It Isn't What You Pay for a Busher That Counts---Your $400 Man May Be a Star and $20,000 Beauty a Quince

DAME FORTUNE PLAYS STELLAR BASEBALL ROLE

Acquisition of Great Major Leaguers Is Largely Matter of Luck.

MANY HIGH PRICED MEN ARE FAILURES

By SHORTSTOP.

The subject under discussion was the 1916 Athletics. No tailender in baseball history ever evoked the conversation which has been spilled over Connie Mack's "terrible" misfits. The sight of this team grovelling in the dust, after it had been cock of the walk for many years, has opened many channels for thought.

"The more I see of baseball the more I am convinced that the development of baseball stars is entirely a matter of luck," said the old time fan.

"Take the case of Connie Mack. He has brought results; he is the only manager who ever won six major league championships and three world's championships. Yet to-day he has the most miserable tailender of all baseball history, a team which is an insult to American League fans. I understand that Connie Mack has tried out over a hundred players, and his team looks worse now than before. Just a fortnight ago the team ended a losing streak which was worse than anything ever hung up in baseball—forty-one defeats in forty-three games. The question I now want to ask is, 'Was it the keenness of Mack that enabled him to build up that infield of Baker, Collins, Barry and McInnis from an obscure minor leaguer, two college stars and a schoolboy or did the element of luck figure almost entirely in the development of this infield?'

Does Luck Figure?

"Can Mack ever bring together such an infield? If he can, then he deserves the title of the 'wizard of baseball.' However, so far Connie has tried out about two dozen players on third base, collegians, minor leaguers, semi-pros, catchers and outfielders, but is he any nearer to a second Frank Baker than when he started?"

The veteran fan who opened this argument knows baseball. He has seen many high priced minor league phenoms blow, while each season he has seen several new obscure names recognized as stars. He says from personal observation at least 90 per cent. of the little leaguers that bring thousands to their owners are bloomers and that everything in baseball hinges on luck.

Shortstop would not string along with him on all his dope, but his reasoning was sound and his questions and statement were pertinent and to the point.

Is there such a thing as the development of a baseball star or is his discovery and subsequent development entirely a matter of luck? Shortstop will not say "entirely," but he will say "largely."

Bench Course Not Needed.

I believe Connie Mack or some other first class manager can tell a youngster who is possible of development from an absolute dub, but after that neither Mack nor any one else can tell how that player will act under big league fire or what several years of baseball tuition can do for him. From close observation Shortstop does not think much of the bench method of development. When permitted to carry a large roster McGraw used it successfully in the development of Merkle, Burns, Fletcher, Robertson and Snodgrass. Yet would not Burns or Fletcher have been as good if they had been put to work immediately, as was Doyle? The Hornsbys, Watsons, Mamauxes, Sislers, Maranvilles needed no bench course to finish their instruction.

On the other hand McGraw carried Art Wilson for five full seasons, and when he needed a man to take Chief Meyers's place in 1913 he was forced to go out and buy Larry McLean. Grover Hartley put in three full years on the Giant bench and isn't a better catcher to-day than when he joined the Giants in 1911.

Ferdie Schupp was carried three full years before McGraw entrusted him with games, and after showing flashes of rare form he has developed into an in and outer. Schauer came a few months after Schupp in 1913, and in his fourth year knew no more about big league pitching than in his first. He had natural ability, but no head. To-day Schauer is going bad in the minors. Did his long bench term in New York enhance or retard his development?

Plank a Star From the Start.

But we started to bring out the point as to whether a manager can tell how an obscure ball player will act in the big leagues. In 1901 Connie Mack heard of a young pitcher going great with Gettysburg College. Mack sent him a contract. His name was Plank, who then was 25. He was a star as soon as he pitched one big league game. Sixteen years later Plank still is pitching the same kind of ball and recently permitted five hits in three consecutive nine inning games.

