

Stamford Earliest Baseball Record c. 1860-1880

The origins of baseball are murky. Some believe baseball was invented by a single individual, while others think that it evolved through a series of children's games. Either way, it is likely that some form of baseball was played in Stamford as early as the 1840s, especially given its proximity to New York City, but no record remains. The first mention of baseball's being played in Stamford occurs in December 8, 1865 news column in the Stamford Advocate. On December 2, 1865 a team of schoolboys representing Stamford played against a Norwalk team defeating them 38 to 23. The game was played on a field on Summer Street. The game was apparently well attended. The column noted this was the third annual contest between the towns. It is well established that immediately after the Civil War, baseball playing became a widespread pastime. Despite its popularity among the younger set, it was games played by grown men that attracted the public's attention. The first record of a Stamford Baseball Club occurs in 1866 when a team was founded to compete against area clubs from area towns and clubs as far away as Philadelphia. Stamford's chief rival team at this point remained that of Norwalk who called themselves the Norwalk "Muffins". Gloves were not initially used and rules were fluid, resulting in high scores. Five outs rather than three were often used. Of the games recorded in that first season of 1866 the

Philadelphia Bachelors routed Stamford 21-12 and Norwalk twice defeated Stamford by large scores: 47-16 and 35-12. In September of that year Stamford managed to defeat Norwalk by a similarly large margin: 54-37. Local games were often followed by elaborate celebrations at which both the winner and loser would feast on meals of several courses. The games drew literally thousands of people and teams, traveling by train, were often met in style by their opponents at the station. The teams and their games became focal points for the communities they represented. Although the sponsorship of teams was not firmly footed initially, and an Advocate column of 1869 bemoans the absence of an established baseball club in Stamford during that particular year, baseball's popularity was growing. Throughout the 1870s mention is made of additional Stamford teams facing off against neighboring towns. With the establishment of manufacturing industries in Stamford starting in 1869 with Yale & Towne, company teams began to appear as well. These early teams helped forge communities as all citizens could root for their players regardless of differences in class, occupation or neighborhood.

The First Industrial Team c. 1885

With the conversion of the economy of Stamford from a primarily agrarian to an increasingly industrialized base, more men found leisure time available to play sports. In June 1885, Yale & Towne, one of Stamford's largest employers, is recorded as forming its first team. Their team played against any clubs desirous of a challenge. Games were played at then privately owned Woodside Park (now Scalzi Park). A 15 cent admission fee was charged although ladies and carriages were free. The money was used to pay the rent for use of the field. It was during the 1880s that team organizers began to look more at how to finance teams, increasingly focusing on ticket sales and gate receipts. During 1885 the fledging Yale & Towne team challenged the Bridgeport Professionals, a pro team drawn from the best players in the state. Predictably Y & T lost 11-0. Nevertheless the popularity of baseball continued to grow and a number of seasons were played in the 1880s until the first Y & T team disbanded.

Baseball Established c. 1890-1902

There seems to have been a hiatus in baseball's popularity after the disbanding of the first Y & T team. However, games continued to be played by the area private schools, King and Betts Academy and in other towns other factories started company teams often luring players from Stamford. Organizers of teams were trying to draw the best players and gambling became common at games in the 1890s. In the midst of this flurry of activity one man stands out as the true founder of established baseball in Stamford and that is Jimmy Giblin. Giblin founded the Hoytville team in the mid 1890s. The team, formed from older kids in the Hoytville neighborhood, became one of the strongest in the area and its success caused other neighborhoods in Stamford to found their own teams. The friendly competition between neighborhood teams often provided the key means by which kids got to know one another. As neighborhoods in Stamford in this era corresponded to ethnicities, teams of Irish kids played teams of Italian kids or Polish kids. As the kids grew older they would find themselves on teams of mixed ethnicities playing with people they knew from their youth. In this manner, these teams provided a 'social cement' that helped to forge a single community out of the diverse neighborhoods.

