NAPOLEON LAJOIE
Modern Baseball's First Superstar

J. M. MURPHY
And now for something completely different... With this issue of The National Pastime we embark upon a new sort of excavation of baseball's glorious past: the special biographical issue. The first in what we hope will be a continuing series of baseball lives is Jim Murphy's comprehensive, affectionate portrait of Napoleon "Larry" Lajoie, a great figure of the game's early years whose accomplishments are little appreciated today. Mr. Murphy has restored Lajoie — "modern baseball's first superstar," he calls him — to the pedestal that was his in the years before Ruth.

SABR is publishing this book-length biography for several reasons. Principal among these is simply that it is good, and we think you will enjoy it. Second, Napoleon Lajoie represents that odd genre of baseball book so well suited to SABR members' interests: the book too obscure or out-of-fashion to be broadly popular yet too informal and cordial to be narrowly academic. Such a work generates little enthusiasm among publishers commercial or academic and would probably fail, were it not for SABR, to find an appreciative readership. And third, we hope that the publication of Jim Murphy's book will encourage other would-be biographers to take on worthy subjects they might otherwise dismiss as unpublishable. We have in hand autobiographies (yes!) of Kid Nichols and Rabbit Maranville, and would welcome biographies of many other neglected major figures.

SABR has published The National Pastime: A Review of Baseball History since 1982, when it began as a collection of essays unified by their writers' grasp of how the past informs and transforms the game's present. In 1984 TNP departed from its original format to present its first special issue, a pictorial devoted to baseball in the nineteenth century. Two years later, responding to the enthusiastic welcome that issue received, we extended the pictorial concept to the dead-ball era; and later this year, we will publish the third pictorial, covering the years 1920-1945. The original format, shelved for 1988, will return in 1989. After that, the climate will be ripe for innovation once more: keep those bright ideas coming, folks.

— John Thorn
Associate Editor: Mark Alvarez


First Printing — Ag Press, Manhattan, Kansas.
To my wife Jeanne. For the two years it took to complete this manuscript, she accepted an unfair share of domestic chores, and did it in the same way Napoleon Lajoie played second base: with grace and class.

...and to David Earl Nelson, who played second base for Cleveland in 1968-69 (and thus was a Napoleon Lajoie successor), and whose friendship has been a family treasure since 1966 when he played for the Pawtucket Indians and was dreaming about making it in the major leagues.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

J.M. Murphy is a retired newspaperman. He first worked with the Worcester, Mass., Evening Post, then spent some 35 years with the Pawtucket, R.I., Times, serving in several capacities, including city editor and managing editor. A graduate of Holy Cross College, he is the author of The Gabby Hartnett Story — from a Mill Town to Cooperstown. He resides in Pawtucket.
NAPOLEON LAJOIE
Modern Baseball's First Superstar
... to Jerry Sandau for his help, encouragement and invaluable services in producing the manuscript; and to Napoleon Lajoie’s nephew, Lionel Lajoie and his wife Doris of Woonsocket, R.I.; and niece, Lillian Lamoureaux of Holly Hill, Florida. Also to personnel at the Woonsocket Library, the Sayles Public Library in Pawtucket, the R.I. Historical Society, the Franco-American Genealogical Society, the Sporting News in St. Louis, the Library at The Cooperstown Hall of Fame, The Society for American Baseball Research, St. Jean Baptiste Society in Woonsocket; to Sheila J. Murphy for copy reading assistance; to Jim Cannon, Veronica Holt, William F. Harty, Peter Vandersloot, Lawrence R. Murphy, Joseph A. Murphy, and Harold and Yvonne Baszner; and to my friends in the R.I. Chapter of SABR for varied helping hands, including Joe Lawler, Rev. Gerald Beirne, Jack Kavanagh, Don O’Hanley and Tim McNamara. For prompt and helpful responses: Fall River Historical Society, Major League Baseball, Office of the Commissioner; to personnel in the public libraries in St. Louis, Daytona Beach, Philadelphia, Westerly (R.I.), Jacksonville, Volusia County (Fla.), Cleveland, California (State), San Francisco (Archives), Lake Worth; Willoughby, Ohio, City Council; town clerk in Blackstone, Mass.; the National Association of Professional Baseball Leagues; and to Al Berube, Bob Broeg, Phil Lowry, Bob Hoe, Betty J. Linn, Robert Sklar, E. Vernon Luse, Ken Stadler, Robert S. Goodman, Rev. Normand L. Courtemanche, Greg Murphy, James P. Murray and Jeanne Theberge.
While the grounds crew is still scraping the infield and the starting pitchers are throwing in the bullpens, I want a brief chat with you about a few aspects of the Lajoie story.

Some of you may challenge the subtitle: "Modern Baseball's First Superstar."

Feel free. You can make a good case for Honus Wagner. I still vote for Nap.

You may challenge the word "Modern." Feel free. Baseball's modern era is often dated from 1900, the year before the American League made baseball a two-lane highway. I've chosen 1893, when the 6-by-4 'box' was moved back to 60½ feet and the game took on its current look. That's four years before Napoleon Lajoie played his first full season in the majors.

Researching can be difficult and frustrating, particularly when the subject and those who knew him best are long gone. Lives of great people usually become, at least in part, mythologized. Larry Lajoie is no exception. The printed word carries no guarantee of truth or accuracy, and in trying to pull together the life story of a man born over a century ago, the printed word has to be the prime source of material. With all due respect to William Cullen Bryant, Truth, crushed to Earth, will not necessarily rise again and know the eternal years; and Error, writhing in pain, will not necessarily die among its worshippers. Error will, all too often, be copied and copied again until it — not Truth — achieves eternity.

For example, I routinely checked with the Woonsocket city clerk's office for Napoleon Lajoie's date of birth. When they gave the date, I politely told them they must be wrong. They rechecked, with the same result. I wasn't satisfied and obtained an official copy of his baptismal certificate. This confirmed that the date always given for Lajoie's birth is incorrect. Apparently, in some printed record of long ago, the year of birth was erroneously indited — and the error has been repeated ever since.

In my research, I came across several interesting stories that I couldn't confirm. Did Lajoie, for instance, insist on $100 a month, instead of the offered $75, before he'd sign his first pro contract? Was that envelope a longtime keepsake with Lajoie? Did he dabble in real estate in his early retirement years? Was the quote accurate that had him saying his six-bunt day in St. Louis was "the greatest mistake of my life"?

I either don't mention these unconfirmed accounts in the text, or I make it clear that they may not be accurate. For instance, when Lajoie was sold by Fall River to the Philadelphia Nationals, was he a "throw-in"? Nap himself was quoted years later that he was. I seriously question that, and in a section clearly labelled conjecture, I explain why and offer a scenario that seems logical and defensible.

Some erroneous printed material, of course, is easy to disprove. One interview I came upon had Lajoie saying his father was angry and disgusted "when I signed my first professional contract." He signed with the Fall River team of the New England League in 1896. His father had died in 1881.

I toyed with the idea of subtitling this effort "The Forgotten Superstar," partly because so little seemed to be known about him among baseball fans in general, and even among residents of his hometown of Woonsocket. So far as I could determine, no birth-to-death account of Napoleon Lajoie's life had ever been attempted. Still, he was the sixth player ever elected to the Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, so "Forgotten" isn't quite apropos.

In any event, it's important to remember that Napoleon Lajoie was one of the pioneers who played the game before it had insinuated itself into the fibre of America. In his early days, baseball was accorded limited space in the general press: When Lajoie quit as manager of the Cleveland Naps in 1909, one Rhode Island paper headlined the story in type about as big as these words you're reading. As baseball grew in stature, it became the most annotated of sports, thanks to the groundwork laid by the Ansons, Burketts, Kellys, Youngs, Delehantys — and Lajoies.

Well, the managers have exchanged lineups, and the umps, in solemn conclave have explained the ground rules (they haven't changed in half a century) ... and there's the home pitcher strolling to the mound — so "Play Ball!"

Hope you enjoy.
"... Of all the thousands of cracking good men who have won laurels on the diamond since baseball became the national game, it is the unanimous opinion that none ever equalled Larry ..."

NEW YORK PRESS, 1906

"... (Lajoie) glided with Gallic grace and effortless ease over tremendous stretches of ground. Never did he make a play seem hard ... He was the most graceful ballplayer who ever lived ..."

ARTHUR DALEY in “Times At Bat”

"... Compare Ty Cobb and Nap Lajoie. Look up their records. Cobb was great, but I'll take Nap ..."

LEO “GABBY” HARTNETT
1955 — Woonsocket Call interview
(Born a quarter century apart, both Hartnett and Lajoie were Woonsocket natives and both are in the National Baseball Hall of Fame.)
Baseball record books, without known exception, list Napoleon Lajoie's birthdate as Sept. 5, 1875. That date is wrong.

Napoleon Lajoie was born just a year earlier. His birth record at City Hall in Woonsocket, Rhode Island, clearly lists 1874 as the year of his birth. And his baptismal certificate in the files of Precious Blood Church lists his birth date as Sept. 5, 1874, with the baptismal date as Sept. 7, 1874.

The records are right about where Napoleon was born, though. The Lajoie family had landed in Rhode Island after following a long road.

In the mid-1770's, there lived in Louilly, Auxerre, France, a man named Pierre Addenin-Lajoie. In time, his descendants left their native land and tested life in Canada. Among the descendants was Jean Baptiste Lajoie, who was born in Canada in 1830.

Jean Baptiste Lajoie married Celina Guertin in 1852 in St. Pie-de-Bagot, P.Q. The young couple set up housekeeping on a farm in St. Hyacinthe, 30-odd miles from Montreal.

In 1853, their first-born arrived, and was called Jeremie. The next year, a daughter, Cleothe, came aboard.

Life was hard. The land yielded a living only grudgingly. Jean Baptiste and Celina would often wonder whether they should try another way. But uprooting themselves was not easy - the idea of leaving their native land was most difficult.

Their family was growing. After 13 years of marriage, there were four children — Albini and Prospere had joined Jeremie and Cleothe. Jean Baptiste and Celina had been reading how things were booming in the United States, now that the Civil War was over.

They made their decision: They'd leave St. Hyacinthe. Jean Baptiste was 36, Celina was 34 and expecting their fifth child in two weeks. With their three sons and a daughter — ranging in age from 12 to a year — they bade Au Revoir to the cruel winters and the grinding poverty of Canada, and headed to the U.S.A. They had calculated that the birth of their fifth child was two weeks off. It wasn't — and they were forced to return home hurriedly. A son, Joseph, soon checked in. Two weeks later, the Lajoies again began their southward journey and took up residence in Rutland, Vermont, where they remained for a few years. A daughter, Celina, was born in that community in the summer of 1868. The Lajoies were part of a wave of Canadians who were leaving their native land in quest of a less arduous life. But Rutland apparently did not live up to expectations. Jean Baptiste heard about the growing town of Woonsocket, R.I., where textile mills were sprouting along the banks of the Blackstone River.

The Lajoies moved into a house on River Street in the Globe Village section of Woonsocket. The head of the household held jobs as a driver and a laborer. The oldest son, Jeremie, was about 13, and he was soon in a mill. Albini and Prospere followed him. A son, David, was born in the summer of 1871.

Then, on Sept. 5, 1874, Napoleon Lajoie made the scene. On his birth certificate was scribbled the notation: “Eighth of 11 children.” Lajoie family members assume that three children, born between 1854 and 1863, did not survive.

