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Baseball Scorebook From Ty Cobb's 1904 Season in Anniston, Alabama

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The baseball scorecard is one of the wonders of the sportsworld. On two small pages the basic skeleton of a baseball game, inning by inning, is laid out in some detail, and anyone going to it can reconstruct a significant portion of a game. These and other devices, such as the box score, are the essentials of baseball record keeping. A few weeks ago Robert Rivers of the Art Department at the University of Central Florida dropped one such scorecard on my desk, and when I began to explore its contents, I was amazed.

The scorebook itself is a product of the Victor Sporting Goods Company, and in the front pages the O.P. Caylor System of scoring was explained. O.P. Caylor was a turn of the century sportswriter and a baseball entrepreneur.

The size of the book is approximately 5" x 8", with a dark red cover. At the top of the first page, written by hand in ink is the notation, "Anniston Base Ball Parks Association." The peculiarity was in the spelling of "baseball" as two words, a practice that was rapidly fading by the turn of the century.

The first game recorded in the book took place in Anniston, Alabama, May 16, 1904, between the Anniston Noblemen and the Bessemer Marvels. The scorebook tells us a great deal. The game started at 3:30 and ended at 5:44, time of game 2:14. Gate receipts were \$86.80. The umpire was Mr. N.C. Smith. Bessemer won the game 9-4, outhitting Anniston 9-5. The game was error filled with 5 by Anniston, and 4 by Bessemer.

The most startling thing about the scorecard is found in the Anniston lineup. Hitting fifth and playing left field that day was a player named Cobb, who went one for four, had one error, and two putouts. In the first inning Cobb reached on an error by the second baseman and later scored on a single. He struck out twice, and singled in the 6th inning.

In total there are twenty-one Anniston home games recorded in this scorebook, running through July 9, 1904. Ty Cobb played in the outfield in each of these games, and what we have here is a complete record of Cobb's games in Anniston that early summer of 1904. The scorekeeper was Lloyd Rivers, grandfather of Robert Rivers, and the legibility and completeness of the record is amazing.

In 1904 Ty Cobb was just beginning his professional baseball career. He signed with Augusta of the Sally League but after only a few games was released along with pitcher, Thad Hayes, who was a friend of the manager at Anniston. Hayes was invited to play in Anniston, and he knew that Anniston was looking for an outfielder. He persuaded Cobb to go with him to this town in northeastern Alabama, or so goes the story as Cobb tells it.

Cobb signed on with Anniston for \$65 per month and room and board, a very good wage for a seventeen year old. He stayed there about three months, until Augusta contacted him and offered him another contract. He returned to Augusta for the remainder of the 1904 season, played in 1905 with Augusta, and then joined the Detroit Tigers late in the 1905 season.

The Anniston Noblemen were part of the Tennessee-Alabama League, along with Columbia, Knoxville (the Mountaineers), Chattanooga ('Noogans), Sheffield, Decatur, Huntsville, and the Bessemer Marvels. The league was not a member of the National Association, and therefore was considered an outlaw league.

Cobb played very well in the few months in Anniston and in his autobiography says he hit about .370. The records in the scorebook indicate he was 30 for 80, a .375 average, over the twenty-one home games. He hit one home run, had five triples, and three doubles. He scored 16 runs. In those games he failed to hit only twice, had hits in his first 11 games, and had 11 multiple hit games. He played both left and center field, and batted in several different spots in the order, with second and third the most common.

This is the only existing record of this part of Ty Cobb's career. In addition it offers a small window on small town baseball in the early part of this century. Most games were played in under two hours, with the shortest games, three of them, at 1:25. Average time seems to be in the 1:40 range. Attendance varies from about 200 to 500 with gate receipts ranging from \$46 on a ladies day, to \$100 for most games. Most games were played in the late afternoon, starting anywhere from 3:30 to 4:15, with two morning games which started at 9:30.

To be able to hold this scorecard in your hand, almost a century after the games were played, gives you a special feeling for the power and spirit of history.

On Sport and Society this is Dick Crepeau reminding you that you don't have to be a good sport to be a bad loser.

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