Jimmy Giblin was a driving force of this process. By 1899, he ran the Stamford Baseball Club, organizing and managing the team, as well as serving as a pitcher. In 1901 he played on the Stamford Athletics, the town entry in the short-lived CT Southern League. The league included teams from Stamford, Norwalk, Winnipank, Danbury and Bridgeport and had a 10 game schedule. The game admission fee remained 15 cents and attendance was crucial since home teams had to pay the travel fees of visitors as well as umpires. The 1901 season ended in a championship for Stamford, but unfortunately the league folded in July of 1902 because of a dispute between Norwalk and Bridgeport's teams. The Stamford team continued to play, booking games against teams from Connecticut and New York including the New York City "All Professionals" and the "Colored Giants" an all black baseball team. Some of these games, usually played on Sundays, attracted up to 6000 spectators. Teams from other towns continued to be met at the train station with brass band and crowds.

A Profusions of Teams and Leagues: Stamford Baseball's Golden Age 1917- 1948

Sport columnist Bob Kennedy has identified the period from 1917-48 as the Golden Age of Stamford baseball. The era was marked by the founding of the Industrial League in the teens and also by the Twilight League in 1932 (which was to endure until 2007). During the early 40s the Stamford Pioneers played at Mitchell field and later Stamford's first pro team: the Stamford Bombers, a Class B team in the short lived Colonial League, was organized in 1947. The founding of the Industrial League in 1916 provided one more means by which people from different backgrounds began to interact with one another through sport. The league included teams sponsored by Stamford Rolling Mills, Yale & Towne, New Haven Railroad and Pitney Bowes. Yale & Towne's team was drawn from players in its own eight team in-house adult league that existed from 1914-30. In addition to the Industrial League, club teams played in their own organized groups. These teams included many organized by athletic clubs including Sound Beach, Cove, Sacred Heart, West Side and after 1925 Holy Name, one of the strongest clubs. All competed for the City Championship. At this time factories would hire some employees based on the strength of the baseball playing. It was not unusual for some players to serve on a number of teams at once. It was during the 1920s that Stamford High's Baseball

team began to win notoriety with star players like pitcher Paul Kuczo and infielder John Scalzi. The 1923 and 1924 seasons were high points for Kuczo, Scalzi and the SHS team coached by Mike Boyle. The team posted 19 wins and 5 losses over these seasons. Kuczo went on pitch on winning Villanova teams before returning to Stamford High where he became an assistant coach to Boyle until 1936 when he became head coach of the baseball squad. Scalzi continued his play at Georgetown and upon his graduation was hired by the professional Boston Braves. An injury ended his career in his first season though he later played professional football as a member of the Brooklyn Dodgers and also coached football at Manhattan College and Columbia U.

Ed Hunt, another former SHS athlete, joined the Stamford Recreation Department in 1924, and became the superintendent by 1929. Hunt saw sport as a way to productively engage Stamford's youth and began a recreation league for young people which would ultimately pave the way for the Little League teams of the 1950s. Recreation teams included the Red Devils and the Lone Stars. Hunt's rec. teams were organized by neighborhoods, much like the teams in Giblin's day. Hunt also coordinated the competitions of the amateur adult leagues. This was formalized in 1932 with the founding of the Twilight League for adult players. All Twilight League games were played at Cummings Park on Wednesdays and Thursdays. Five teams made up the league at first: the University Club, Stamford Gas & Electric A.C., the Tasti-Mallow Baseball Club, the

West Side A.C. and the Stamford All Stars. By the 1980s the Twilight League would boast 13 clubs.

The Stamford Pioneers began their play at Mitchell Field in 1941. The field, razed in the 1950s, was an enclosed stadium on Magee Avenue. John Scalzi managed the club and booked semi-pro and pro teams as opponents including teams from the International and Negro Leagues. The Pioneers were so good that they managed to defeat the National League's St. Louis Cardinals in 1941 before 3,000 Stamford fans. While WWII sapped some of baseball's strength for a time, the founding of the professional Class B Stamford Bombers in 1947 showed that baseball fervor was still strong. The Bombers also played at Mitchell field as a member club of the newly formed Colonial League. Other clubs included teams from Port Chester, Bridgeport, Waterbury, New London and Poughkeepsie, NY. Henry Zeke Bonura managed the team and Mitchell Field was expanded to hold 5000 seats. With a \$1.00 admission ticket however attendance soon waned and after the 1948 season the league and the Bombers folded and Stamford began to turn its baseball eyes to its youth.

