

Ira Plank

Gettysburg Patriots 1915 Gettysburg Ponies 1916

Player-Manager/Outfielder

Class D, Blue Ridge League

By Mark C. Zeigler

Though overshadowed by his famous older brother, Hall of Fame pitcher, Eddie Plank, Ira David Plank, Sr. became a legendary sports figure of his own in their hometown of Gettysburg, Pennsylvania.

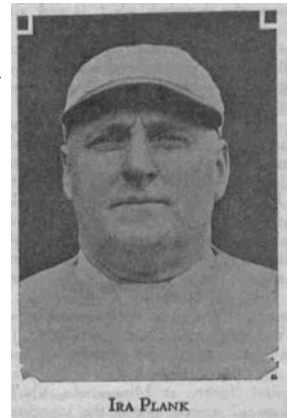
Despite never playing one game in the Major League, Ira Plank was a very successful Minor League pitcher and outfielder in the early 1900's. A few years younger than his brother, Eddie, both pitched at their alma mater, Gettysburg (PA) College. While his brother would go on to win 300-games in the Major Leagues, and later be enshrined in Baseball's Hall of Fame, Plank would win 277 games of his own, only as a college coach.

A native of Adams County, Pennsylvania, Plank was born in Straban Township on June 6, 1882. He was one of four sons to David L. and Martha McCready Plank. Plank lived in the same county his in entire life, moving to nearby Gettysburg in 1917.

Attending local schools in the Gettysburg area, the blue-eyed Plank followed his older brother by attending Gettysburg College, pitching three years for the college nine from 1901 to 1903, and playing center on the football team for two seasons.

Plank made his professional debut with Norwich (CT) in the old Connecticut League in 1904. The following season he played for Altoona of the Tri-State League, but returned to Norwich in 1906. He went 24-9 pitching for Norwich in 1907. This attracted the American League's New York Highlanders (now Yankees), who drafted Plank prior to the 1908 season. He participated in Spring Training with the American League club, but was sent to Jersey City (NJ) of the old Class AA, Eastern League (now International League), where he won 26 games, and lost 10. Despite his successes and name, Plank never received another chance to make it to the Major Leagues.

He made stops at Meriden (CT), Springfield (MA), and Northampton (CT) of the Connecticut League, and Binghamton (NY) of the New York State League. In 1913, while with South Bend (IN) of the Central League, he was offered a position to be baseball coach of his Alma Mater, Gettysburg College.



Ira Plank

Elected to Gettysburg College Hall of Fame in 1989. Longest reigning baseball coach in school history, coaching over 37 years from 1912 to 1948.

Courtesy of Special Collections, Musselman Library, Gettysburg College, Gettysburg, PA.

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This would begin a 38-year relationship with the college, as Plank would become the most successful baseball coach in the school's history, before retiring in 1950, due to poor health. His 35-year coaching record was 277 wins, 175 losses and six ties. His best team was in 1916, when they went 11-4, and 1948, when the team went 11-2. Among his best players were pitchers, Clarence Heir aka "Topsy Hoar", Paul Sherman and Earl Howard, catcher James "Bill" Mahaffie, and first basemen Jackie Kyle and "Deacon" Motter.

In 1915, while coaching the college, Plank was named Player/Manager of the new Gettysburg franchise in the Class D, Blue Ridge League. Using several of his college players, Plank tried to place a respectable team on the field, but the club was using the college diamond, Nixon Field, which had no fence, and was limited in collecting admissions. After two losing seasons at the helm, Plank left the minor league club to concentrate on his college duties. He stayed in the league, played briefly for the neighboring Hanover (PA) Raiders in 1917, but retired as a player after that season.

In addition to coaching, Plank was a successful businessman, opening a garage business with his brother Eddie. After Eddie Plank's death in 1926, Plank he operated a Ford dealership, that became as Adam County Motors, and in the mid-1940's co-owned another dealership with Roy Hankey, which became known as Gettysburg Ford after his death. Plank and his wife, the former Blanche K. Barker (b. 1882 – d. 1973), had one son, Ira David Plank, Jr (b. 1923– d. 2003).

At the age of 69 years, Plank suffered a heart attack on August 9, 1951, and was admitted to the hospital. After almost a month stay, he was released, but died six days later at his home in Gettysburg, PA on a Friday afternoon, September 14, 1951, of complications from the heart condition. His is buried with his family at Evergreen Cemetery in Gettysburg, PA.