Napoleon's schooling was limited. The Town Census of mid-1885 — when the youngster was a few months away from his 11th birthday — recorded him as having a total public school attendance of eight months, and indicated he could read but not write. At that time — following the Lajoie family work pattern — he was employed as a cardroom sweeper in a mill and was living with a married sister.

Child labor laws were not part of the scene when the Lajoie family was striving to eke out a living in Globe Village. Jeremie tossed aside his mill job and took up teamster duties (an occupation that would, at one time or another and with several employers, be the means of livelihood for every male Lajoie). As Jeremie left the mill, his brothers were still working there; at age 13, Albini (“Ben”) was a cleaner in a cotton mill, and Prospere, 12 and Joseph, 11, were both spinners.

With five pay envelopes coming in, the family fed itself and paid its bills. Then stark tragedy struck: Jean Baptiste, the husband and father, died on March 13, 1881. He was 51. Celina was left with a brood of eight — six sons and two daughters. The two oldest sons, Jeremie and Ben, were boarding out. The other six children were with Celina. Napoleon, the youngest, lived on occasion with his married sisters. In time, Napoleon would be listed in Woonsocket directories at nine different addresses, all in the Globe Village area.
Baseball was the nation's favorite pastime in the 1880s and early 1890s. Every community seemed to have its town team or teams. Kid's sandlot aggregations proliferated.

In this milieu, young Napoleon Lajoie (at about age 10, he would say in later years) took a liking to baseball. His first ball diamonds were the dirt streets of Globe Village. His widowed mother Celina forbade her youngest child to play ball there, fearing injuries from horse-drawn wagons laden with cargoes of coal, wood, milk, meats or whatever. But his pals needed "Poli" — one of his nicknames — for these scrub games, and he loved to play. The youngsters knew, too, of Celina's edict. So they concocted a plot: Napoleon would be given a new identity; they'd call him "Sandy." His hair was pitch-black, and anyone hearing that name being shouted during the games would never suspect that it was Napoleon Lajoie who was being yelled at. Celina would blithely go about her household chores, unaware that her youngest was indulging in forbidden fun.

"Sandy" he would always be to his Woonsocket friends. In somewhat more organized play, Sandy — or so tradition has it — was a member of the Globe Stars, a collection of youngsters from the Village. In a 1953 interview in The Sporting News, Lajoie is quoted as saying that the Globe Stars, "the first organized team I was on ... played all over Rhode Island and Connecticut." Whether the fault lay in the newsman's notes or Lajoie's memory, there is reason to doubt those words.

Toward the end of his semi-pro years, Lajoie played with "The Woonsockets," who did considerable traveling, though Connecticut trips are not recorded. The Globe Stars, though, whose games were rarely written up in Woonsocket journals, was a team of youngsters, one of three from the Globe Village section — the others were the Mugwumps and the Foxes — and it's doubtful if they enjoyed the luxury of travelling throughout the rest of Rhode Island, let alone invading Connecticut.

Newspaper writeups of kid-team games in the 1893 season were rare (and skimpy when used at all). And for good reason: The Lizzie Borden murder trial in New Bedford, Mass. was accorded saturation coverage by all area media, leaving little space for Stars game accounts.

In any case, the Stars did not always shine brightly; in late April, one brief writeup stated, they journeyed to nearby Slatersville and were shot down by the Rangers, 13-3; and in mid-August, they met their match in the Young Earl Street Stars, who won, 13-1. The name "Lajoie" appears in neither story.

There was no shortage of teams to which sandlotters could graduate. "Big" teams in the Greater Woonsocket area took the field representing Slatersville, Lonsdale, Harrisville, Forestdale, Nasonville, Manville, Pascoag, Albion, Ashton, and on occasion "long" trips were made to take on nearby Massachusetts nine's in Franklin, East Douglas, Southbridge, Webster, Millville, Uxbridge and Whitinsville.

Lajoie kept tabs on the major league scores (posted nightly in the window of a Globe Village pool room), and in 1892, when Woonsocket entered a team in the professional New England League, he attended games. His own regular position at this time was catcher, and at age 17 his idol was the catcher for the Pawtucket team, Jimmy Casey. But Casey's tenure was brief. Pawtucket, beset with money troubles, disbanded in late July while on a road trip in Portland, Maine.

Napoleon Lajoie made his first appearance in the Woonsocket City directory of 1893, which listed him as living with his mother at 135 Sayles Street, and working as a clerk for C.E Hixon, an auctioneer and dealer in new and second-hand furnishings whose store was at 54-58 North Main Street in Monument Square. The money wasn't good, but at least he was out of the cardroom.

In mid-Summer of 1893, a belated and bumbled effort was made to organize "The Woonsockets" baseball team as a rival to the well-established St. Anne's nine. The effort collapsed soon after the team lost an August game to a Monarchs team from Boston. But in 1894 another try was made — and with more, if limited, success. Napoleon Lajoie joined the new outfit. He was 19 as the season opened. In the main, games were scheduled for Saturdays. The season did not go smoothly. Unrest cropped up among players, and some quit the team. The manager, J.F. Sweeney, resigned, and William J. Ferris took over. Replacements had to be sought. As a result, the team played only 13 contests, including four with St. Anne's and four more with Manville, a formidable foe from the neighboring village. The team played its games at Agricultural Park, now Barry Memorial Field. It was the fairgrounds, site of the annual farm fair whose sprawling expanse included a ball field.

Lajoie did not play in the opener, on May 5, against St.
Anne's, but the next week, against Pascoag, he had himself a day. He hit safely five times (four singles and a double) in six trips. He might have done better but the game was called after only six innings, with the score 29-4 in Woonsocket's favor. Lajoie, in the early season games, was the catcher and second baseman, but as the season wore on, he began to catch full time.

From May 30 until July 21, the Woonsockets played only three games, defeating Franklin (twice) and St. Anne's. Briefly renamed the "Father Matthews," or the "Reorganized Woonsockets," the troubled team managed to get in eight more games. In the first of the eight, with St. Anne's the foe, young Nap stood out in a way he wished he had didn't:

He was 0-for-5, made three errors (he caught) and struck out three times. His team went under, 13-10.

The game that highlighted the season — and led to a series that lent sparkle and excitement to a turbulent first year — was played in Manville July 28. The host club, undefeated in 17 games, was the "best amateur nine in the state" (so its paid ads proclaimed). Its mound mainstay was "the other Napoleon" — Napoleon Tessier — who had earlier been with Woonsocket but had deserted to rejoin Manville. The Woonsockets won, 17-10, with Lajoie's only hit in six tries being a home run, one of five clouted that day. Tessier, so good the Pawtucket club of the NEL offered him a contract, lasted into the seventh inning.

An angry Manville crew, conquerors of such powers as the Pawtucket Woodbines, the Pawtucket Stars, Newport, the Attleboro Shamrocks, and the Providence Banner Boys, demanded a second game. After bitter haggling, it was finally set for Saturday, Aug. 11, and was advertised as "for the amateur championship of Rhode Island and the Blackstone Valley." Admission was 15 cents (10 cents extra put a fan in a grandstand seat). Ladies got in free. Electric car service was available to and from the park.

"The largest crowd of the season" saw Napoleon Tessier beat the Woonsockets, 12-6. A dismayed sports penman laid the loss at the feet of the losers' outfield, "whose work was of the hippopotamus order at times ..." While efforts were being made to play a third game, the Woonsockets engaged Nasonville, and Lajoie had another one of those days best forgotten: His team won, 29-5, but Sandy went only one-for-five, had three passed balls and made two errors.

Finally, agreement was reached on details for Game #3, which would be played for a $100 booty. For a time, this munificent sum itself precipitated a war within a war: who could be trusted to be custodian of such a huge sum until the game? A man named James Sullivan, with a sort of dual citizenship (he lived in Manville but had previously lived in Woonsocket) was finally adjudged to be of the necessary high character.

Woonsocket won a coin toss for game site. After rain deferred the confrontation for a week, 1,400 cranks on Sept. 15 paid to get in to Agricultural Park and others

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| Woonsocket | 0  | 2  | 3  | 0  | 0  | 0 — 6 |

2b - Moriarty 2, A. Tessier, Brodeaux; 3b - Beaumont, Brodeaux; SH - Moriarty, Shortier, Beaumont, Lajoie, Maroney; SB - Kennedy, Shortier, Capron, Coffey 2; Struck out by N. Tessier 11, Caffety 2, Maroney 6; BB - Maroney 3, N. Tessier 5; Passed Ball - Beaumont 2; Time - 2:20

Umpires - Frank Grimes of Manville and Thomas Parker of Providence

*Sweeney out, hit by batted ball; Beaumont out, running out of line; N. Tessier out on muffed infield fly.

**Author's Note:** The boxscore in the Woonsocket Evening Reporter erroneously gave the Woonsockets an extra run.

"worked the fence dodge" — the trees in the vicinity were full of "crows."

In the very first inning, the two Napoleons waged an exciting duel. The Woonsockets' Lajoie fouled off seven of Manville's Tessier's offerings before going down on strikes. Tessier won the battle, but he lost the war: Woonsocket

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**Boxscore of August 11, 1894 Game in which Manville beat the Woonsockets.**

(Lajoie's first year as semi-pro.)
won, 4-2, as Paul White (Brown University '95), who had been pitching for St. Anne's, fanned 13. Lajoie went 0-for-four.

Down one game to two in the series, Manville hoped to square things in a season finale against Woonsocket. It wasn't to be. For Napoleon Tessier, it would be a long winter: He lost an 8-6 decision. For Napoleon Lajoie, memories of the season would be more pleasant: He went two-for-four in the win over Manville, and knocked in four of his team's eight runs, but he fanned twice and had five base runners steal on him.

Under the "City Briefs" heading, the Evening Reporter ran an intriguing note: "Napoleon Lajoie, catcher for the Woonsockets this past season, has been offered and has accepted a position on the Holy Cross baseball nine, and for his services will receive free board, tuition and clothing."

(This was the first and only allusion associating Sandy Lajoie and matriculation at a college, but the paragraph may not have been the journalistic aberration it seems. SABR-member Art Ahrens researched the life of Jimmy Ryan, a capable major league outfielder from 1886 to 1902, chiefly with Chicago in the National League. Ryan came from Clinton, Mass., not far from Worcester, where Holy Cross College is located. Ahrens wrote: "... Ryan began his baseball career at Holy Cross College, although it is not clear whether he was a student or only a member of the team."

(In the intervening years, it is only fair to say, Holy Cross has stiffened its academic standards to an immense degree. But in the mid-1890's, it's just possible that overtures were made to Lajoie about attending Holy Cross and donning the Purple's diamond regalia.)

The Woonsockets were 10-3 on the season, and in the 10 games for which his stats are available (he played in 12), Lajoie was 19-for-50, a .380 pace. He caught in nine winter: He lost an 8-6 decision. For Napoleon Lajoie, memories of the season would be more pleasant: He went two-for-four in the win over Manville, and knocked in four of his team's eight runs, but he fanned twice and had five base runners steal on him.

Under the “City Briefs” heading, the Evening Reporter ran an intriguing note: “Napoleon Lajoie, catcher for the Woonsockets this past season, has been offered and has accepted a position on the Holy Cross baseball nine, and for his services will receive free board, tuition and clothing.”

The team sported a "Napoleonic battery" — Tessier, the ex-Manville mainstay pitching, and Lajoie of Woonsocket catching.

Woonsocket won its first four games. With Lajoie at second base, the team beat the Pawtucket Woodbines, 12-3. Lajoie would play only one more game at second; he'd catch nine and play shortstop once.