Baseball Growth 1903-1916

Baseball's growth and spread weakened somewhat after 1902 as other sports such as cycling and yachting caught on. Betts Academy, King School and Stamford High School's baseball teams provided entertainment for baseball enthusiasts during this time. Baseball was hampered by the lack of adequate playing fields. It was not until 1910 with the development of Halloween Park (later Cummings Park) that a proper field was available to the High School. After 1910 more grown men began to take up baseball again. Jimmy Giblin with brothers William and George were at the center of this second "founding" period, along with pitcher Harry Mertz an astounding local pitching talent. The All-Stamfords managed by Buckey Thomes starting in 1915 became a Stamford sensation. Based at the "West End Field" near the former Conde Nast where American Cyanamid is located today, the All Stamfords faced teams of former professional players from as far away as Hoboken, NJ and Lancaster PA. They also faced professional teams from the Eastern League. The games became of events of civic pride at which it was not uncommon to see well over 1000 spectators. The semi-pro All Stamfords recruited their players from the many amateur clubs and industrial league teams populating Stamford during the teens. The All Stamford's faced their greatest challenge on Sunday June 4, 1916 when the Pittsburg Pirates captained by shortstop Honus Wagner played them in Stamford.

Although the Pirates won by a score of 7-4 Stamford took pride in yielding only 3 of the runs as earned while Stamford earned all four of its points.

Stamford's Baseball Reputation Grows Through Its Youth 1949-1971

With the increasing professionalization of baseball, home teams, while still commanding local fans, began to lose their audiences, especially with the advent of television. While the Twilight League games continued to entertain many, as the decades passed fewer attended. The gradual transformation of Stamford from an industrial hub to a center for corporate headquarters also changed the nature of the working population such that industrial league teams disappeared. Baseball, however, remained strong in Stamford but, as opposed to the years from 1860-1940 when it was primarily a man's game, it now increasingly was a game from boys and younger men 10 to 20 years of age.

The Newspaper Tournament 1949

The first step to this new age of baseball came with the announcement by the Boston Braves of a New England Newspaper Baseball Tournament in 1949. The Stamford Advocate sponsored the local team and more than 125 players aged 17-20 attended the three-day tryout camp at Mitchell Field directed by the Boston Brave scouts. The Advocate team played against some of the best teams in New England at the old Braves field in Boston. The team won the New England championship establishing Stamford as not only as a local but regional baseball power. Several players from

that team succeeded in baseball; Ralph Vitti, Joe Morelli and Mike Coppola all ended up signing contracts with the Brave. Dick Haggerty signed with the Cleveland Indians and later by the Braves.

Little League 1950-52

The clear interest and talent exhibited by Stamford's youth called for an organized league through which the players could grow and improve. While the Board of Recreation had provided opportunities for play, many envisioned a more organized league patterned on those of adults. On March 25, 1950 a meeting was held to establish if Stamford wished to obtain a Little League Baseball charter. J. Walter Kennedy, a member of the National Little League board, was the driving force behind the move. Kennedy established the league and compelled the service clubs: Exchange, Rotary, Kiwanis and Lions, to each sponsor a team. Over 400 players tried out for the 48 necessary spots need to have the league. Mickey Lione and Paul Klinkowski served as the All Star coaches in the summer of 1951. Although only in its second year of operation, Stamford's all-star team captured the state championship then defeated a team from Westerly, RI at the Vine Road field before 3,000 fans. Westerly was defeated a second time at its home turf and Stamford advanced to the World Series in Williamsport, PA. Many of the players such as captain Mickey Lione Jr. and Dom Lacerenza admitted at the time to not fully realizing what they had accomplished. Andy Wasil pitched for Stamford before 10,000 fans. Stamford defeated the team from Austin TX 3-0 to take the National Championship. A second Little League was started in Stamford in 1952 to provide more

opportunities for play but it would be more than 20 years before Stamford would appear again at Williamsport.

Little Bigger/Babe Ruth League 1952-54

While Little League took care of the youngest players, there were not a lot of opportunities for the next age set (13-15 year olds). The American Legion team, which had operated since the 1920s, provided some spots for older youths, but not many. The Little Bigger League was established in 1952 to address this gap. While the Rec. League had provided some time for play, the Little Bigger League was more organized and national in scope. The first team included Chuck “Zeke” Symeon, Charlie Pike, Buzzy Baron, Joe Inzitari, Mike Carella, Steve Chocas, Chuck Willard, Dom Viesta and pitcher Andy Wasil, who had aged out of Little League. The 1952 fledging squad would go on to win the first Little Bigger League championship in Trenton, NJ. The league was still small in 1952 and Stamford hosted the first regional tournament. The home team beat Bristol RI 8-0 and Burlington VT 18-1 in games held at Cummings Park sending them to Trenton. They won their first game against Boys Town Nebraska and their second game vs. Hazelton, PA. West Des Moines, Iowa was their final opponent falling 2-0 giving Stamford the National Championship.