Ira D. Plank, Sr. was elected to the Gettysburg College Sports Hall of Fame in 1989.

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Listed below is Ira Plank's Minor League Batting and Pitching Record.

Ira Plank's Known Minor League Statistics

BATTING

Year	Club	League	AVG	G	AB	R	H	TB	2B	3B	HR	RBI*	SAC	SB
1903	NORWICH-CT	CON-B	.227	36	119	15	27	31	4	0	0	-	1	1
1904	NORWICH-CT	CON-B	.301	28	93	11	28	29	1	0	0	-	-	3
1905	ALTOONA-PA	TSL-B	No Statistics Available											
1906	NORWICH-CT	CON-B	.302	58	172	31	52	70	9	0	3	-	9	2
1907	NORWICH-CT	CON-B	.236	54	144	15	34	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
1908	MERIDEN-CT	CON-B	.160	17	50	2	8	10	0	1	0	-	0	0
1908	JERSEY CITY-NJ	EAS-AA	.125	6	16	1	2	2	0	0	0	-	0	0
1909	NORTHAMPTON-CT	CON-B	.293	72	205	21	60	68	6	1	0	-	14	3
1910	SPRINGFIELD-MA	CON-B	.168	47	125	8	21	23	2	0	0	-	9	2
1911	BINGHAMPTON-BY	NYSL-C	.260	32	73	5	19	-	-	-	-	-	5	0
1912	READING-PA	TSL-B	.261	6	22	4	6	-	-	-	-	-	0	0
1914	SOUTH BEND-IN	CEN-B	No Statistics Available											
1915	GETTYSBURG-PA	BRL-D	.249	54	173	25	43	45	2	0	0	10	4	7
1916	GETTYSBURG-PA	BRL-D	.278	64	212	23	59	67	6	1	0	24	3	3
1917	HANOVER-PA	BRL-D	.192	37	120	11	23	24	1	0	0	5	9	0
MINOR LEAGUE TOTALS			13 years	.251	511	1524	172	382						

PITCHING

Year	Club	League	GP	IP	W-L	.Pct	H	R	ER	BB	SO	ERA
1903	NORWICH-CT	CON-B	33	238	18-14	.563	228	96	-	49	159	-
1904	NORWICH-CT	CON-B	20	-	4-9	.308	-	39	-	-	33	-
1905	ALTOONA-PA	TSL-B	No Statistics Available									
1906	NORWICH-CT	CON-B	36	-	21-13	.618	-	-	-	-	-	-
1907	NORWICH-CT	CON-B	37	239	26-10	.722	-	-	-	66	138	-
1908	MERIDEN-CT	CON-B	17	-	7-10	.412	-	-	-	-	-	-
1908	JERSEY CITY-NJ	EAS-AA	5	39	1-2	.333	26	17	-	3	10	-
1909	NORTHAMPTON-CT	CON-B	32	-	9-18	.333	-	-	-	102	122	-
1910	SPRINGFIELD-MA	CON-B	35	-	16-17	.485	204	113	-	109	119	-
1911	BINGHAMPTON-NY	NYSL-C	20	-	7-13	.350	-	-	-	-	-	-
1915	GETTYSBURG-PA	BRL-D	4	16 1/3	1-0	1.000	13	3	1	3	6	0.55
1916	GETTYSBURG-PA	BRL-D	2	6	0-1	.000	13	7	4	3	4	6.00*
MINOR LEAGUE PITCHING TOTALS			10 years	242			110-107	510				

*Unofficial. Runs Batted In and Earned Run Averages were not official statistics compiled by the Class D, Blue Ridge League.

Special Thanks to Darrell Hanson of Iowa State University. Statistics compiled through Reach and Spalding Baseball Guides from 1905 through 1918, thanks to Andrew North of SABR-L, Fergus, Ontario, Canada. Blue Ridge league stats through author's research. Boston Daily Globe, "Disposes Three Players—New York American League Club...," February 20, 1908, page 5; The Gettysburg Times, "Ira Plank Dies Today", September 14, 1951, front page. The Gettysburg Times, "Ira D. Plank Funeral Rites 2:30 PM Sunday", September 15, 1951, front page, page WWI Draft Registration Card from 1918 through www.ancestry.com; Statistical research provided by Andrew North, SABR member, Fergus, Ontario, Canada; 1910 Spalding Baseball Guide, St. Louis, MO; and Ray Nemeec, SABR member, basebalray@aol.com.