One fact was emerging: Nap could hit. One boxscore has vanished with the years, but on the basis of figures of 13 of 14 games he played, Nap batted .344 (he was 20-for-58). Boxscores can be unfair, but Lajoie caught in a winning effort (4-2) against the Banner Boys in East Providence one July Sunday, and made three hits in five tries — but the Banner Boys stole six bases.

It was a tempestuous season. A game was booked with Holy Cross College, but the Worcester team, deciding to save its regulars for an impending Yale game, sent a "cheap" team. The game was viewed by 1,200 disgusted fans. The only Crusader regular to show was Louis Sockalexis, the Maine Penobscot headed to a tragic life and an early grave. When the host club piled up an early 12-0 lead, the farce was terminated "to let the Holy Cross players catch a train home." Nap went two for two — two doubles. Sockalexis was hitless in two tries.

Baseball-history buffs will note that a major league team — Cleveland — would one day take nicknames from two of the players in that farce of a game.

In a game against St. John's Lyceum of Roxbury, Mass., Napoleon Tessier didn't show up — he was in a slammer facing drunkenness and revelling charges. The regular shortstop and an outfielder were drafted as Lajoie's battery mates, and Woonsocket won. The travelling Cuban Giants were the foe twice in three days, and won both games by 8-7 margins, the second in 10 innings. Lajoie was the goat in the first game when a passed ball let in the winning run.

In a rare Monday afternoon game in late June, the Newport team came to Agricultural Park, and led 9-6 in the eighth. Lajoie's triple then scored a pair and made it a one-run game. In the top of the ninth, Woonsocket tied it (in that era, "first bats" was decided by a coin toss), and then took the lead by scoring in a close play at the plate in which the Newport catcher spiked the runner. A wild fight broke out, during which a baserunner scored. Newport protested time should have been called but the run was allowed. Newport refused to continue to play. The game was forfeited to Woonsocket, 9-0.

Key players began to desert. Napoleon Tessier didn't show for a July 4th game against the Carters of Franklin. A telegram had been sent to a Boston area hurler named Sullivan asking him to play — but he didn't show. A Woonsocket outfielder was given the pitching assignment, but in the first inning — before he had thrown one ball — he hurt his knee running the bases. An infielder was then named to pitch, but by now Woonsocket had only eight players present and healthy. A Franklin substitute was sent to right field to play for Woonsocket. The game
Boxscore of July 4, 1895 Game  
Played at Agricultural Park in Woonsocket

The Woonsockets' rivalry with the Carters (of Franklin, Mass.) brought Napoleon Lajoie to the attention of Fred Woodcock, who had pitched briefly for Pittsburgh in the National League a few years before. It was on Woodcock's recommendation that Lajoie was given a tryout with Fall River of the New England League in 1896.

The game, played in the morning, was called after seven innings due to a steady downpour. The scheduled Woonsockets-Pawtucket Stars afternoon game was cancelled.

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Carters  
3b - Supple, Conboy; SB - Carters 5, Woonsockets 3  
Time: 2H; Umpire - Cook  
*Conboy out for not touching first base

The game, played in the morning, was called after seven innings due to a steady downpour. The scheduled Woonsockets-Pawtucket Stars afternoon game was cancelled.

players were AWOL. A three-game series was played with Westerly. After splitting the first two, Westerly hosted and won the deciding game, 8-1, when several of the Woonsocket players — including Lajoie — did not make the trip to Westerly.

Lajoie's reputation was spreading, however modestly. One clipping indicates he caught a game for "The Millbury Semi Pros of Worcester, Mass." against the Fisherville (Mass.) Foxes. (Millbury is the community bordering Worcester on the south.) It is said Nap got $5, plus round-trip train fare. Supposedly, he hit two homers and "several other extra base hits." Millbury won — but no sustaining boxscore could be found in the Worcester paper.

One intriguing story has survived about a game, apparently in 1895, that "Sandy" Lajoie played in Uxbridge, Mass., 10 miles north of Woonsocket. The narrator is Mickey Landry, former newspaperman and foreign correspondent:

"I didn't see Lajoie play, but I heard this story many, many times from my father. He saw the game. Uxbridge was playing Whitinsville. They were bitter rivals. Just as the game was to start, Nap rolled onto the field driving his horse vehicle to the Hecla (Uxbridge) bench. He tossed aside his stove pipe hat, peeled off a long black coat, under which he was wearing a baseball shirt. He wore sneakers and carried a glove that looked as though it had been through a war.

"Lajoie had a real good day for Hecla, both at bat and in the field. At the end of the game, he was paid $2, jumped into his team, and headed back to Woonsocket."

Two games were carded against Forestdale, but the Woonsocket lineup had so many strange names it was labelled "Picked Team." The finale was played as part of the annual Agricultural Fair, and Woonsocket won, 12-8, with Lajoie playing shortstop and smashing a triple that was called "one of the longest hits ever seen in the local grounds."

As the 1895 season ended, Napoleon Lajoie was 21. He was strong, and baseball talented. But playing professionally was something he merely dreamed of. His toil as a teamster at City Lumber was paying him a reputed $7.50 a week, and he was still dissatisfied. A neighbor, Narcisse Patenaude, had sold his Globe Village livery stable to Michael Kelly — it became the Combination Livery Stable — but Patenaude was still in charge. Sandy went to work there as a hack driver — he drove people to funerals and weddings, and also drove teams, delivering coal, hay, wood and straw. (In the 1896 City Directory, he'd be listed as a "hostler," defined in Webster's as "a person who takes charge of horses at an inn or stable; anyone who takes care of horses.")

He'd check the daily major league scores and followed the doings of the game's gods: Hugh Duffy of Cranston, R.I., . Delahanty . . . Burkett . . . Keeler . . . Cy Young . . . Rusie. But scouting was not the finely tuned phase of the game it would become. Nap's fame stretched chiefly...
CHAPTER III
SIGNING FOR "THE STUFF"

Fall River had a new manager, Charlie Marston, who had formerly handled Waterbury in the Connecticut State League. He was replacing Mike McDermott, who had signed with Scranton of the Eastern League. Though Fall River had won the 1895 pennant, Marston was seeking to strengthen the club. Brockton, managed by Walter Burnham, was embroiled in a salary dispute with an outstanding outfielder named Willis. Burnham committed himself to a deal that would send Willis to Fall River. Accepting Burnham's word, Marston let his top-rated outfielder, Fitzmorris, go to Lewiston. But Burnham changed his mind and decided to keep Willis. Marston was in a bind.

The team would be reporting for spring training in about ten weeks. On a trip to Boston, Marston dropped in on his longtime friend, Fred Woodcock, the Carters of Franklin hurler by then pursuing an insurance career after his brief stay in the National League. Woodcock was still pitching weekends for the Carters. Marston mentioned his Willis-Fitzmorris debacle, and his dire need of an outfielder. Woodcock had pitched against Lajoie and was convinced of his potential. (A printed story that Nap had once hit two homers off Woodcock seems apocryphal; in the two Woonsockets-Carters boxscores available, Woodcock held Lajoie hitless.) But he did not mention Lajoie's name to Marston, because he wondered if Lajoie would be interested in continuing his semi-pro career with the Carters in 1896. In a telegram, Woodcock posed the question to Lajoie. The frugal Napoleon answered on a postcard. In later years, Woodcock knew Nap wanted a crack at money available only from the pros. So he got in touch with Marston and recommended Lajoie as a prospect.

On Jan. 30, 1896, Marston — telling a reporter only he was going to talk to a "dark horse" — took a train from Fall River to Woonsocket, made his way to the Consolidated Livery Stable, and asked the employee who greeted him if he could speak with "Sandy Lajoie, the ballplayer." He already was. "You must mean me," Lajoie smiled. Marston inquired of Nap whether pro baseball interested him — and the answer, quick in coming, was exactly as might be expected from anyone earning $30 a month. The Marston offer was $100 a month — probably just $500 for the May-September season. But that was well over a year's salary to Nap.

A week went by before Marston announced Lajoie's signing. The news story — including background only Marston could have furnished though he was not directly quoted — credited Fred Woodcock as the person who had recommended Lajoie. No mention was made of what later became part of the Lajoie legend — that Marston had neglected to bring along a formal contract so the signing was on the back of an old used envelope. Lajoie was instructed to report to Fall River on Monday morning, April 6. With an enthusiasm previously lacking (a nephew, Lionel Lajoie of Woonsocket, says Napoleon was never in love with work), Nap went back to driving the hack and teams, and waited.

Over the winter, there were varied stories printed in the Fall River paper (and thus Lajoie probably never saw them) that the Fall River team might lose its playing site, the Bedford Street Grounds, because of plans to sell it off for house lots. The grounds owners were demanding fifty season tickets, an action that visiting teams protested the year before. The fence and the grandstand were in bad shape, and carpenters — including pitcher Fred "Duke" Klobedanz — were making repairs. The club was not in good financial shape. Though it had captured the '95 pennant, it had lost $350. There'd be no going South — the training would be at Bedford Street.

Napoleon Lajoie and the other players reported as scheduled, and were driven to the grounds in a wagon. It must have seemed like an auspicious start to Lajoie — on his first day he had a chauffeur! A handful of cranks ignored the cold and turned out to watch the light practice sessions. On the second day, a snow squall added discomfort to the proceedings.

Less than two weeks into the training grind, Sandy Lajoie played his first pro game. The opponent was Scranton, managed by Mike McDermott of the '95 titlists. Attendance was 150. The (one and only) umpire was Tom Connolly of Natick, Mass. In the seventh inning, as Connolly was still returning to his post behind the plate after
LAJOIE’S FIRST PROFESSIONAL GAME  
April 30, 1896, at Fall River, against Lewiston  
New England League

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Lajoie played 80 games for Fall River. He was leading the N.E. League in hitting with .429 when he and Phil Geier were sold to the Philadelphia Phils in early August.

calling a play at first base, the pitcher delivered the ball and the batter hit it for a clean single. Connolly disallowed the hit. A seething McDermott ordered the runner to steal. The argument ended when Connolly forfeited the game to the home team, 9-0. 'I😜vo days later, Fall River took on Scranton again, and beat them, 14-10, with Lajoie keying a four-run ninth inning. Fall River won, 5-3. On July 2, also at the Dexter Street grounds, Lajoie was six-for-seven in a 31-5 mauling of Pawtucket by the Border City nine.

LAJOIE’S BEST DAY IN THE MINORS  
July 2, 1896, playing for Fall River against Pawtucket

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Lajoie had a home run, two doubles, and three singles. He struck out his other time at bat. The Pawtucket-Fall River game was umpired by Tommy Connolly, took 2 hours and 40 minutes, and was attended by 300. Lajoie made his team’s only error.

Usually even-tempered, Lajoie put a limit on turning the other cheek. In Augusta, umpire Charley Brady made a
questionable call that, in the unanimous view of the Fall River players, gave the game to the home team. That night, outside the hotel where the team was staying, Lajoie bumped into Brady — and a few of Lajoie's teammates had to restrain him from belting the arbitrator.

Lajoie was occasionally referred to in game stories as "Old Slashaway", and his achievements were gradually drawing favorable comment in the newspapers around the circuit. In fact, his first accolade had appeared on only the second day of practice (the day of the snow squall). Exactly what he was doing expertly wasn't recorded, but since throwing hard was banned that day, he must have been swinging the bat well despite the long winter layoff. Wrote the Fall River baseball penman: "... the big Woonsocket fellow, Lajoie, promised to catch the town ... " Before May had ended, league president Tim Murnane — after seeing every team in action — named Lajoie, outfielder "Shorty" Geier, up from Norfolk, and Klobedanz as the best Fall River bets to go to higher company.

