

July 26 -- Denver *Blue Stockings* 25, Walker Ranch Boys 13

Was Football Invented at Walker Ranch?

While there is still uncertainty regarding the origin of our great national past time of Base Ball, it could be that the Denver *Blue Stockings* and Walker Ranch Boys teamed up to invent a new game this Sunday past high on the foothills overlooking Boulder. For want of a better name, I'll call it "foot-ball", because it was that appendage as much as any that came into contact with the ball. In what this observer believes to be a record, on at least a half-dozen occasions (and maybe a couple more) runners on the base-paths redirected struck balls -- mostly with their feet, mostly by the *Stockings*, and mostly successful at adding bases to their runs.

However, if this new form of play becomes more than just a passing fancy, one Denver man had better stick to the old game, for his botched attempt at footwork resulted in a tumble to the dirt and a lost ace for himself and his team. Fortunately, the deficiency mattered not, so I will spare the red-headed fellow further embarrassment and withhold his identity. I am surprised, though, that he had not seen such an outcome "in the cards".

It was both pleasantly familiar and unusual returning to the Walker Ranch field -- familiar in this being our second oldest continuing rivalry -- and unusual in it being a mid-summer visit. In the past this match and special event had always been held the last Sunday in September. However, occasional disruptions by early winter calamities -- one year a snow-out, another a land slide that blocked the carriage road, another a wild-fire that claimed the Walker's residence -- had prompted the organizers to reschedule the date. This year it almost backfired, as our current predilection of afternoon thunderstorms were a constant threat -- although we snuck through with only about three innings of drizzle, the darkest clouds skirting by to the south.

Despite the new date and a resultant drop in cranks, the match itself was reminiscent of many years ago. In recent years the Walker match has become something of a hurler's duel with combined scores in the low teens. But much of this series in its beginning could be counted on for lots of scoring, as evidenced by that record-shattering match in '95 that ended with the *Stockings* victorious 40-37. Talk about football?!

The home boys were disadvantaged somewhat in that several of their normal brood were absent. Only *Sneaky Pete* Walker returned from last year's victory, although that is a good start for any club -- Pete's fine hurling, steady play, and enthusiasm has been a part of all twelve matches in the series. Also, some of the boys were off handling chores on the back forty, so *Ma* Walker had to call upon the assistance of cousins *Cannibal* (Tinney) Walker, *Hustler* (Nunez) Walker, and *Breadbasket* (Beckers) Walker.

It was fairly evident from the start that last year's listless visitors had been left at home and the real *Blue Stockings* sent instead. After two innings they were up six to one and it never got much closer than that. The shorn grass in the outer garden wasn't as deep as in previous years and the visitors regularly plunked the sphere into the tall, uncut grass. Despite the tortuous climb through first to the second bag, numerous fellows managed two-baggers, although curiously no one managed a four-bagger this year. When Denver added four aces in the fifth inning and then countered Walker's four with seven more in the sixth, the outcome was pretty much beyond doubt. Another seven in the eighth sealed the deal.

For the local boys, *Sneaky Pete* led four other ballists including *Crusher* Walker, *Masher* Walker, *Lefty* Walker and *Hustler*, with two tallies apiece. *Anvil* Walker, *Joltin' John* Walker, and *Breadbasket* added the remaining three tallies. *Cannibal* did a fine job at the short scout and tried his best to counter the consistently fine fair-foul slaps of Denver's *Crazy Legs* Brighton. Lastly, the youngster, *12-Gauge* Walker, acquitted himself well at the behind in what was admittedly his first try ever at the national game.

Stars were abundant for the *Blue Stockings*, as every one of their 13 ballists managed to ring the bell. *Hands* Phelan led all scorers with a perfect five aces in five attempts -- turning the seasonal scoring contest into a real race. He now trails *Wheels* Harris by only two -- 25 to 23. *Buckeye* Mitchell added four tallies in only his

second match of the season, while *Fearless Foster* (just back from surgery), *Rube Foster*, visiting rookie *Chicago Kevin Phelan*, *Crazy Legs*, and *Fast Eddie Phelan* all scored twice. Rounding it out were Captain *Old Hoss Foster*, *Tiny Heine*, *Irish Tom Valaika*, *Crush Sumner*, *Bugler Christensen* (finally getting his swing back), and Red Dog Wickett all getting around once. *Old Hoss*, *Crusher*, and *Rube* evenly shared the effective hurling duties.

On the sidelines, *Cherokee Sharon* handled the tally while the *Deacon* took his normal umpiring duties. Of special note was the announcing of *Digger Haddix*, who kept the small but enthusiastic crowd, enthusiastic -- including the staging of our first real suffrage rally using the new signs and sashes.

Although we all went home a little wetter than we came, we'll accept the "liquid sunshine", as someone called it, in exchange for another wonderful visit on Flagstaff Mountain.