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Swat Erickson Went from Sandlots To Big Leagues, Once Holding Rival Batsmen from Hitting to Outfield

Jamestown Pitcher Likes Pacific Coast Loop Best; Is Happy On His Farm

The start of another baseball season this spring recalls the fact that it was just a quarter of a century ago that Erick (Swat) Erickson, who later went on to the minor and major leagues, made his debut as a pitcher on the local sandlots.

Swat, tall, lanky right-hander, was a member of Len Carlson's old Jamestown A. C. nine back in 1912, the same year that Hugh Bedient was winning far-flung fame as a member of the Boston Red Sox in the memorable World Series with the New York Giants.

After graduating from the city league, Swat joined H. H. Lerow's semi-pro club at Celoron park and in 1914, in company with several other ball players from this vicinity, went down to Dallas, Tex. From the Lone Star State league, the Jamestown athlete was sold to the New York Giants of which Christy Mathewson was then a member.

One day in the spring of 1915, when the late John McGraw's club was training in Texas, Swat was hit in the hand by a batted ball. His injury consisted of a fractured right index finger. The accident occurred in an exhibition game at Waco resulted in his being shipped to the Rochester Internationals, with which he finished the season.

Swat's finger healed in time and although he had his heart on going to the Chicago Cubs it was Ty Cobb's Tigers who next secured the services of the big blond flinger. Erickson remained on the auto city club's roster for a couple of months and was then sold to the San Francisco Seals of the Pacific Coast loop, which he says is the best in the country.

During the 1917 season Swat pitched good ball for the California team, winning 32 and losing 15 games. He took part in 62 contests frequently appearing in the role of a relief pitcher. He led the league that season the Seals won the pennant, having the most strikeouts and the lowest earned run average in the entire circuit.

The death of Ward, millionaire baker, president of the Federal league and its subsequent collapse prevented Swat from returning east as a member of the Brooklyn club on which he had counted, but he came back home to enter the army.

Stationed at Camp Dix, N. J., in 1918, Swat, as a member of its baseball team turned in two no-hit games. Service teams at that time were composed largely of big league ball players.

Returning to the Detroit Tigers in 1919, Swat was traded to the Washington Senators, where he remained until 1923. While in the capitol city, Erickson played under three different managers in as many seasons, Griffith, McBride and Milan each having their hand on the helm of the Nats, whose pitching mainstay for many years was Walter Johnson.

While a member of the Senators. Swat was honored by several hundred Jamestown fans who treked to Cleveland and presented him with a watch.

A late snowstorm in Milwaukee in the spring of 1924 was the beginning of the end of Swat's professional ball career. A member of the Millers club, Erickson appeared on the mound in the opening season game.

It was a cold day and snow had been cleared from the field to permit the American Association teams to pry off the lid on the cold, wet diamond.

Pitching to the last batter, Swat slipped and strained his shoulder. Trying to get back into form too quickly, the trouble spread to his back and the next year he was home, tossing 'em over the plate for Falconer and Fredonia. Later he pitched for the late Billy Webb's Spiders here for several seasons.

While a member of the Jamestown team, Swat blanked the Boston Braves 2-0, in an exhibition game at Celoron Park. A pinch hitter robbed the veteran hurler of a no-hit game in the closing stages.

One of the most memorable games Swat recalls was played at Elmira one season when he and several other big leaguers took part in a post season series between Elmira and Hornell clubs.

An intense spirit of rivalry existed between these southern tier cities and no amount of money was spared to achieve a triumph. Bedient had been pitching for Hornell and the late Lee Straight, manager of the Elmira Arctics, signed Swat to add strength for the three-game series.

In the final game Swat was opposed on the mound by Slim Harris, who later went to the Cleveland Indians. Throughout the game not a single ball was hit to the Elmira outfield as Swat steadily mowed down the opposition. The only batter to hit the ball hard was Benny Bengough, N. Y. Yankees' catcher, and Erickson nabbed his drive. The final score was Elmira 2, Hornell 0.

Ripley, whose Believe It Or Not Cartoons appear in the Evening Journal, once called attention to a similar feat where the ball was not hit to an outfielder.

Throughout his career in baseball, Swat dreamed of the day when he would have a farm. Today that desire is fulfilled. He owns a 15 acre farm on the East Hill road overlooking the city which saw the start and finish of his life on the baseball diamond.