Bill McGunnigle, a Bay Stater managing cellar-dwelling Louisville in the National League, was reportedly eyeing several members of the Fall River team (no names mentioned), "... but Marston is not anxious to sell and is holding out for big money." The journalism of the day allowed sports writers to do some masterminding. The New Bedford writer predicted that [Manager Cap] "Anson of Chicago will someday look at New England League players ... and Lajoie will belong to Chicago. This is a tip to [Boston Manager Frank] Selee, but he won't take it."

The Boston Herald: "Many a big league club will be sorry next year it didn't corral Lajoie." The Brockton Times cited reports that Lajoie, Klobedanz "and others" with Fall River are "scheduled to be grabbed by Selee or others."

In mid-July, Billy Nash, player-manager of eighth-place Philadelphia, put his team in charge of veteran catcher Jack Boyle, and headed out on a personal, talent-hunting safari. He caught up with the Fall River team in Maine. He talked to Lajoie (a later story reported he had asked Nap if any particular pitch gave him trouble. "Only the ones I can't reach," Nap is said to have replied.) Geier is thought to have been Nash's prime interest, at least originally. Nash plainly liked what he saw, and when Marston's nine headed home, Nash followed them. In a game in New Bedford, a pitcher named Silver Braun fanned Lajoie three times and the New Bedford Journal gloated that "... another $500 was knocked off ... the fancy [asking] price for Lajoie, but after [the next Fall River-New Bedford game] he may not be worth his salt."

Attending a Fall River-New Bedford game July 31 were Nash, Selee of Boston and Miah Murray of Providence's Eastern League entry (which was headed to a pennant). Fall River caved in, 13-1, that day. Lajoie hit safely once in four tries.

Other teams were eying Lajoie. Pittsburgh reportedly offered $500 and refused to meet Fall River's $1,000 demand, deciding to wait until the Fall draft and getting him for $500. Andrew Freedman of New York drew the line at meeting Fall River's price, giving rise to a story that Freedman didn't want a Frenchman on his team. (In a 1916 article, Freedman was quoted in a New York paper as having said, in refusing to pay $1,500 for Lajoie and Geier a month before they went to Philadelphia, "I want no Frenchmen or Dutchmen on my team. Get me a couple of Irishmen.")

The Fall River team lost an incredible game in Pawtucket on the first Saturday in August — even though it was played in a miniature park that was derided throughout the rest of the league. Pawtucket won, 32-22. Fifty-four hits were made, 35 by the home team. Nap was three-for-five (Geier was four-for-five). Lajoie played left field, center field and also caught. The following Monday, also in Pawtucket, Fall River exacted revenge, winning 13-4, with Lajoie contributing two doubles and a home run — one of the doubles was hit into trees near the fence and rebounded onto the field. Some fans thought it should have been scored as a second home run.

After a two-game set with Brockton, Lajoie and his mates returned to Pawtucket Aug. 7. By now, Nash and Marston had reached an agreement under which Lajoie and Geier would become Philadelphia property. But that day, Marston told reporters Philadelphia hadn't come through with the cash to buy either player "... and neither one is going to leave until I receive it." Playing first base, Lajoie got two hits, but Pawtucket won, 20-9. Fall River made only two errors that day, and ironically one was committed by Lajoie and the other by Geier.

The next day, a Saturday, Fall River hosted Pawtucket, and won lopsidedly, 18-3. Nap checked in with a single, double and triple. It was to be his final game for Fall River.

Sometime between the Friday game in Pawtucket and the Saturday game, a check was received from the Philadelphia management, closing the Lajoie-Geier deal. On Sunday, August 9, the pair left together for Philadelphia.

It has become part of baseball lore that Phil Geier was the player whom Philadelphia was most anxious to buy, and that Lajoie was merely a "throw-in." If so, this phase of the transaction didn't surface at the time the sale was made. A week before the deal was closed, the Fall River paper stated that "... terms have been practically agreed upon where Lajoie and Geier will be sold (to Philadelphia)." And in Pawtucket, Marston's statement had given every indication that each player carried a separate price tag.

The "throw-in" version (even though Lajoie himself repeated it in some interviews in later years) is suspect. Geier had promise (he was batting .381 at Fall River and was only 20 years old). But Nap was stronger, just as versatile, hit for power and average, and plainly merited a price tag all his own. Other National League teams were interested in Lajoie.

A Philadelphia Record story also seemed to squelch the "throw-in" angle. It quoted Marston as telling Manager
Nash: "You are paying me $1,500 for a man you would not sell for $10,000 after he plays out the season with you . . ."

It's much more likely that Manager Marston put a $1,500 price tag on Phil Geier. Philadelphia balked, branding the price too high. Marston then added Lajoie to the deal, with the $1,500 unchanged. Thus, in effect, Marston came down on his asking price for Geier, but still got his $1,500 by adding Lajoie to the deal.

This scenario makes a lot more sense than the version that has been frequently printed: that Philadelphia offered $1,500 for Geier alone, and that Marston was "so elated" that he "threw in" Lajoie for nothing. The Fall River team's finances were not so bright as to warrant Marston throwing away whatever dollars Lajoie's sale could have brought in — and he knew that several clubs were interested in Nap, who was leading the league in batting. Marston is not known to have publicly broken down the $1,500 into a Geier price and a Lajoie price, but it's hardly a wild guess that the bulk of it he regarded as the proceeds from the Geier sale, and the rest from Lajoie's. But Lajoie as a "throw in" just doesn't add up. Marston got something for Nap.

In any event, on Monday Geier and Lajoie reported to their new team. On Tuesday, wearing a big league uniform, Lajoie played first base in an Atlantic League exhibition game against Atlantic City and came through with two singles and a double. And on Aug. 12, 1896, Napoleon Lajoie participated in his first official major league game, playing first base, registering his first hit, and helping the hometown Phils to a 9-0 win over Washington. Just a year and two days before, Lajoie had been held hitless by Napoleon Tessier, the Manville pitcher hired that day to hurl for Forestdale against the "troubled Woonsockets" or "Picked Team," as it called itself.

### "THE FALL RIVER STORY"

**Nap Lajoie's First 80 Pro Games in New England League in 1896 Before Phils Bought Him**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Game No.</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Opponent</th>
<th>Home or Away</th>
<th>Game Result: Fall River:</th>
<th>Lajoie Team Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>May 1 (Fri)</td>
<td>Lewiston</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>Wm 7-6</td>
<td>1 for 4; cf; bats 7th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>May 2</td>
<td>Portland</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>Wm 6-3</td>
<td>2 for 4; cf; 3b; 1,600 attendance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>May 4 (Mon)</td>
<td>Portland</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>Wm 6-2 (10)</td>
<td>2 for 5 (triple); cf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>May 5</td>
<td>Lewiston</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>Wm 10-7</td>
<td>4 for 5 (one K); cf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>May 6</td>
<td>Augusta</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>NO GAME — COLD</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>May 7</td>
<td>Bangor</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>Wm 21-4</td>
<td>2 for 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>May 8</td>
<td>Augusta</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>Wm 9-3</td>
<td>0 for 4; one E; cf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>May 9</td>
<td>Augusta</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>Lost 3-2</td>
<td>0 for 3; bats 7th; cf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>May 11 (Mon)</td>
<td>Lewiston</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Wm 25-5</td>
<td>3 for 5 (two doubles); two stolen bases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>May 12</td>
<td>Lewiston</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Lost 5-4 (10)</td>
<td>4 for 6 (two doubles); one E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>May 13</td>
<td>Portland</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Lost 7-3</td>
<td>3 for 4; still bats 7th; cf</td>
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>May 14</td>
<td>Portland</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Wm 14-7</td>
<td>5 for 6 (HR, first as pro; one K)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>May 15</td>
<td>Bangor</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Lost 13-5</td>
<td>0 for 4; one SB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>May 16</td>
<td>Bangor</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Lost 11-4</td>
<td>2 for 3; cf; bats 7th; Bangor leads league</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>May 18 (Mon)</td>
<td>Augusta</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Wm 10-9</td>
<td>1 for 5 (double, one K); cf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>May 19</td>
<td>Augusta</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Lost 10-6</td>
<td>2 for 3; cf; Pawt. (11-3) leads; all-night train ride to Brockton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>May 20</td>
<td>Brockton</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Wm 7-4</td>
<td>1 for 5; bats 4th; cf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>May 21</td>
<td>Brockton</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>RAIN OUT</td>
<td>Pawt. leads, FR 3rd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>May 22</td>
<td>New Bedford</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Lost 11-7</td>
<td>1 for 5; cf; bats 4th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>May 23</td>
<td>New Bedford</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>Wm 6-3</td>
<td>0 for 5; cf; bats 4th; 3,000 attendance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>May 24</td>
<td>New Bedford</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>Wm 10-3</td>
<td>3 for 5 (double); cf; bats 4th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>May 25</td>
<td>New Bedford</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>RAIN OUT</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>May 26</td>
<td>Brockton</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>Wm 14-5</td>
<td>1 for 5; six PO's in cf; made great catch; FR in 1st place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>May 27</td>
<td>Brockton</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>Lost 6-5</td>
<td>2 for 5; SB; cf; another sensational catch; FR 13-8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>May 28</td>
<td>Pawtucket</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Wm 5-4</td>
<td>3 for 5; three RBI incl. tying and winning runs in 4-run 9th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>May 29</td>
<td>Pawtucket</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Lost 12-4</td>
<td>2 for 5 (HR, one K); cf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>May 30 (am)</td>
<td>Pawtucket</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Wm 6-2</td>
<td>1 for 4; SB; cf; 4,500 attendance; FR leads, Pawt. 2nd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>June 1 (Mon)</td>
<td>Pawtucket</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Wm 10-5</td>
<td>2 for 5; one E; cf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>June 2</td>
<td>Portland</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>Wm 13-9</td>
<td>3 for 5 (two HRs, one the longest ever seen at home grounds)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>June 3</td>
<td>Portland</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>Wm 17-11</td>
<td>4 for 6 (double, two triples); 54 hits in first 27 games</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>June 4</td>
<td>Lewiston</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>Wm 8-1</td>
<td>1 for 5; cf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>June 5</td>
<td>Lewiston</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>Wm 16-10</td>
<td>2 for 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>June 6</td>
<td>Bangor</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>Lost 13-8</td>
<td>2 for 5; one E; FR 1st: 20-10; Pawt. 2nd: 19-10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## The Fall River Story — Continued

