the south corner of the museum property. She said the team enjoyed Sterling and wants to come back." Indeed, I expect a return invitation is already in the works.