Viesta and Wasil returned as members of the 1953 squad that repeated the previous team’s performance. The 1953 squad first defeated West Haven 17-1 for the state championship at Target Field (where Cubeta

Stadium now stands). Target Field hosted the regional tournament as well where Stamford's boys defeated Bristol RI 22-0 and Manchester NH 14-2. In Trenton, Stamford first faced the previous year's finalist West Des Moines. They advanced winning 3-2. They next downed Seattle 8-2 and faced Burlington, NJ in the finals before a crowd of 7,000. Their Stamford again triumphed.

In 1954 the Little Bigger League officially became the Babe Ruth League, but that was the only change as Stamford went on to win its third championship in as many years. The finals were played at Griffin Stadium, home of the old Washington Senators. Stamford's 1954 squad included seven players from the 1951 Little League championship squad. They again defeated West Haven 3-2 for the state title, then downed Holyoke MA 8-2 and Manchester NH 8-1 to advance to the finals. The team was captained by Mickey Lione Jr and Andy Wasil. Wasil pitched the team to a victory over Visalia, CA 8-1. Richie Moavero then won over Cincinnati 16-8 with Bob Ferrara earning 6 RBIs. Finally, Jackson TN fell in the final game 2-0 and Stamford had another title crown.

That same year, 1954, also saw more baseball laurels for Stamford as the Oscar Cowan Post No. 3 American Legion baseball team, minus four of its players who were involved in the Babe Ruth World Series, went on to win its fourth straight state championship and then the Region II championship. The team, coached by Buddy O'Meara fell in the finals to Baltimore. At the same time, Stamford's National

Little League All Stars won the district and state championships before losing in the regional to Woburn, MA. It certainly had been a year. It would be 10 years before another national championship banner flew over Stamford.

Youth Baseball and the Senior Babe Ruth League 1955-1964

Between 1955 and 1960 Stamford was the New England championship team that played in five more Babe Ruth League World Series. The 1955 BR World Series in Austin, TX was particularly eye opening for the young Stamfordites. That year their team had two black players: George Brown and Ed White. Upon arriving at Austin the Stamford team was informed that they would not be staying at a hotel but at Bergstrom Air Force Base because of the presence of the black players. There was lasting resentment in Austin against Stamford because of its past victories according to Tony Attanasio and Al Nanai who were members of the 55 squad. The presence of black players increased the prejudice of the Austin hosts. It is likely that the treatment experience by the Stamford team contributed to their defeat in the first game against Terre Haute, IN 3-2. In 1956, neither the American nor National Babe Ruth Stamford entries made it past district play. In 1957 the American Babe Ruth entry took state and New England titles played in Stratford and Norwalk respectively, before falling to Pensacola, FL in the World Series in Ann Arbor, MI. Jim Mazurek, a 14 year old member of that team, established a Babe Ruth record hitting two home runs in a game. The 1958 squad continued Stamford's winning ways, taking the regional championship in Amherst MA. The World

Series that year were played in Vancouver, BC a three-day train trip across the country. Stamford ended up placing 7th overall in the tournament. The 1959 squad coached by Sharkey Laurenno, Hack Wolfson and Pete Accousta earned another trip to the World Series, this time in Stockton CA. Stamford defeated Hazelton Pa in its opener before losing to Sikeston, MO 10-5. In 1960, Stamford faced Puerto Rico for the second time in the regional finals (Puerto Rico having been put in the New England region in 1959 for some unknown reason). Stamford again triumphed 25-12. Gus Sclafani had 3 home runs and drove in 8 runs in the game. Stamford avenged itself at the World Series against former foe Sikeston, MO defeating them by a score of 17-4. The 17 runs was a tournament record. The St. Paul based World Series ended there however as the Stamford squad fell 13-2 in their second game vs. Charlotte, NC. Stamford then experience a 4 year dry spell with not Babe Ruth World Series teams. In 1964 the team coached by Sharkey Laurenno won the regionals in Sanford ME and went to the World Series in Woodland CA but lost their first two games and were eliminated. The Babe Ruth League graduates of these early teams often went on to the Twilight League afterwards. A new league for the 16-18 year olds was soon to be born to bridge the final age gap: The Senior Babe Ruth League.

The Senior Babe Ruth League 1966-1971

With the exception of the 18 spots on the American Legion team, prior to 1965, 16-18 year olds did not have much opportunity to play baseball outside of school. By the mid 1960s there was a second and then a third Babe Ruth league catering to the 13-15 year olds. What to do when they aged out? Some earned spots on one of the four local Twilight League teams, but those teams tended to be dominated by 20 and 30 year olds. The success of the 1964 Babe Ruth team that made it to the World Series begged the question as to how these youths would continue to improve their play after they turned 16. It took till the summer of 1966 for the Senior Babe Ruth League to emerge through the work of Camine Salvatore, Carl Martino, Pat Tisano, Stan Filmer, Al Lopiano, Andy Wasil and Mickey Lione Jr (who would coach or manage the All Star squad from 1966-74). Robustelli Travel, Clariol, Die Craft Tool and Atlantic National Bank became the four original team sponsors. In 1967 another team was added and later there were eight teams. The league had a slow start. In 1966, there was no All Star Team because not enough towns had leagues. By 1967, there was a North Sectional that served as a World Series since only eight organized Senior Babe Ruth Leagues in the country. The series was played at Morristown, NJ but was not up to the caliber of the other Series because of the lack of talent. Stamford defeated a New York team 25-5 but lost to

Warwick, RI. Because of competition with the American Legion teams over players the Legion team did not participate in post season play in 1967. American Legion baseball would disappear from 1967 until 1980.

The first real Senior Babe Ruth World Series took place in 1968 and the Stamford squad boasted the likes of Art DeFilippis, Bobby Robustelli, Vic and Dom Carlucci and Bennett Salvatore. The Stamford team defeated St. Paul MN 7-3 for the first baseball crown since 1954 with DeFilippis getting the save. Stamford also became the first US city to win titles in Little League, Babe Ruth and Sr. Babe Ruth leagues. In 1969 the Stamford squad again made it to the World Series losing in the last inning to San Antonio TX played at Mennen Field in Morristown, NJ. The 1970 campaign left Stamford finishing fourth in Wellington, KS. In 1971, Stamford hosted the World Series at Cubeta Stadium and some 30,000 fans watched the week long series that culminated in a Stamford victory in four straight wins. The Stamfordites hit .391 as a team, a SRBRL record that stood through the 1980s. The 1971 coaching staff of Bart Gerardi, Mickey Lione and Giulini was voted as the SRBRL All Time Coaching staff. Stamford had qualified for the first five Sr. Babe Ruth World Series and had won two. Sr. Babe Ruth League was in Stamford for good.

And so the legacy continues...

The transformation of Stamford into a corporate headquarters and the transformation of the City through Urban Renewal changed the nature of the workforce and the neighborhoods where it live. The growth in population in the City and the establishment of additional high schools also served to divide the attention of the City's sports enthusiasts. The rise of softball leagues also negatively impacted the old baseball leagues. Gone were the industrial teams of Yale & Towne, Rolling Mills and others as were the companies that sponsored them. Gone were the neighborhood ball teams. The Twilight League also played its last season in 2007. The distractions of the modern world have changed the nature of hometown sports.

Yet, the sport of baseball lives on in the teams of the schools and the many youth leagues that continue to perpetuate the legacy of baseball in Stamford. After the 1971 victory other teams made it to the World Series events. The 1972 Sr. Bath Ruth All Stars from Stamford made it to the World Series in Monroe, NC. Although they did not win, they continued to uphold Stamford's banner. The Conetta team of the Twilight

League also won the Stan Musial Division of the American Amateur Baseball Congress World Championship in Battle Creek MI that year. Between 1971 and 1985 the Sr. Babe Ruth All Stars of Stamford would make it to the World Series six times: 71, 72, 74, 76, 81, 82. The Babe Ruth League All Stars of 1978 made it to the World Series as well in Newark OH. In 1981 a Stamford Little League team made it to the LL World Series for the first time since 1955 when the Federal Little League finished 6th in the world. In 1983 the Stamford Americans again went to the World Series and finished 4th in the World.

Today Stamford youths continue to swing bats, catch flies, hit homers and dream of their own trips to the World Series.