### Game Results and Fall River Notes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Opponent</th>
<th>Result</th>
<th>Lajoie/Team Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>June 8 (Mon)</td>
<td>Augusta</td>
<td>RAIN OUT</td>
<td>4 for 5 (double, triple); one E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 9</td>
<td>Augusta</td>
<td>H Won 6-5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 10</td>
<td>Bangor</td>
<td>A Won 7-4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 11</td>
<td>Bangor</td>
<td>A Won 3-1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 12</td>
<td>Augusta</td>
<td>A Won 6-2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 13</td>
<td>Augusta</td>
<td>A Won 7-3</td>
<td>0 for 3; cf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 15 (Mon)</td>
<td>Augusta</td>
<td>A Won 5-0</td>
<td>1 for 4 (triple); cf; bats 4th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 16</td>
<td>Lewiston</td>
<td>A Lost 7-6</td>
<td>2 for 4 (double); cf and 2b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 17</td>
<td>Portland</td>
<td>A Lost 10-8</td>
<td>1 for 5; 2b (McDermott still hurt); bats 4th; FR 26-12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 18</td>
<td>Portland</td>
<td>A Won 4-3</td>
<td>1 for 4; 2b; Geier cf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 20</td>
<td>Brockton</td>
<td>A Lost 11-8</td>
<td>3 for 5 (double, HR); 2b; FR leads Pawt. by 2½ games</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 22 (Mon)</td>
<td>Brockton</td>
<td>A Won 12-6</td>
<td>3 for 6 (two doubles); 2b (three throwing ESs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 23</td>
<td>New Bedford</td>
<td>H Won 7-6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 24</td>
<td>New Bedford</td>
<td>A Lost 20-4</td>
<td>2 for 5 (HR and double); 2b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 25</td>
<td>New Bedford</td>
<td>H Lost 9-1</td>
<td>0 for 4; cf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 26</td>
<td>Brockton</td>
<td>H Won 4-0</td>
<td>3 for 5; th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 27</td>
<td>Brockton</td>
<td>H Lost 12-0</td>
<td>0 for 4; th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 29 (Mon)</td>
<td>Pawtucket</td>
<td>A Won 17-1</td>
<td>5 for 6 (two triples); cf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 30</td>
<td>Pawtucket</td>
<td>H Won 4-3</td>
<td>2 for 4; cf; FR 32-16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 1</td>
<td>Pawtucket</td>
<td>A Won 12-11</td>
<td>2 for 5 (HR); bats 4th; cf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 2</td>
<td>Pawtucket</td>
<td>A Won 31-5</td>
<td>6 for 7; cf; 33 FR hits; each FR player had at least three hits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 3</td>
<td>Brockton</td>
<td>A Won 12-11 (10)</td>
<td>4 for 5; HR in 10th won game; cf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 4 (am)</td>
<td>New Bedford</td>
<td>A Won 5-4 (10)</td>
<td>2 for 6 (HR); cf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 4 (pm)</td>
<td>New Bedford</td>
<td>H Won 16-1 (8)</td>
<td>3 for 5 (two doubles, triple); cf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 6 (Mon)</td>
<td>Bangor</td>
<td>H Won 6-2</td>
<td>1 for 5; cf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 7</td>
<td>Bangor</td>
<td>H GAME CALLED AFTER FIRST — FOG</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 8</td>
<td>Augusta</td>
<td>H Won 11-1</td>
<td>3 for 5; cf; FR's 9th straight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 9</td>
<td>Augusta</td>
<td>H Won 7-4 (10)</td>
<td>3 for 5 (double); scored winning run on hit and wild throw; cf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 10</td>
<td>Lewiston</td>
<td>H Lost 6-1</td>
<td>1 for 4; has made 63 hits in 38 games since May 25; cf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 11</td>
<td>Lewiston</td>
<td>H Lost 13-4</td>
<td>2 for 5; bats 5th; cf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 13 (Mon)</td>
<td>Portland</td>
<td>A Won 8-4</td>
<td>4 for 4 (HR and double); bats 4th; cf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 14</td>
<td>Portland</td>
<td>A Won 5-3</td>
<td>3 for 5 (double)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 15</td>
<td>Portland</td>
<td>A Lost 6-3</td>
<td>1 for 4; bats 4th; cf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 16</td>
<td>Portland</td>
<td>A Won 12-7</td>
<td>1 for 4; Lajoie caught (PB); Klobedanz p</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 17</td>
<td>Lewiston</td>
<td>A Won 4-3</td>
<td>4 for 5; batted 2nd; caught full game</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 18</td>
<td>Lewiston</td>
<td>A Lost 22-3</td>
<td>1 for 5; caught again</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 20 (Mon)</td>
<td>Bangor</td>
<td>A Lost 9-5</td>
<td>0 for 4; batted 5th; cf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 21</td>
<td>Bangor</td>
<td>A Won 4-3 (10)</td>
<td>0 for 5; batted 5th; cf; FR 45-21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 22</td>
<td>Augusta</td>
<td>A Lost 4-3 (11)</td>
<td>2 for 3; caught Hallowell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 23</td>
<td>Augusta</td>
<td>A Won 29-3</td>
<td>4 for 6 (two HRs, two Ks); caught Klobedanz; 27 FR hits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 24</td>
<td>New Bedford</td>
<td>A Lost 8-3</td>
<td>0 for 4 (three Ks); cf</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Game Results and Fall River Notes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Opponent</th>
<th>Result</th>
<th>Lajoie/Team Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>July 27 (Mon)</td>
<td>Beat Newport, RI, in exhibition game, 12-6. (Lajoie 0-for-4)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 28</td>
<td>Brockton</td>
<td>A Won 12-3</td>
<td>3 for 5 (HR); cf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 29</td>
<td>Brockton</td>
<td>A Lost 12-9</td>
<td>3 for 5; cf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 30</td>
<td>New Bedford</td>
<td>H Won 11-1</td>
<td>1 for 5; three Ks; scouted by Nash, Selee, Murray</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 31</td>
<td>New Bedford</td>
<td>A Lost 13-1</td>
<td>1 for 4; cf; Lajoie-Geier deal reported near closing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aug. 1</td>
<td>Pawtucket</td>
<td>A Lost 32-22</td>
<td>3 for 5; played 1b, cf, 3b; Pawt. 35 hits, FR 19; FR leads league</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aug. 3 (Mon)</td>
<td>Pawtucket</td>
<td>A Won 13-4</td>
<td>3 for 6 (two doubles, HR); Geier 3-for-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aug. 4</td>
<td>New Bedford</td>
<td>H Won 6-4</td>
<td>0 for 4; cf; two ump's worked game</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aug. 5</td>
<td>Brockton</td>
<td>H Won 5-0</td>
<td>3 for 5 (SB, one K); 1 b; team is 51-26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aug. 6</td>
<td>Brockton</td>
<td>H Won 11-7 (12)</td>
<td>2 for 5; 1b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aug. 7</td>
<td>Pawtucket</td>
<td>A Lost 20-9</td>
<td>2 for 5; 1b; one E; hits: Pawt. 28, FR 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aug. 8</td>
<td>Pawtucket</td>
<td>H Won 18-3</td>
<td>3 for 6 (single, double, triple); 1b</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Additional Information

**NOTE:** After Saturday's win, Fall River led the N.E. League by four games over second-place Bangor. The leaders' record was 53-27. Brockton was in third place, Pawtucket fourth.

On Sunday, Napoleon Lajoie and Phil Geier left together by train for Philadelphia to report to the National League Phils. On Tuesday, they played for the Phils in an exhibition game against Atlantic City, each contributing a double. On Wednesday, Aug. 12, 1896, Lajoie made his official major league debut, helping the Phils win a home game, 9-0, against Washington. Lajoie had a single and played first base. In his first eight games, he hit safely 15 times.
LAJOIE’S FIRST GAME IN THE MAJOR LEAGUES
August 12, 1896, against Washington

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>PHI</th>
<th>AB</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>H</th>
<th>O</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>E</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cooley (cf)</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hulen (ss)</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Delahanty (lf)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thompson (rf)</td>
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|      | Washington   |    | 0  | 0  | 0  | 0  | 0  | 0  | 0  | 0  | 0  | —  | 0  |

Lajoie’s hit was a single. The Washington battery was Win Mercer pitching, and Jim “Deacon” McGuire catching. In 1901-02, Mercer and Lajoie barnstormed with an American League All-Star team. In 1909, McGuire succeeded Lajoie as Cleveland manager.

The Philadelphia Evening Reporter carried this notation in its Aug. 14 issue:
“Lajoie . . . has an easy, graceful way of playing.”
No adjective has been more commonly attached to any major league ballplayer than “graceful” has been to Lajoie — appropriately, it even appears on his plaque at the Hall of Fame. It’s possible that it was first applied to him in this Evening Reporter story.

Napoleon Lajoie’s minor league career had embraced exactly 80 games. When he’d left to join Philadelphia he’d been batting a league-leading .429. He’d hit safely 163 times (a shade over two hits per game) in 380 at bats. He had hit 16 home runs.
Nap took over first base regularly at Philadelphia, enabling Ed Delahanty to return to the outfield. (Veteran first sacker Dan Brouthers had quit the team in a salary dispute and Delahanty had been filling in.) The young man from Woonsocket — he turned 22 just as the ’96 season was ending — made good from Game #1. He slammed out 15 hits in his first eight games, then cooled off a bit and was hitting a respectable .286 after 16 games. He hit his first major league home run on Aug. 20 and notched three more before the season closed. He registered a .328 batting average.

After the season, in a bland interview during a visit with friends in Fall River — a city for which he retained a lifelong fondness — he voiced delight at being in the big leagues, said he was well treated by the Philadelphia organization and passed along the good wishes of Phil Geier, who had returned to his home in Washington, D.C. Lajoie had high praise for Manager Marston, tracked down a ’96 Fall River team picture he wanted as a souvenir, and told a newsmen he would always remember with pleasure his season there.

Nap was making progress — and fast. The cotton mills and the livery stable seemed a million miles away.

CHAPTER IV
“LARRY” LAJOIE IN THE NATIONAL LEAGUE

However outstanding a player has been in the minor leagues, the jump to the majors is rarely smooth. Players like Hugh Duffy, Ed Delahanty, Roger Connor, Dan Brouthers, Jesse Burkett, and John McGraw all had their troubles before finding themselves.

But Napoleon Lajoie hardly broke stride as he advanced from the semi-pro Woonsockets to the minor league Fall River team to the Philadelphia Nationals. He finished his major league rookie half-season with a .326 mark, and in 1897 — his first full season under the Big Top — he checked in at .361. The next year he dipped to a still-respectable .328.

The 1896 Phils came in eighth under Billy Nash’s management, and were six games under .500. Nash was deposed as manager but retained as an infielder, and George Stallings was brought in in 1897 to take charge. Seeking a winning combination, he juggled his lineup frequently. Lajoie was usually the first baseman, but he was assigned to outfield duty on occasion while veteran Jack Boyle took over at first. Nap sometimes batted second, but he most often hit third or fourth.

Playing first base in St. Louis on May 10, 1897, Lajoie had what would turn out to be his day of days: Four-for-five, a single in the first, home runs in the fifth and seventh and a double in the ninth. The 11 total bases were a major league record.
LAJOIE'S BEST DAY IN THE MAJOR LEAGUES
May 10, 1897, in St. Louis

PHILADELPHIA

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Lajoie singled in the first inning, homered in the fifth and seventh, and doubled in the ninth.

No miracle occurred — Stallings was some 17 years away from that. In mid-May, the future manager of the World Champion 1914 Braves had his men in fourth place. From there, the team sank to eighth, spurted to sixth in mid-June, then settled in near the bottom of the standings. They finished tenth in the 12-team league.

Stallings had little choice but to shake up the team for the 1898 campaign, and shake them up he did. Lajoie's 1897 infield partners had been Lave Cross, Sam Gillen and Billy Nash. For the next season, Stallings got shortstop Monte Cross from St. Louis, and handed the third base job to rookie Bill Lauder. In exchange for right fielder Tommy Dowd came a jack-of-all-positions from the Cardinals named Klondike Douglas, a .329 hitter.

As part of this overhaul, Lajoie was switched to second base, the position with which he would be identified in baseball history.