In 1906 Mack sent a contract to the all around star of the Colby College team, Jack Coombs. Coombs reported and won a shutout in the first game against Washington. A few months later he won a twenty-four inning game against Boston. Coombs then pitched just mediocre ball for three years, but in 1910 he won 33 games for Mack, 13 shutouts and 3 World's Series victories over the Cubs. The other day he held the Cubs to one hit, and only 27 men faced him.

Now for the other side of the story. A young man named Hasselbacher was pitching as great ball for Penn State this spring as did Eddie Plank for Gettysburg in 1901. Mack sent for him. Another young man, Williams, pitched invincible ball for North Carolina; Jingling Johnson was a star at Ursinus; Minott Crowell pitched as grand ball for Brown as any college pitcher ever flashed. All were called to the Athletic colors. So far none of these boys has shown anything, and after getting some fierce drubbings Hasselbacher and Crowell have been released.

Luck a Big Factor.

Who can say that any manager could tell that Collegians Plank and Coombs would be stars of the first magnitude almost from the minute they came into fast company and that Crowell and Hasselbacher would fail? Was it not a great element of luck in Mack's favor that Plank and Coombs turned out the players they did? Why does Connie Mack bring his army of college pitchers to Shibe Park? Is it not in the hope that out of the lot he may hope to find another Bender, Plank or Coombs?

Let us take up another phase of the situation. In 1908 Frank Baker played third base for Reading in the Tri-State League, a Class B circuit. He was quite a buster up there, hit a flock of homers and extra base hits, and Mack paid perhaps $1,000 for him. "Home" played a few games at third in 1908. In 1909 he hit the cover off the ball down in the South; he hit it in the spring series with the Phillies, and started to club from the first day of the season, finishing his first year with an average of .305. Baker was one of the great hitters of the game after he was in the league a week.

In 1911 the Giants purchased Art Bues, a third baseman, from the Seattle club of the Northwestern League, also a Class B league. Bues led his league with an average of .352, and smashed out 27 home runs that year, and he got a lot of space in the New York papers that winter. He made the 1912 Giant training camp, but lasted just long enough to eat a sandwich in New York. He went to Jersey City and was later tried out by the Cubs, but couldn't hold on. He is now somewhere out in the sticks.

Here were two youngsters of remarkable swatting ability in Class B circles. Neither had much but hitting to recommend him, as Baker did not have the grace of a Sisler when he broke into the American League in 1908. Baker hit big league pitching even harder than the Class B brand; but against big league pitching Bues was a "bust."

Was there any way of telling in advance that one would be a star and the other a dub? When Mack rebuilt his club in 1908 the first man he selected to fill old Jimmy Collins's shoes was Frank Baker. When he tried finding a successor for J. Franklin it wasn't so easy. Did not Dame Fortune smile sweetly on Mack when his green country boy turned out to be such a star?

It really is a wonder that big league club owners are willing to pay real big money for great minor league players. The old timer who started this argument points out that 90 per cent. of the highly touted minor leaguers are rank failures. He uses that as an argument that it is entirely a matter of luck whether or not a player will make good in fast company.

Especially in recent years have so many of these "big money" minor leaguers turned out to be bloomers. Those who have failed have a big margin on those who have made good. Charley Weeghman of the Cubs recently claimed he paid more than the O'Toole price ($22,500) for Shortstop Chuck Wortman. Wortman looked like a million dollars in the Association, but so far he has not set the National League on fire. He is barely hitting over .200 and piling up a young mountain of errors.

Still, it is too early to pass judgment on Wortman, and he may not belong to the O'Toole class. However, nobody expects Wortman to develop into the player Maranville is, and the Rabbit cost the Braves less than a thousand when they bought him from New Bedford in 1912.

$1,000 Lemons in A. A.

Especially has the American Association raised a great crop of thousand dollar lemons. If Wortman, who was bought from Kansas City, fails he will not lack precedent. Through some reason or other the Association seems to be able to get much bigger money for its stars than the other two Class AA leagues, the International and the Pacific Coast leagues.

