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The Fay Furies

BY DR. DALE TEETERS

Baseball has long been the national pastime, and it certainly wasn't any different in the small towns in Western Oklahoma just after statehood. The town of Fay in the southeastern corner of Dewey County was a case in point. During the spring and summer of 1912, only two topics consistently made headlines in the local newspaper—moving the post office up the hill into Fay proper and the Fay baseball team.

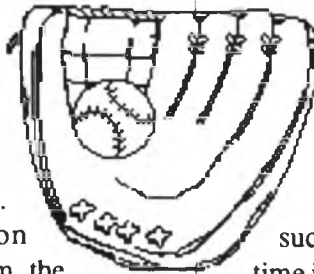
As the baseball season approached, cries went up from the community to field a team. The editor of THE FAY FORUM implored local businesses to support such an endeavor. "Do you realize that a ball team brings more business to a town? We have the material for the best team in the country. The boys don't ask a salary; all they ask is that you help bear the expense. Will you do it? It's up to you," taunted the editor. The town was for it, and a baseball team, the Fay Furies, was formed.

The team played in a cow pasture west of town. Sober, Didier, Jones, Hussey, Eldridge, Phipps, and Wheeler were names of some of the players. These men were the fathers and grandfathers of some of the current residents of Fay; and if you check Fay's phone book today, you see many of these names listed. Colonel Sober was the catcher for the team and one of the

stars. The newspaper often reported on his hitting and base running, which is no doubt the reason that he was often referred to in the newspaper as "Ty Cobb." The name "Cobb" stuck with him the rest of his life and so did the effect of his years of playing baseball. Several of the tips of his fingers were permanently bent from catching fast balls for many seasons with the Fay team.

The 1912 season turned out to be a successful and an interesting one. At the time in Oklahoma's history, trains stopped at all the small towns, and the players for the various town teams would catch the trains at the country depots to make the away games. Having to deal with train schedules proved to be a problem in some cases. When Thomas played the Furies at Fay, the game was called in the eighth inning so the Thomas players could catch their train home. The game officially ended in an 11-11 tie, even though there was some dispute: the Fay paper reported "Some who kept score say it was 12 to 10 in favor of Fay."

Fay and Oakwood have had a long-standing rivalry. It was no different that season, even though Fay beat the Oakwood "Owlets" (as the paper called them) the four times they played by scores of 12-9, 16-12, 17-4, and 18-4.



The last game between the two teams was probably the most representative of the intense competition. As the Fay paper put it, "A few accidents marred the pleasure of the game." First, the Oakwood second baseman's finger was knocked out of joint by a thrown ball. He refused to leave the game but was moved to the outfield and continued to play. According to the paper, "On went the ball game." The next inning, a Fay player was lost because a ball hit him on the end of his thumb, causing a bad cut. The two teams finally managed to finish; but as the spectators were leaving after the game, a local resident, Frank Baird, was hit in the stomach by a thrown ball and knocked unconscious. The Fay paper maintained that the worst accident was "the way the boys knocked down Oakwood's playhouse."

The big series of the season was the two games between the Furies and Watonga. Watonga had a good team that year, and, according to the Fay paper, they were "...out for the amateur championship of the state." Fay won at home 11-2, but Watonga claimed that not all its team was there for the game. By this time, the Oakwood community was angry at having already lost three times to Fay and sided with Watonga. The editor of the Fay paper wanted to keep the citizens excited and ran a short excerpt from the Oakwood newspaper which said, "Of course Watonga[s] first or second team would not bother playing Fay, for they like to have practice when they go that far from home, and Fay can't play fast enough to give Watonga good practice." Watonga also got into the act. At the rematch a week later in Watonga, handbills passed out to the crowd before the game said, "Fay defeated a bunch of our school boys last Saturday by a score of 11 to

2 and now they imagine they can play ball." The game at Watonga was close, but Watonga won it.

By mid-season, the town was behind its team 100%. The paper started running half-page ads announcing the next ball game, and the community purchased new uniforms for the team. The Furies played Oakwood, Eagle City, Custer City, Thomas, Watonga, and other local teams that summer, sometimes as many as four times each. For the season they lost once to Watonga and Thomas and "tied" Thomas in the eight-inning game the day the Thomas club had to catch its train.

The weather was still nice in September, and the team wanted to continue to play; but according to the paper, "Though the manager of the Furies has been trying hard to match some more games, no one wants to play the Furies." The paper stated, "The Furies have played

themselves out of a game." And so the 1912 season ended.

Today, when you attend a sporting event in Western Oklahoma, you are sure to see that competitive spirit between the communities that we are all proud of. Remember that this spirit is based on the long history of the cities and towns of Western Oklahoma. It is based on playing-days-past such as the 1912 season of the Fay Furies.

CREDITS: a personal interview with Annabelle Scott, "Ty Cobb's" daughter, and 1912 issues of THE FAY FORUM.

(DR. DALE TEETERS is a professor of Chemistry at the University of Tulsa. He was reared on a farm near Fay and graduated with a B.S. in Chemistry from Southwestern and a Ph.D. in Chemistry from O.U. He has expressed an interest to talk with anyone who knows the history of the Fay community.) *

Designed by Matt Heckman



The Fay Furies baseball team circa 1912. Kneeling left to right: Elmer Sober, Walter Burnison, Floyd Jones, Colonel Sober (Ty Cobb), and Gus Didier. Top Row, left to right: Unknown, Edd Spiker, Henry Didier, unknown, Eli Phipps. Photograph submitted by Dale Teeters.