

Class D, Blue Ridge League

1920 – A Rebirth in the Post-War Era

by Mark Zeigler

The towns surrounding the northern Blue Ridge mountains had a taste of professional baseball for several years before the Great War (known today as World War I), abruptly curtailed the 1918 baseball season, just three weeks into the schedule.

Baseball had been a strong focal point for the participating communities that fielded teams in the Class D, Blue Ridge League. This was a time when the trolley was the main source of transportation, and the vehicle of choice was a Maxwell. Radio was just in its infant stages, and the thought of television was not even known for almost another twenty years. By 1920, the 20th Amendment allowed women the right to vote, while the 21st Amendment, Prohibition was in full force throughout the country. The nation's attitudes were changing, but one constant was baseball.

People were re-energized after the war effort had ended, and were looking for new things to do in their spare time. Baseball offered them a few hours of distraction from their daily lives, and a chance to support their community by “rooting for their home team.”

1919, A Lost Season

Professional baseball felt a void in Hagerstown and the other Blue Ridge League towns in 1919. The only opportunity for many players to play baseball in the area came from the Industrial League towns of Waynesboro and Hagerstown, which fielded teams from the Landis Tool Company, and The Frick Company, to name a few.

The “new” Blue Ridge League

When James Vincent Jamison, Jr. of Hagerstown brought back the idea of reviving the Class D, Blue Ridge League to its former organization in February of 1920, it was accepted almost unanimously by all the previous representatives of each of the league towns.

The revised Class D, Blue Ridge League did return with some changes. Like in the old Blue Ridge League, the league kept a six-team format. Hagerstown (MD) resumed as the league headquarters, and Frederick (MD) and Martinsburg (WV) returned to serve as the base clubs of the league. Chambersburg (PA), which had lost its franchise in the middle of the 1917

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season, returned to the league, as did another Pennsylvania town, Hanover. Gettysburg, which was an original member of the league from 1915-17, did not have adequate facilities to host a team, and gave way to nearby Waynesboro, PA, which had a ballpark, and was eager to participate in the league. There was some discussion of trying to get a team from Cumberland (MD), or Carlisle (PA), but their representatives bowed out due to travel concerns.

In March 1920, the league was formalized, and sanctioned by the National Association of Professional Baseball Leagues (NAPBL). The Blue Ridge League remained at the Class D level, which they would prosper throughout the decade, until the Stock Market crash of 1929, which led to the league's demise after the 1930 season.

Fielding Teams

Like in previous years, each baseball association, as they were known as, were responsible for choosing a manager, and fielding a team. They were responsible for payroll, equipment, and any other expenses relating to their respective club. Each team consisted of 14-players, including the Manager, who also played. Most teams had pitching staff's of four active pitchers, and played a 100-game schedule, running from mid-May until Labor Day.

Managers

The six managers selected at the beginning of the season included a few former Major Leaguers. "Mike" Mowrey, a former infielder with the Brooklyn National League club, and a Chambersburg, PA native, took the helm of the Hagerstown club, playing third base. Bill Loudon, a former infielder with the New York Giants, and a native of nearby Piedmont, WV, managed the Martinsburg club, and played second base. Karl Kolseth, a former Federal League player, and once a star player for Chambersburg in the Blue Ridge League in 1916, returned to manager the Hanover club.

Pitcher George Washington "Buck" Ramsey managed the Frederick club, while veteran Manager William "Country" Morris, managed the new Waynesboro club. "Eddie" Hooper, who managed the pennant winning Chambersburg club in 1916, returned to manage the Maroons.

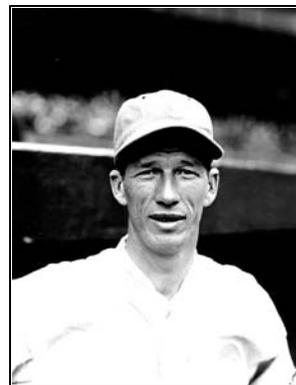
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Diamonds in the Rough

When Louden went to recruit players for his Martinsburg club, he utilized his resources near his hometown and the surrounding Western Maryland area, near Cumberland. There he came across a 19-year old southpaw hurler from Lonaconing, MD, named Robert Moses Groves. Louden also scouted the Baltimore area and found another 19-year old in promising first baseman Johnny Neun. Both players would later go on to have successful Major League careers, especially Groves, who dropped the