The first big lemon from the Association was "Bull" Durham, who came to the Giants from Indianapolis with Marquard in 1908. The Rube brought $11,500, the highest sum ever paid for a minor league player up to that time and Durham $6,000. Durham was put to work the same afternoon that Marquard had his first blowout in the fall of 1908. Bull, who is now in the movies, struck out the side when he made a start as a Giant, and then he never put out another big team batsman.

But for McGraw's patience and the inability to ship Marquard out of the league on waivers Marquard might have remained the $11,000 lemon to the end of his days. Giant fans well remember the poor Rube in 1909 and 1910, when he couldn't earn his salt. In the spring of 1911 McGraw planned to ship him over to Joe McGinnity in Newark, but the Giants could not get waivers on the player.

Marquard's Case an Example.

Rube, coached by Wilbert Robinson, hit his top form in the early summer of 1911, and for three years he practically was unbeatable, except when he met Baker. If Marquard had been shunted to Newark in 1911 he might never have come back. Was there not an element of luck in the fact that waivers were not granted?

The most historic A. A. bloomer, of course, was Marty O'Toole, whom Pittsburg purchased from St. Paul in 1911 after some spirited bidding, the price paid being $22,500. His catcher, Kelley, also was bought for something like $8,000, but both were fizzles and are now back in the minors. O'Toole couldn't even hold on with an Association team. He recently was sent to the Western League.

Then Charley Comiskey paid something like $20,000 for Larry Chappelle of Milwaukee in 1914. An early injury incapacitated him, but he never showed any big league hitting ability. He was thrown in with Roth, Klepfer and $30,000 when Comiskey bought Joe Jackson from Cleveland, and is now back in the Association, where he always seems to be able to punish the ball.

During the last year of the Fed war, 1915, big league clubs were not paying big prices for minor league talent, and the player who brought more than any other was Tipple of Indianapolis, who stood Messrs. Ruppert and Huston $11,500. Shortly after Tipple was bought he lost nine straight games with Indianapolis. He showed nothing at the Macon training camp of the Yankees last spring, and has been farmed to Baltimore, where his work has been only fair. He was recalled last week and will get another chance to earn his big price. On the other hand Urban Shocker, who looks like a real find, was picked up in the draft for a few hundred dollars. That is the way baseball luck breaks.

Other famous bloomers were Lena Blackburne, the Providence shortstop, who cost Comiskey $7,500 (a very high price for International League players) in 1908, and Lefty Russell, bought by Connie Mack from Baltimore for $12,000 in 1910. This Russell is an older brother of the Allen Russell now with the Yanks, and one of the few players Mack dug deep in his jeans to get. Russell shut out the Red Sox with three hits in his first game with the As and was called a successor to Plank. He never won another game, and is now playing first base for the Baltimore Internationals.

Yet it is not fair to assume that all high priced minor league players are failures. The Giants dug up $6,000 for Chief Meyers, and he was worth all of it, and Hal Chase lived up to his minor league reputation when he joined the Yankees in 1905. Fritz Maisel cost the Yankees $12,000 and the release of Daniels and Midkiff when he was bought from Baltimore in 1913, and Frank Gilhooley also vindicated the big money that the club twice paid to International League clubs for his release, despite the fact that Chance let him out in 1914 after he hit .330 in the preceding fall.

Comiskey is generally regarded as the most goldbricked magnate, but he found some real gold among the dross. Ray Schalk, his great catcher, and Hap Felsch, the Sox centre fielder, both cost in the neighborhood of $20,000, and are easily worth it.

But the Schalks, Chases and Felsches, players who graduate from the higher minor leagues and retain or better their Class AA standard in the big leagues, are the rarities.

Unknowns the Real Stars.

Who are the real stars of the game but the boys who come from some obscure country town and played ball in som elittle minor league? A year ago no one ever heard of Rodgers Hornsby but his parents, relatives, school chums and the Texas League fans. To-day the twenty-year-old Cardinal infielder is recognized as the greatest young star in the National League.