Sandy opened the 1898 season on Saturday, April 16, at Philadelphia against Brooklyn before 16,000. The Phils lost, 7-6. Nap was one-for-five. The Phils lineup:

Cooley — cf
Douglas — 1b
Delahanty — lf
Lajoie — 2b
Thompson — rf
Cross — ss
Abbatichio — 3b
McFarland — c
Donahue — p

Stallings' multiple moves had their beneficial effect. The team finished fifth, as Baltimore and Cincinnati proved the class of the loop. But Stallings wasn't around to smell the roses, however slightly faded; the players were unhappy with what they perceived as harsh methods of handling his men and were on the brink of revolt when Stallings was unloaded on June 18. Bill Shettsline, club secretary, took over with the club at 20-27 and in eighth place. The team unleashed a 21-hit barrage against St. Louis in its first outing under the new regime. The Phils won, 14-2. Nap helped out with a three-for-five day. Morale improved and the team went 59-44 for the rest of the season.

A new nickname — one that would stick with him for life except in his native Woonsocket where he'd always be "Sandy" — was born of Lajoie's elevation to the major leagues. Gradually, from 1896, he became "Larry" Lajoie. Years later, his own explanation of how he became Larry was botched from the first printing, and the error has been perpetuated in later Lajoie research.

In a lengthy 1953 Sporting News interview that many writers used as a source of data about Lajoie, he was quoted as saying that "the first person to call me Larry was 'Bollicky Bill' Taylor, a pitcher from Staten Island who was with me on the Phillies." According to Lajoie, Taylor had trouble getting his tongue around either "Lah-Zhwa" (purportedly Nap's preferred pronunciation) or "Laj-way," as most people pronounced his surname. Despite the fact that pronouncing Lajoie either way seems hardly an invincible challenge, the story was that Taylor's best shot was "Larry." Taylor began calling him that and others gradually picked it up. Soon he was being called nothing else. No doubt, the alliteration of the new label with "Lajoie" helped things along.

But there's a hitch: Napoleon Lajoie never was a teammate of "Bollicky Bill" Taylor. He probably never even met him. Laced with some personal though plausible conjecture, here is what probably happened:

In the interview Lajoie doubtlessly credited a teammate named Taylor and gave the hometown as Staten Island. He may have given a first name — but he most certainly didn't give it as "Bollicky Bill." When the writer checked an encyclopedia for "Taylors" who were pitchers, he settled on "William H. 'Bollicky Bill' Taylor." In parts of three seasons, "Bollicky Bill" pitched for a Philadelphia team — but in the American Association in 1884, 1885 and 1887. Eighty-seven was his last in the major leagues — and at that time, Napoleon Lajoie was a 12-year-old playing sandlot ball in Woonsocket.

The "Taylor" who tagged Lajoie as "Larry" had to be Jack Taylor, born in Staten Island and a pitching mainstay with the Phils for three years before Lajoie came on board, and for 1896 and 1897, Lajoie's first two years in Philadelphia. (Jack Taylor pitched and won the game in which young Napoleon Lajoie, just up from Fall River of the New England League, made his major league debut against Washington on Aug. 12, 1896.)

John B. "Brewery Jack" Taylor appeared headed toward a bright baseball career. At age 18, he pitched a game for the New York Giants. With the Phils beginning at age 20, he won 94 games between 1893 and 1897. He then played for St. Louis and Cincinnati. But in the winter after his
Cincinnati stint, he died of Bright's Disease in New Brighton, Staten Island, on Feb. 7, 1900. He was 26.

("Bollicky Bill" Taylor was a Washington, D.C. native who hurled for several years in the National League and in the Union and American associations. His stats are mediocre except for 1884 when he racked up a 43-16 record divided between St. Louis of the Union Association and Philadelphia of the American Association. He won 50 games in the major leagues. He died in 1900 while wintering in Jacksonville, Florida. He was 43 or 45, depending on which source you accept.)

In 1899, Napoleon Lajoie began his third full season in the National League, but the newspapers hadn't mastered spelling his last name as well as Nap had mastered hitting major league pitching. Boxscores and stories still carried him as "La Joie". But no matter — he was off to a splendid start and showed signs of atoning for his "slump" to .328 the season previous. And the team was winning. Bill Shettsline had strengthened the pitching staff by adding Bill Bernhard and Chick Fraser, brought outfielder Duff Cooley in from the outfield and put him on first, sent first-year man Roy Thomas to the outfield.

But disaster lurked for Lajoie. On July 14 in a home game against Cincinnati, Lajoie and Harry Steinfeldt, Reds third baseman, collided in a play at second base. Steinfeldt lay unconscious for almost five minutes — but Lajoie actually came out second best. Steinfeldt played the next day and got three hits. Lajoie was sidelined for two months. On Sept. 15 he was used as a pinch-hitter against Louisville. Four more times in September, he pinch-hit (over-all, in this role, he was two-for-four, plus a walk). Then he sat on the bench until the last five games of the season when he played the outfield (and went four-for-nine).

The Philadelphia front office had offered a $5,000 bounty to be divided among the players if they won the pennant — and $2,500 if they finished second. Brooklyn's Superbas were the pace-setters that year, but the Phils were battling Boston for the runner-up slot when Lajoie was hurt. Ten games later, with Joe Dolan of Richmond playing second and hitting .251, they were fourth, but they battled back. Second place was at stake as Boston and the Phils closed the season with a seven-game home-and-home series. Philadelphia won two of the three at home. Then Boston took three (all on shutouts) of the four in Beantown, and captured second place, one length up on Shettsline's crew that finished 94-58. Lajoie and his mates picked up none of the prize money the front office had dangled before it. Ed Delahanty's .410 was the league's best.

The season closed for good after Brooklyn beat the Phils, three games to two, in a post-seasonal exhibition series.

The Steinfeldt crash in the mid-season game in 1899 would prove to be one of a persistent series of incidents that would plague Lajoie for much of his career.

On May 31, the day after the Phils had swept the 1900 Memorial Day double-header with Chicago, and were in first place, Lajoie and teammate Elmer Flick engaged in a clubhouse dispute over a bat. Fisticuffs soon erupted. It was a case of heavyweight Lajoie (195 pounds) and middleweight Flick (168 pounds) going at one another for keeps — and with surprising results. Larry threw a left at Flick's jaw. It landed — but on the clubhouse wall. Flick had ducked. Lajoie broke his thumb, and also emerged with a black eye. Flick's wounds were not explicitly delineated, but they included hurt feelings and disgust — or so it seemed once the real story of the imbroglio became known.

At first, the absence of both Lajoie and Flick from that day's lineup was explained by front office officials as due to "injuries suffered in pre-game practice." But the true story was not long suppressed, and embarrassed Philadelphia officials finally confirmed the facts. Flick had stomped from the clubhouse vowing he'd never play for the Phils again, but team officials assured fans that Flick would return to action very soon. Lajoie, they said, would not be able to see action "for some time."

They were correct with Flick. He missed three games, and was back for a Pittsburgh series. But Lajoie was idle for all of June and until July 5 when the team was in St. Louis for a series. Light-hitting Joe Dolan took over the second-base chores. The Phils, leading the league when the Lajoie-Flick bout was staged, were two games off the pace (behind Brooklyn) in the waning days of June. Napoleon Lajoie both missed with his left and was missed by his mates.

To Sandy Lajoie's Woonsocket friends and admirers, the late 1890's, when the graduate from "The Woonsockets" was rapidly forging a reputation as the game's premier performer, was a period of pride and joy. When Sandy would come to Boston with the Phils, scores of residents would go by train, attend the games, and root for their fellow townsman. Surviving nieces remember making the trip often, leaving on the 7 a.m. train, and picking up the complimentary game tickets Napoleon always left.

In this period, Lajoie for the most part spent his off-seasons back in Woonsocket, living with his widowed mother Celina, and enjoying the company of his brothers and sisters, and his pals of boyhood days. One off-season he spent working for Albert Gardner, owner of a pool room and beer garden on Woonsocket's Main Street.

The 1900 season would prove to be Larry Lajoie's final one as a National Leaguer. Strong winds of change were blowing from West to East and they'd soon drastically alter the baseball map. Challenges to the National League had been mounted before: the American Association in 1882 (it lasted 10 years); the Union Association (born and died in 1884); the Players League (1890 — one year only). But this new uprising was different — dynamic Western League president Byron Bancroft Johnson was its moving force. It was well financed. It was well managed. Johnson switched franchises, brought in Charles Comiskey and Connie Mack as owners, invaded Chicago, renamed his
league the “American,” and for 1900 accepted the National Agreement and minor league status. But after that season, he rejected the reserve clause in player contracts and lured established big leaguers — long resentful of the NL’s salary cap of $2,400 a year — into his upstart league.

Lines were thrown out and the biggest “catch” — though a top secret at the time — was Napoleon “Larry” Lajoie, still “out for the stuff.” The Phillies’ owner, Col. John L. Rogers wasn’t paying him what he had promised — at least so thought Nap. Actually, Lajoie was getting — under the table — $2,600, but he wanted equal pay status with his roommate Ed Delahanty, who was quietly receiving $3,000. Lajoie — probably with no great difficulty — learned about it. “I saw the checks,” he said in later years.

CHAPTER V
LENDING CREDIBILITY TO THE AMERICAN LEAGUE

After the 1900 season, Lajoie returned to Woonsocket. By now he was a demi-god, and 50 of his friends and admirers staged a banquet in his honor on a Monday night, Nov. 13, at the Monument House, off Social Street and now the site of a Fleet National Bank office.

Still “Sandy” or “Pony” to Woonsocket friends, he had wrapped up his fourth full season in the majors. His combined average for four-plus seasons was .345. At the age of 26, he had established himself as one of the game’s prime performers, a successor — along with young Honus Wagner and Elmer Flick — of men like Jesse Burkett, Roger Connor, Hugh Duffy and Dan Brouthers.

The banquet’s toastmaster, Thomas E. Kane, labelled the guest as “second to none” in baseball, an appraisal that may have been built on parochial pride but that was accurate nonetheless. “He has made the name of Woonsocket heard all over the country and has distinguished himself in his calling.” Kane noted that baseball “has now come to be an honorable profession” in which Lajoie “has accredited himself nobly . . . He stands second to none, and in spite of a little hard luck, has maintained a record within one per cent of the top notch.”

The “hard luck” was an obvious allusion to Lajoie’s left hand landing on the clubhouse wall instead of on Elmer Flick’s jaw. The “one per cent of the top notch” referred to Nap’s diamond performance for the season just past. His .337 average was quite respectable. His 33 doubles were surpassed only by Honus Wagner’s 45. And Lajoie’s slugging average of .510 was third best, exceeded only by Wagner’s .573 and (listen to him chuckling!) Elmer Flick’s .545.

A goldheaded cane was the gift to Larry. In accepting, he mentioned what everyone knew: Making speeches was not his favorite pastime. “I wished it were,” he said, “so that I might more strongly express my appreciation for the kindness you have shown. I thank you for your kind words, and I pledge that I will always conduct myself in such a way that you will never be disappointed in me.” Music and recitations added to the pleasure of the evening, which closed a bit after midnight to the singing of Auld Lang Syne.

One of the things Nap was silent about that night was a sensational story that would soon have the nation’s fans agog.

Connie Mack, due to take over the new Philadelphia entry in the American League, had a quiet arrangement with the Philadelphia Inquirer sports editor, Frank Hough, who would contact players and tell them what Mack would pay them if they jumped their respective teams. According to one account, Hough told Lajoie that Mack would give him a four-year contract worth $24,000 if Larry would jump to the Athletics (years later, Mack said the offer was $4,000 a year). Nap signed. (Clark Griffith is credited with being a factor in Nap’s decision to switch allegiances. Then a top Chicago National League hurler who jumped across town to the new Chicago White Sox team after 1900, Griffith was a key ally of Ban Johnson in persuading players to join the ranks of the new league.)