"Lefty" Grove

"s" in his last name by the time he reached the Majors in 1925. Grove pitched 17 years in the Majors for the Philadelphia A's and Boston Red Sox, winning 300 games, and earning enshrinement in Baseball's Hall of Fame in 1947. Neun would go on to play for the Detroit Tigers and Boston Braves from 1925 to 1931, and earn the distinction of being one of nine Major League players to pull off an unassisted triple play in 1927. Neun would later manage the famous 1938 Newark (NJ) club that featured several future New York Yankee players, including outfielder Charlie Keller. Neun managed the Yankess and Cincinnati Reds from 1946 to 1948.

Industrial League Players Fill Out Rosters

When managers had trouble filling out their rosters to star the season, several gave some of the better players from the area Industrial Leagues an opportunity, and some were the nucleus of a few Blue Ridge League teams. Hagerstown, for example, had several former Industrial Leaguers on their roster. Among them were outfielder "Tommy" Day of nearby Adamstown, MD, who was one of the top players in the league, and pitchers Tommy Verecker, and Hagerstown, MD native, Wilbur Phillips, who were two of the four regular starting pitchers on the league's pennant winning club.

The New Phenomenon – The Home Run and "The Babe"

By the time the league began play on May 19, a phenomenon had taken place in the Major Leagues that would drastically affect the direction of how baseball would be perceived by the fans throughout the country.

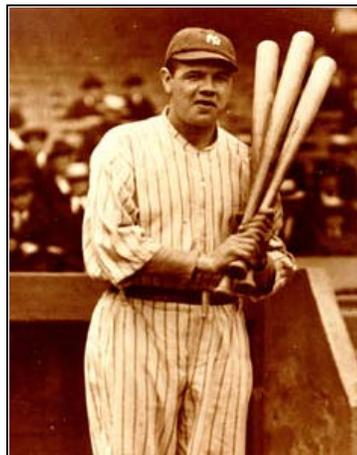
Thanks to New York Yankees slugger, George Herman Ruth, recently

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acquired from the Boston Red Sox, the word “home run” would have a totally different interpretation. Ruth, a former pitcher turned outfielder, established a new Major League mark with 29 home runs for the Red Sox in 1919. What he did in 1920, was unbelievable to every baseball fan. Nicknamed “The Babe”, Ruth single handedly ended the “Dead-Ball era”, when home runs were not commonplace. In 1920, Ruth bettered his own mark by 25 home runs, establishing a new Major League mark with 54 home runs. Around the minors, home runs became known as “Babe Ruth’s”, as fans around the clamored for players to hit the ball over the fence.



“Babe” Ruth

In the Blue Ridge League, Ruth’s feats were still a rarity, as Harold Yordy of Waynesboro led the league with just 12 home runs.

Hagerstown The Team to Beat

The Waynesboro club made their debut on May 19, hosting the Hanover Raiders at E-B Park. Over 1,500 fans attending the extra inning game to watch the hometown Villagers defeat Hanover, 11-9.

Hagerstown (56-40), led by Manager Mike Mowrey, soon became the team to beat. The Champs, as they were called that season, led or tied in the league standings for almost the entire season. The exception, being June 8, when Frederick took a short-lived lead, but when the Hustlers lost a 1-0 game to Martinsburg, and the Champs beat Waynesboro, 6-4, Hagerstown took charge, and never looked back.

The Kid From Lonaconing

By June, word had gotten out that the Martinsburg club had one of the best pitching staff’s the league ever seen. Robert Groves and Cecil Slaughter, two 19-year old southpaw teenagers, began to quickly become noticed by the other teams in the circuit. Word spread about the two, and on June 16 and 17, Jack Dunn, Jr., and scout Harry Frank of the Baltimore Orioles attended two games in Hagerstown to take a look at the two promising southpaws. Despite losing 4-2, primarily because the Martinsburg catcher

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could not handle Groves 90-plus mile an hour pitches. Groves made a major impression on the two Orioles scouts, and within 10 days, the lanky southpaw from Western Maryland was pitching for Jack Dun, Sr.'s Baltimore Orioles of the International League.