Two months ago "Mule" Watson, also of the Cards, had never been heard of except in southwest Texas. He startled big league fandom about a month ago by winning a shutout game from the great Alexander. Last week he beat Sallee, 1 to 0. Perhaps he is another Ed Walsh; he is acting like one.

Seventeen years ago a name, "Mathewson," appeared in a Giant box score. The papers said "a wild semi-pro finished the game." New York never gave Matty a tumble then. He was sent back to Norfolk, and the Reds drafted him. Then the Giants thought maybe there was something to this Mathewson after all, and got him back in a trade for Rusie.

Did anything luckier ever happen to a ball club? Imagine a club letting a man like Mathewson go, and then getting him back before the other club had a chance to try him and see what a find it had on its hands.

Here's Where Luck Figured.

You often hear the question "What ails the Giants?" They are dropping away for the loss of a Mathewson. Can any one say how many of his five pennants McGraw would have won had Cincinnati kept Matty in 1901? How many of his six pennants would Connie Mack have won had the young Gettysburg collegian, Plank, turned out to be a Hasselbacher, the lean skinny Indian from Carlisle (Bender) a baseball Thorpe, and the tall youth from Colby a Crowell?

Eleven years ago, a name Cobb started to appear in the Detroit lineup. A Detroit fan might have asked Sam Crawford, Bill Donovan or some other old Tiger, "Who's this Cobb?" The answer would have been, "Oh, some fresh kid they picked up somewhere down South, who thinks he can hit. We got to lick 'im in the clubhouse every day to tone him down."

Yes, Cobb brought the grand sum of $700 when the Augusta club sold him to Detroit. Any other club could have had him for $750. They say Clark Griffith, then managing the Yankees, could have had Ty in a trade for some mediocre player, whose name I have forgotten. Giving Jennings, Donovan, Crawford, Mullen and the old Tigers full credit, Detroit never would have won a pennant without Ty. When a team picks up a player like Cobb it is luck.

Sox Paid $400 fo Speaker.

Who ever heard of Tris Speaker until he began to startle American League fandom in 1908? Tris was a star in the Texas League, and went so good that Boston purchased his release from Huston for the munificent sum of $400. He played two games with Boston in 1907, and in 1908 he was sent to Mickey Finn of Little Rock, with the privilege to buy him back for $500. Speaker then burned up the Southern Association. Several clubs were after him, but Finn, who hadn't even a written agreement with Boston, stuck to his gentleman's agreement, and let Boston buy him back for $500.

Who ever heard of Walter Johnson until he came to the tailend Washingtons in the fall of 1907 a youngster with terrific speed, who annoyed the veteran Washington bucksters because they couldn't hold any such cannon balls? One of the few who heard of this semi-pro marvel of Weiser, Idaho, was Fred Clarke, then manager of Pittsburg. The Weiser manager begged Clarke to give Walter a trial, but Pittsburg wouldn't even send train fare. They couldn't be bothered with bunk way out in Idaho. Joe Cantillon of Washington then agreed to take Walter on, and every one knows the result. Did not luck play right into the Washington club's hands?

Alexander Obtained by Draft.

Grover Cleveland Alexander won twenty-nine games and lost fourteen for the Syracuse New York State League in 1910, the Indianapolis club having farmed him to Syracuse. Several scouts looked Alec over, and any one could have bought him for $1,000, but no one did. The lucky Phillies put in a draft for him and got him for a few hundred dollars.

Perhaps the old timer was right. He says baseball is entirely a matter of luck. Do you agree with him?

ONE ON PITTSBURG.

Pirates Twice Buy Carson Bigbee, Northwestern Star.

Along in 1914 a youngster named Bigbee was proving a sensation with the baseball team of the University of Oregon and a crafty and far seeing Pittsburg scout signed him—and then somebody back in Pittsburg released him without even so much as a trial. The youngster finished school and went out to make his way in baseball.