Over the winter, Colonel Rogers got wind of the signing and Lajoie later said that the Phillies’ owner offered him a two-year pact totalling $25,000. He said that he brought up the matter of the $400 he felt he still had coming (the differential between his salary and Delahanty’s), but that Rogers denied he owed his player anything. Lajoie said he therefore rejected Rogers’ offer, and he told an interviewer that, “Because of $400, I became an American Leaguer.”

This version of the story seems shaky, for Lajoie had given his word to Mack, and backed it with a signed pact.

Ban Johnson was undeterred by the protests and ridicule his plans for a second major league precipitated. Still, in late 1900, when National League owners offered to meet
with him for a go-around on his new-league plans, he accepted. But they snubbed him when he went to their meeting, and from that moment, the war was on in earnest.

Johnson repudiated the National Agreement, and set up teams in Philadelphia, Washington, Baltimore and Boston. *The Ultimate Baseball Book* by Daniel Okrent and Harris Lebow (Houghton Mifflin, 1979) states that 111 of the 182 players “who contributed significantly” to the American League’s initial major league season were former National Leaguers. Playing in the new organization in 1901 were such NL “fugitives” as John McGraw, Cy Young, Jimmy Collins, Lou Criger, Wilbert Robinson, Buck Freeman, Ossie Schreckengost, Kid Elberfeld, Lave Cross, Cy Seymour, Mike Donlin, Roger Bresnahan, Bill Bradley, Hugh Duffy and Dave Fultz. Phil Geier, Lajoie’s erstwhile Fall River teammate, played for both Philadelphia and Milwaukee.

Philadelphia hastily erected a ball park at Columbia Avenue and 29th Street. Admission was 25 cents; the capacity was 9,500. The opening was delayed two days because of rain, but on April 24, the A’s opened against Washington. The Senators, behind “Doughnut Bill” Carrick, won, 5-1, over the Mackmen. Chick Fraser, with the Phils in 1900, hurled for the losers. Attendance was 10,547, a respectable number for opening day in 1901.

The 1901 Phils, who had finished third in 1900 with Lajoie, finished second without him. Pittsburgh won the pennant. The fledgling AL had its problems and would work on them, but it did well.

Lajoie himself did better than well: He led the AL with a still-modern-record of .422, had 125 RBIs and 14 home runs, making him the Triple Crown Winner. He hit safely in 114 of the 131 games he played. Lajoie belted four of those home runs in two consecutive games: the second game of a double-header at Washington on Aug. 9, and the first game of another bargain bill the next day. The A’s won the first set, 5-4 (Nap got two hits) and 9-4. (Nap made five hits off Casey Patten, including the two homers.)

The next day, enroute to a sweep, the Mackmen won the opener, by 9-4 again. Larry hit safely twice, both circuit blows and both off Win Mercer. (The A’s prevailed in the second game, too, with Nap picking up three more hits.)

As the 1901 season ended, Napoleon Lajoie was baseball’s most talked about player. He dominated the AL in its first year (admittedly aided some by the rule that, that year, did not count a foul ball as a strike). Stories still varied as to his exact annual salary from the A’s ($5,500 was mentioned in one report), but it was top-scale. Still, he was always interested in adding to his bank account, so he formed a barnstorming tour.

John McGraw was player-manager at Baltimore in the new league and had been helping to put together two teams to head to the Pacific Coast for a 5-week series of exhibitions. But McGraw was injured, so he turned over his end of the arrangements to Lajoie and Win Mercer.

The over-all organizer of the barnstorming tour was “Pongo Joe” Cantillon, one of the game’s most colorful figures. He was umpiring in the AL, but conflict of interest was apparently unknown in 1901 and he signed up two teams, one from the new AL, the other of NL players, and launched the post-seasonal tour. Joe served as advance man, arranging for the contests and the publicity, and collecting the advance guarantees. The AL team was nominally headed by Lajoie, the NL team by Jake Beckley, 33-year-old Cincy first baseman.

On September 30, a crowd of 5,000 turned out for an afternoon exhibition between the American League team, led by Lajoie, and the Woonsocket Gyms in Larry’s hometown. Game time was 3:15 p.m. and many a spectator had taken early leave of the mills to join in the tribute to the young man who once knew what mills jobs were all about but who now was comparatively living in the lap of luxury.

The “All American” lineup: James Barrett, Detroit, m; “Turkey Mike” Donlin, Baltimore, 2b; J.B. Seymour, Baltimore, lf; Lajoie, ss; Harry Davis, Washington ‘99, lb; Win Mercer, Washington, 3b; Bill Bernhard, A’s, rf; Roger Bresnahan, Baltimore, c; William M.”Doughnut Bill” Carrick (who had snapped a Lajoie 16-game hitting streak during the season), Washington, p; Jimmy Williams, Baltimore, was the 10th man. Bernhard and Bresnahan could assume pitching chores and Jimmy Williams could play anywhere in the infield. Mercer could fill in creditably at any of the nine positions.

The game was a farce. In the first inning, the bases were filled with none out as the city’s favorite son — “The greatest ball player that ever trod a diamond,” as the next day’s newspaper story called him — stepped to the plate, and received a thunderous ovation. The game was halted as Thomas E. Kane, the perennial toastmaster, presented Nap with a gold watch, chain and charm, suitably inscribed. “Let this watch,” Mr. Kane intoned, “mean home to you, and wherever you play or whatever city’s name adorns your breast, we always want to know that Woonsocket is in your heart.” “Larry” was visibly overcome as he acknowledged his appreciation. He then proceeded to swat the first pitch into the Blackstone River that flowed past right field. Two runs scored. Three more came in in the first inning. Five more came in in the third. Playing shortstop, Lajoie handled 13 chances without an error. The final score: 14-0. The *Evening Call* scribe wrote in the late edition that carried the full line score: “The Gyms seemed to be frightened and did not play anywhere near their usual article of ball. Some of their plays were amateurish.”

The writer was correct on both counts, for every Gym player except the pitcher and catcher made at least one miscue. They made 13 altogether.

That evening, 120 friends and admirers of Napoleon Lajoie assembled at the Monument House to honor him and his fellow barnstormers. The Woonsocket Gyms were
also guests. Among the diners were Jeremie and Prospere, two of Sandy's brothers; Peter Harpin, a brother-in-law; and William H. "Bill" Mellor, of Pascoag, R.I., who in the upcoming season would play 10 games at first base for McGraw's Baltimore American League team, whose catcher (and, later, manager) was Wilbert Robinson.

The menu was a mouth-watering one, from the chicken soup that led off to the boiled salmon with French "Pease" and "Salad a la Lajoie, 'Great'" in the middle of the lineup, down to the Parker House Bouquet cigars. Then "the banqueters . . . puffing fragrant weeds, prepared for the post-prandial exercises . . ." The ubiquitous and eloquent toastmaster, Tom Kane, tossed endless oral bouquets at Lajoie, and "Sandy" didn't handle them as well as he handled line drives. He "kept his eyes upon the snowy linen to hide his embarrassment." Kane enumerated Nap's hitting achievements of the recently ended season, putting Nap's 1901 batting average at .415 (the Call placed it at .413). (Lajoie's 1901 BA was kicked around considerably over the years until it was officially set at .422. Some details of this interesting development will be set forth presently.) Kane lauded the Gysms, said they were a credit to Woonsocket, and assured the American Leaguers "you did not see the Gysms at their best today . . . They went in the air on seeing the superb (warm-up) practice of (you professionals)." Kane, a master of euphemisms, was saying the Gysms choked.

Mayor George W. Greene extended the freedom of the city to Lajoie and his teammates, and extolled the hometown athlete as "the greatest hero, the monarch of the diamond, the Napoleon of baseball."

Another speaker, one Dr. William F. Barry, introduced as a former ball player, told of a young pupil being asked by his history teacher what Napoleon's greatest achievement was, and answering, "Five hits for a total of 14 bases." The statistics may have been inaccurate, but the implication was dead on target: to young baseball fans at the end of the 19th Century, "Napoleon" meant Lajoie, not Bonaparte.

Three of Nap's teammates were called on. Win Mercer voiced thanks for the evening and finished his remarks with: "I am sure that in Lajoie you have the greatest ball player that ever lived." Harry Davis, a NEL alumnus from 1895, mentioned the high respect in which Lajoie was held — as athlete and gentleman — by his teammates and other players in the league. "Turkey Mike" Donlin also voiced thanks for the pleasant evening.

Nap was the final speaker, and as usual, he was brief: "I thank you for this nice time . . . There was no chance for your team (to win) today. They wanted to win and so did we. We won. If we did not, we would have left town and would not be here tonight . . ." Then he voiced thanks for the watch given him at the ball game, and on behalf of the barnstorming team he thanked the group for the "hearty reception tonight." A news account said a cold "prevented Lajoie from speaking at further length."

After Woonsocket, the Lajoie aggregation had games scheduled in Milford (Mass.), Buffalo, Toronto, Detroit and Chicago, where they joined with the NL team and headed for California.

Cantillon set up the tour so that the pro teams' itineraries would not be in conflict. The main areas in which they'd perform would be Los Angeles and San Francisco. The four teams in the California League (still an "outlaw" loop and not under the National Agreement) furnished the opposition. Lajoie's men first invaded San Francisco in early December and took on the San Francisco, Oakland and Sacramento nines. Then, in mid-month, the All Americans (referred to in the San Francisco press as "All Americans") switched with the Nationals and went down to Los Angeles.

Then, for the grand finale, the two pro clubs opened a 13-game series against one another in San Francisco with a double-header on Christmas Day. Lajoie missed one of the contests, and a press account ascribed his absence to an "overdose of Christmas delicacies." Sports writers of the day were given wide latitude, so it's difficult to say whether the report was medically accurate — or just a bit of journalistic sarcasm or conjecture.

The major leaguers were called the "Easterners," and one account noted that the Americans were far superior to the Nationals in all points of the game — "the Nationals do not play with the vim and snap of Lajoie's men."

The tour ended on a Sunday, Jan. 20, and when the players arrived in Chicago — "Their pockets bulging out with gold," the Sporting Life story began — an exultant Joe Cantillon put the per-player profit at $700. Presumably, that included the take from the en-route-home stopovers. "A great success," gushed Cantillon, and he said that next year he'd do the same thing but would include the Hawaiian Islands in the itinerary. The $700 was a fairly modest fraction of what Lajoie was being paid annually by the A's, but it was a welcome sweetener to the salaries of most of the other players, who may have been doing better with the American League dumping the $2,400 maximum, but still were hardly riding a wave of prosperity.

Lajoie, who hit .333, must have had his fill of baseball by the time the tour was over, but that was just as well. His playing time in 1902 would be short.
CHAPTER VI
LOSING A COURT BATTLE
AND MOVING TO CLEVELAND

When Lajoie jumped to the crosstown Philadelphia A's in 1901, the Phils had marched promptly to court to try to regain his services. Cited in the suit in equity were Lajoie; the Philadelphia AL club; Benjamin F. Shibe, club president; Manager Connie Mack, and newsman Frank Hough; Connie Mack's sub rosa agent.

The Court of Common Pleas denied the Phils' injunction request, pointing to the "lack of mutuality" in baseball contracts — a high-toned way of saying terms were all one-sided in the owners' favor.