When Groves pitched his last game in the Blue Ridge League on June 25, the Martinsburg club was one of the strongest in the circuit. Groves tossed a two-hit shutout against Hagerstown in a 5-0 win, and it looked like the Mountaineers would be a cinch to battle Hagerstown for the pennant.

Martinsburg, in need of new outfield fence and grandstand, “traded” their star player to the Dunn's Orioles for \$3,000 to pay for those expenses, and later included a pitcher named Bahr to complete the deal. Groves sudden departure left a void, and his replacement, didn't measure up to Lefty's standards, and caused some dissatisfaction among the rest of his Martinsburg teammates.

Life After “Lefty”

After Groves departure, two other pitchers started to show their prominence in the league. While Hagerstown had a solid pitching staff with Verecker, Phillips and Chalkey McCleary, the addition of their fourth pitcher turned out to be the best one of the bunch. Cumberland, MD native, Charles Dye didn't join the team until May 30, but would lead the league, winning 18 games. Another notable pitcher was Frederick Manager, “Buck” Ramsey, who was the oldest player in the league at 41, and helped the Hustlers (53-40) win 14 of their last 18 games to challenge Hagerstown (56-40) and Waynesboro (53-42) for the pennant.

On August 22, Chambersburg's Charles Raab tossed the league's only no-hitter of the season, out-dueling Waynesboro's Wick Winslow, 1-0 in the first game of a doubleheader in Chambersburg.

Waynesboro and Hanover were involved in one of the biggest trades in league history on August 9, when the Villagers traded pitcher Walt “Red” Herrell, and two other players for the Raiders slugging infielder Karl Kolseth. Kolseth, who was the manager of the Hanover club at the time, was replaced at the helm by Bert Weeden after the trade, and went to Waynesboro as a player only.

Controversy swirled around the league concerning the league-wide Salary Cap that each club was responsible for adhering to. Waynesboro, in

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an attempt to challenge Hagerstown for the pennant, circumvented the salary cap rule by signing several higher priced players during the latter part of the season. What resulted was disruptions within the clubhouse, resulting in one of their regular starters, second baseman Luke Kaunas, walking out in protest over his salary compared to some of his teammates.

The return of the league, under the guidance of James Vincent Jamison, Jr., was a success. Hagerstown club President Richard Hartle reportedly made over \$6,000 profit during the season, which marked the first time their association made a healthy profit since forming during the 1916 season. The three Pennsylvania clubs struggled financially, but improved as the season progressed.

Many challenges still laid ahead for the Class D, Blue Ridge league in the coming years, but for the fans and players, it was good to be back. For the Tri-State area, each league town would see a resurgence of community spirit around their baseball teams that would last through the decade of the “Roaring Twenties.”

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1920

Class D, Blue Ridge League Season Summary

James Vincent Jamison, Jr., President
Hagerstown, Maryland

<i>Club</i>	<i>Games</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>L</i>	<i>T</i>	<i>.Pct</i>	<i>GB</i>	<i>Manager</i>
Hagerstown-MD Champs	96	56	40		.583	-	“Mike” Mowrey
Frederick-MD Hustlers	93	53	40		.569	1 ½	Geo. W. “Buck” Ramsey
Waynesboro Villagers	95	53	42		.558	2 ½	William J. “Country” Morris
Martinsburg Mountaineers	97	49	48		.505	7 ½	Bill Louden
Chambersburg-PA Maroons	94	38	56		.405	17	“Eddie” E. Hooper
Hanover Raiders	97	37	60		.381	19 ½	Karl Kolseth/ Bert Weeden

Batting

Batting: ..355, Bill Satterlee, Chambersburg
Runs: 61, John Blair, Waynesboro
Stolen Bases: 48, Charles Dysert, Hagerstown

Home Runs: 12, Harold Yordy, Waynesboro
Hits: 122, Bill Satterlee, Chambersburg

Pitching

Wins: 18, Charles Dye, Hagerstown
Strikeouts: 150, Alan “Lefty” Clarke, Waynesboro

Win Pct.: .Charles Dye, Hagerstown (18-7)
Innings Pitched: 231, Ross Roberts, Martinsburg

Chapter 5