A couple of weeks ago the Portland club paid $5,000 to Tacoma for his contract. He is the same Carson Bigbee released by Pittsburg without a trial over in 1914. The scouts who have watched his work say he is not a star and Ty Cobb, but rather he is a second Willie Keeler. He is a little fellow, a flash, who can hit, run and [illegible] unless the dope is all wrong, he will be a star in the game for some time to come.

REPORT "PERFECT GAMES"

Pitching must be good down in the Carolinas. Within the space of two days two correspondents sent in reports of "perfect games." At Lumberton, N. C., Lee Stone, pitching for Lumberton against Raeford, both independent teams, did not allow a man to reach first base. At Fountain Inn, S. C., Sam Lanford, pitching for Fountain Inn against Belton, both teams being independents, did not let a runner see the pitch home. He was with Anniston in the Georgia-Alabama League until that circuit folded for the season, while Lanford once pitched for New Orleans in the Southern. He was a sensational college pitcher ten years ago.

WARD LOOKS CLASS.

Chuck Ward, the Portland [illegible] made a fine impression on Bill Donovan, the Detroit scout, and it is reported he had advised his [illegible] Ward has taken care of himself this year and played good ball, which is equivalent to saying he was a [illegible] less in his conduct last season.

SPEAKER BROUGHT $400; O'TOOLE COST A FORTUNE

STARS WHO WERE ACQUIRED FOR A SONG, OTHERS WHO BROUGHT BIG PRICES, AND 3 "BEAUTIES" WHO FAILED

FRANK GILHOOLEY (NEW YORK AMER) YANKEES TWICE DUG DEEP FOR HIM BUT OWNERS DID NOT REGRET IT

TY COBB (DETROIT AMER) LUCKY TIGERS HANDED OVER ONLY $700. FOR THE GEORGIA PEACH

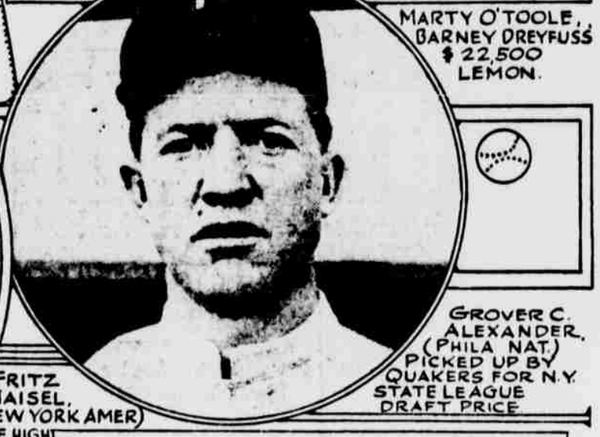
CHRISTY MATHEWSON CINCINNATI (NAT.) CINCINNATI HAD HIM IN 1901 BUT LET HIM GO IN A CHEESE TRADE

DAN TIPPLE, HE COST MORE THAN ANY 1915 BUSHER BUT WENT BACK TO THE BRUSH

RAY SCHALK (CHICAGO AMER) ONE $10,000 BEAUTY WHO MADE GOOD.

LARRY CHAPPELLE, WHITE SOX

FRITZ MAISEL, (NEW YORK AMER) CAME HIGH BUT PROVED HIS WORTH



MARTY O'TOOLE, BARNEY DREYFUSS $22,500 LEMON.

GROVER C. ALEXANDER, (PHILA NAT.) PICKED UP BY QUAKERS FOR N.Y. STATE LEAGUE DRAFT PRICE

TRIS SPEAKER, (CLEVELAND AMER) COSTS RED SOX ONLY $400. AND WAS SOLD FOR $50,000.

HAP FELSCH, (CHICAGO AMER.) COMISKEY DOESN'T REGRET THE $18,000. SPENT FOR HIM.