The Phils appealed and the case temporarily disappeared from view. At season's end, though the Lajoie case was by no means abandoned, a peaceful agreement seemed possible. Stories noted the strange relationship of Alfred J. Reach, Phils president, and Benjamin Shibe, A's president: they were business partners.

One news story depicted Lajoie in a no-lose situation for 1902; it said his salary ($4,000 or $5,000 — take your choice) had already been deposited in a bank, an arrangement insisted upon by the "King."

Lajoie had at least one other option: The New York Giants franchise, still far from the glory days it would know, offered Nap $21,000 over a three-year period to jump from the A's. He refused, noting that he had received the "best treatment possible" from Benjamin Shibe and Connie Mack. "I am under contract for two years longer," he said in a statement on April 3, 1902, "and I have no intention of repudiating that contract. I intend to show my appreciation of the treatment I have received from Manager Mack by remaining loyal to him."

The Giants were persistent. John J. McGraw, who late in the 1901 season quit Baltimore and took the manager's reins in New York, continued to pursue Lajoie ardently, and upped the bait to a two-year contract totaling $25,000, the largest sum ever offered a ball player. Lajoie again refused, and got himself ready for another season with the A's.

But in February, his case was argued before the Pennsylvania Supreme Court, and on April 21, 1902, two days before the American League was to open its season, the time bomb that had been ticking ominously, if inaudibly, for more than a year exploded. The nation's baseball fans were stunned as they read the black headlines. The Pennsylvania Supreme Court had reversed the lower court and decided that Lajoie should be prohibited from playing for any club other than the Phils during the term of his contract. In effect, the court upheld the reserve clause.

National League owners were exultant, playing up every positive finding and closing their eyes to unfavorable segments of the court's ruling. Col. John L. Rogers of the Phils hailed the "splendid victory of the NL," and vowed to seek an injunction against Lajoie playing for the AL Philadelphia entry.

National League president Nicholas E. Young claimed "a great legal victory," and Chicago NL president James A. Hart said Lajoie would be jailed if he continued to play in the American League.

American League leaders were shaken, but put up a brave front, voicing confidence their second season would be unaffected. League counsel vowed to "fight to the last ditch." They stressed the court decision applied to Lajoie and to him alone (Chick Fraser and Bill Bernhard had been named in the Phils' original complaint), citing the court's own words that Napoleon Lajoie was "an expert ball player (whose) place would be hard to fill; his loss would weaken the team and lessen attendance ... His work is peculiarly meritorious (and that) he is a most attractive drawing card. (Lajoie's) services are of such a unique character as renders them of peculiar value and so difficult of substitution that their loss will produce irreparable injury ... " Concluding that his contract provisions were reasonable and the pay fully adequate, the court found that "substantial justice" required that Lajoie be prohibited from playing with the Philadelphia A's.

Ban Johnson hurriedly took a train from Chicago to Philadelphia, and went into a huddle with Shibe, Mack, and Lajoie himself in a Philadelphia hotel.

The season was to open in Baltimore on April 23, and Connie Mack announced that Lajoie would make the trip. Larry not only accompanied the team; he was put in the starting lineup.

A vengeful Colonel Rogers, bolstered by the favorable court ruling, was on the warpath, determined to reclaim his players who had taken a stroll. Manager Shettsline, dispatched telegrams to all the Phils players who had jumped to the other league before, during or just after the 1901 season.

In the main, the jumpers stood firm. Chick Fraser returned to the Phils, but he alone. The others decided to
stay put, relying mainly on the fact that the court's statement mentioned Lajoie alone. By now, too, some lawyers had begun to say that the finding applied only to the state of Pennsylvania.

Lajoie, in Baltimore for the season opener, received another telegram, offering him $3,000 a year ($400 above his top Phils pay) to play in California, presumably with some team in the outlaw California League.

But the most important telegram of all was addressed to Manager Mack. Lajoie had made one hit (off Iron Man Joe McGinnity). As the ninth inning of the game with Baltimore was about to begin, the telegram was handed to Mack, informing him that, acting on Colonel Rogers' complaint, the court had issued a temporary injunction forbidding Lajoie from playing with the AL Philadelphia team. Mack pulled Lajoie from the game and sent in Socks Seybold to pinch hit and "Jud" Castro as his defensive replacement.

Thus, Napoleon Lajoie, the ex-millhand-teamster-hack driver, in a time when vacations were not an accepted part of the working man's right, began one of the longest — and most unusual — vacations he'd ever know. For two months, baseball's leading figure sat around while the owners and their lawyers scrambled.

Initially, the court finding was interpreted to mean that Lajoie could play only with the NL team. Then someone — probably an American League owner or official — decided that the injunction was effective in the state of Pennsylvania only.

There was only one thing to do, and Connie Mack did it. Hating to lose Lajoie but interested in anything that would help the American League in its death fight with the National — Mack gave Lajoie to Cleveland, a tottering franchise in desperate need of help on the field. Cleveland owner Charles Somers had helped Connie Mack financially with his new A's team, and Connie was now able to repay the debt.

Rumors had been rampant that the Cleveland team might be relocated to Cincinnati or Pittsburgh. Interest in Cleveland baseball was at a low point and so was attendance. On June 4, 1902, Lajoie, who was named team captain immediately, made his debut — and 10,000 turned out. His double helped defeat Boston. Crowds showed sharp increases when the Blues went on the road around the new circuit. Chieﬂy because of Lajoie — but bolstered by Charlie "Piano Legs" Hickman, over from Boston (AL); Bill Bernhard (17-5); Elmer Hick, also from the A's; and Harry Bay, late of Cincy — the Blues began winning and turned a dismal early season into a winning record (69-67) and a fifth-place finish.

The new Lajoie contract was reported variously as $25,000 for three years, or $30,000 for four years. Cleveland agreed to pay it even if a similar court ruling was promulgated outside of Pennsylvania. Nap didn't come cheap, but the increase in revenues soon made of him a gilt-edged investment who paid high dividends.

Money-conscious Lajoie was soon in business with his manager, Bill Armour: They became partners in a cigar-store venture.

Lajoie's 1902 season had its comic aspects. With the injunction still in effect in Pennsylvania, and the possibility of contempt citations and civil suits against players who jumped, Lajoie made himself scarce when his Cleveland mates hit the road for a jaunt that included games against the A's. Sheriffs met each train the Blues rode into the Philadelphia station, boarded the cars, and searched for "the Frenchman." Manager Armour would tell search parties he had no idea where their quarry was — "I guess he took French leave," he once quipped.

Locale meant nothing to Lajoie. Give him a bat and a ball field and he'd do the rest. In the 67 games he was able to play in 1902, he registered a .378 average, the league's highest and two points ahead of his former Phillie roommate, Ed Delehanty, who had fled to Washington in the new league. Delehanty is carried in record books as the top '02 batsman, because Lajoie hadn't gotten enough at bats.

National League moguls remained unhappy (Rogers even sought an injunction in Ohio, but lost), but they began to face up to reality. In Boston, Philadelphia and Chicago — the three cities having teams in both leagues — the American League entry had outdrawn the NL team in 1902. The American League was here to stay, despite its problems — the biggest of which was the rocky Baltimore franchise — and the NL leaders knew it.

In the early days of 1903, they made one last stab to remain the dominant factor in baseball: They suggested a merger. Ban Johnson roared "No!" and peace was made largely on his terms once he agreed to recognize the National Agreement. Players who had jumped were to be allowed to stay where they were. The AL was to be allowed a team in New York, though the Giants were unhappy. The AL made one concession: It would not place a team in Pittsburgh.

The Philadelphia National League club had the injunctions dissolved. The war was over. The American League had won the fight. And there were three heroes (or villains as NL people perceived them):

- Ban Johnson — for his strong administrative leadership.
- Charles Somers — for his financial support. (He was the Cleveland club's president, but he furnished cash to help four other AL clubs survive that critical first year.)
- Napoleon Lajoie — as the premier player of his day, he gave the upstart league the prestige and respectability it so sorely needed to survive in the bitter struggle with a strong and established opponent.

The hectic season ended. Pittsburgh won the National League pennant, and Connie Mack's A's took the American. Once again, some players' fancies lightly turned to
thoughts of added cash in the spring-like California clime. And once again, Joe Cantillon rounded up 11 players from each league and the "gold hunt" was on.

Lajoie had planned to go West again, but had to cancel when, in early 1903, while "on the road" promoting his cigar business, he suffered a severe attack of pleurisy. He was also forced to cancel a scheduled visit to New England and, of course, Woonsocket. In late February, Larry felt well enough to give a newspaper interview, garbed in a bathrobe in his hotel room.

The reporter wrote that "the king of ball players did not look like a man who had been through a desperate illness... (He) is almost himself again. But he has been a sick man, and many doubted he would come through the ordeal alive."

Of great help to Lajoie during his illness was Peter "Petie" Powers, a street urchin Nap had virtually adopted. At Lajoie's expense, Petie sometimes made road trips and served as the Indians' mascot.

Lajoie's recovery was no doubt helped by his own abundant good health. He was strong, a physical specimen who received many offers to exhibit his physique in dime museums throughout the country. He always refused. "I'm not a freak," he stated.

CHAPTER VII
GIVING THE TEAM
A NICKNAME AND BECOMING ITS MANAGER

Napoleon "Larry" Lajoie's popularity in the Forest City defied belief. Over the winter, as he recovered from his illness, there were stories advocating that he replace Bill Armour as manager. While the team was in spring training in New Orleans, a contest was sponsored by the Cleveland Press to select a new name for the team, and "Naps" — from Lajoie's given name — was the winner. It was a unique honor, a measure of the esteem in which he was held by an entire city.

With baseball's major troubles behind it, the game looked forward to a more sensible season. Lajoie felt the same — he'd be playing regularly, there'd be no more hiding out from sheriffs, and confrontations would be on the diamond, not in courtrooms. He was completely happy with Cleveland as his new hometown. To top it off, he and Armour were doing well as proprietors of the cigar venture (on Bond Street, across from the Hotel Hollenden. They also lived in the building.) It was an odd partnership — the papers were either criticizing Armour or ignoring him while they wrote reams about Lajoie and agitated for him to be named to replace Armour in the top field post.

1903 was kinder to Lajoie than to the team. His .355 was again the league's best. The team came in third, only percentage points behind the second place A's but a whopping 15 behind the pennant-winning Bostons.

Larry was a study in popularity, and the only question is which city idolized him most. He owned his native Woonsocket. He was also Cleveland's best-known resident and he could do no wrong there. But Fall River laid claim to him, too, for the Bedford Street grounds was the launching pad for his pro career. He was not only baseball's most glamorous figure, he had attained that peak after sweating out in Woonsocket several of the same kinds of menial jobs that a lot of Fall River-ites slogged along at.

So when Sept. 15, 1903, was designated "Lajoie Day," and he came to town with Cleveland for an exhibition game against the Fall River nine of the New England League, the city experienced the most memorable day in its sports history. It was a Tuesday, a work day, but people left their posts in the mills to come to see their "Old Slashaway" Larry. Housewives baked early, and they and their young ones came, too. Game time was mid-afternoon.

The bleachers were filled before noon. The grandstand was almost filled an hour and a half before the first pitch was scheduled. The horse gate on Oak Grove Avenue never handled so much traffic. Camp chairs were given out to help the fans; people stood along the left field line and all over the deeper parts of the outfield. Kids sat on the top of the fence, angering other non-payers whose views from nearby trees they obstructed.

The game itself, offering the chance to see, in person, