



Chautauqua Sports Hall of Fame

15 West Third Street - Jamestown, NY 14701

March 2015

Yes, Irene, Babe Ruth Played in Celoron and Hit a Ball into the Lake

(from an article written by Greg Peterson, CSHOF inductee 2012)

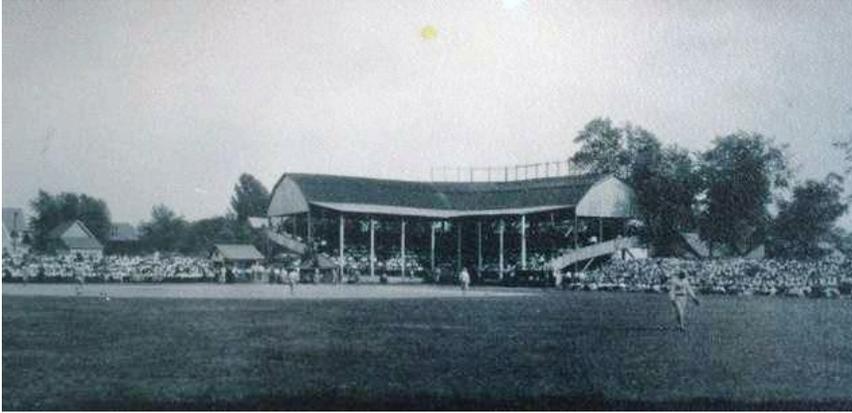


The October 17, 1921 headlines screamed “Babe Ruth to play here.” The *Jamestown Post* went on to say: “Babe Ruth! The name falls like magic on the ear of every baseball fan. Those who have read and heard of his prowess have longed for the opportunity to feast their optics on this Champion of Champions and baseball phenom.”

On the night of October 13, 1921, the day after the Yankees lost the World Series to the New York Giants, reports circulated in the New York papers that **Babe Ruth** (left) and his Yankee teammate Bob Meusel had signed contracts with a promoter for a barnstorming tour to start immediately after the last series game.

In the early years of the twentieth century, players from World Series teams went on tours and replayed the Series in backwater towns. Sometimes the touring players were truly representative of the pennant-winning team; more often, they had only two or three top players and a bunch of amateurs. In either case, they were billed as World Series heroes and tickets were sold on that basis.

On the evening of October 13, 1921, Babe Ruth left for Buffalo. He played in Buffalo on the 14th. The *Jamestown Evening-Journal*, the city’s other paper, stated on Monday October 17, 1921, “Babe Ruth is Coming to City.” It further quoted Ruth, “I am not in any fight to see who is the greatest man in baseball, I am out to earn an honest dollar, and at the same time give baseball fans in these towns a chance to see the big players in action. I think we are doing something good for baseball....”



The exhibition game was scheduled at **Celoron Park** on Tuesday, October 18, 1921. George Maltby, manager of Celoron Park, decided to open the doors of the park to present this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

“It is a big undertaking to bring an attraction of this size and importance to Celoron, but Mr. Maltby, after posting a big guarantee (\$1,000) decided to take the chance and ask in return only that all red-blooded fans turn out and enable him to break even on the deal. It is a chance that many will never have again and if the fans show their spirit, it is a foregone conclusion that Celoron Park will be filled to capacity. Oh the joy of it all, seeing Babe Ruth clouting a few of those dear \$2.50 balls into the blue waters of Chautauqua Lake.”

The anticipation was great in the city. The results of the previous four games in Elmira and Buffalo were covered in the papers. The *Jamestown Post* noted in an article that Falconer’s own, Hugh Bedient, hero of the 1912 World Series and a former teammate of Babe Ruth, would pitch against the “All-Star” team.

The paper covered every move of the Babe as he traveled to Jamestown. He arrived at 2:07 a.m. on October 18th and stayed at the Hotel Samuels. (Editor’s note: The Chautauqua Sports Hall of Fame is located in the old Hotel Samuels Building.)



During the morning, a large number of local fans gathered in the lobby of the hotel waiting with expectant interest for the appearance of **Babe Ruth** and **Bob Meusel** (right). However, the major leaguers did not make an early appearance, and came down shortly before noon. Everyone expected a large crowd for the game that was to start at 3:15. Pat Riley was announced as the umpire.

When game time approached, a light rain started. This caused a temporary delay and a reduction in the number of expected fans. It was believed the rain kept hundreds of fans away from the game.

Nevertheless, the crowd was treated to a real show. The *Jamestown Evening-Journal* on Wednesday October 19, 1921 captured the highlights. “Ruth’s Stars Defeat Locals. Meusel’s Home Run Scoring ‘Babe’ Feature of Game.”

The *Evening-Journal* went on to state: Babe Ruth made good his promise to knock one into the lake, but it did not come during the game. In a long-distance hitting exhibition before the game, Ruth knocked one into the blue water of Chautauqua Lake, a distance of over 500 feet.”

The *Jamestown Post* described it as follows: “The Babe lifted one over right centerfield which found a resting place in the waters of the lake. This drive would have gone for a home run in most any game. It is a feat that has seldom been accomplished on the local lot and it brought great cheers from the crowd, which the ‘enfant terrible’ acknowledged with a doff of his cap and winning smile.”

Dorothy Ruth Pirone, the Babe’s daughter, in her book entitled *My Dad The Babe*, described the hit as follows: In Jamestown, one of his first stops on the tour, Babe hit a home run into Lake Chautauqua – it has yet to be retrieved.”

Whether fact or fantasy, baseball lore was created, and to this day people still tell of the Babe crashing one into the lake.



Hugh Bedient (left) was announced and his appearance was met with large applause. He clearly was the local hero. Hugh’s career highlights included a game in which he struck out 42 men in a 23-inning semi-pro game at Corry to establish what is generally believed to be an all-time record for any kind of baseball, and his brilliant victory over Christy Mathewson of the New York Giants in the 1912 World Series.

Bedient and Ruth played together in Boston in 1914. It was reported that Hugh was in a good mood and kidded with the big man whenever the Bambino was at bat. Hugh intimated that he would not be averse to letting Ruth drive a ball to Greenhurst, but the Sultan

of Swat failed to connect.

The final score was 14 to 10. An announced crowd of 2,500 jammed the wooden ballpark. Ruth was 2 for 5 but failed to get a home run in game play. So great was his legendary home run prowess that the *Jamestown Post* banner the next morning read: “Ruth Fails to Get Homer Here.” When Ruth failed to get a homer after hitting 59 during the 1921 season, it was banner news, even in an exhibition game.

Postscript

In 1921 'The Bambino' was coming off of his best season as a pro to that point. He had batted .378 with 171 runs batted in (RBI) and made baseball history by slugging 59 home runs. Ruth led the American League in home runs, RBI, runs scored, slugging percentage and total bases while leading the Yankees to their first pennant. The Yankees lost in the World Series to their cross town rivals the Giants 5 games to 3.



In deciding to barnstorm after the season, Ruth and his Yankee teammate Bob Meusel broke a major league rule against barnstorming by players who participated in the World Series. The first Commissioner in baseball history, **Kenesaw Mountain Landis** (at left between Ruth and Meusel), believed that the Series should be the most important event of the baseball season. With baseball's reputation having suffered from the Black Sox scandal of 1919 Landis did not want anything to

take away from the fans faith in the game.

According to legend when Ruth heard that Landis meant to enforce the rule he reportedly said, 'Tell the old guy to go jump in the lake.' (Editor's question: Chautauqua Lake?)

The Commissioner fined Babe Ruth, considered the greatest player in baseball history, and Meusel their full World Series shares of \$3,500 and suspended them for the first six weeks of the 1922 season. Landis' handling of Ruth is considered by some to have strengthened his role as Commissioner more than any other act.

Despite protests from the fans, Ruth was not reinstated and began the 1922 season in street clothes. Even when he came back, his suspension did not lead to reform. Ruth was suspended twice more in 1922, once for arguing and throwing dirt on an umpire and then for cursing at another.

Ruth's antics would not stop the greatest dynasty in baseball history from winning its second consecutive pennant. And in the 110 games that he played he hit .315 with 35 home runs and 99 RBI.

1922 was a tumultuous year for Ruth and the Yankees. Some say it was the Babe's worst season. And it all began when Commissioner Kenesaw Mountain Landis made sure that he paid a price. He also made sure that everyone in baseball knew that not even the greatest player in baseball history was exempt from breaking the rules - rules that extended all the way to Celoron Park.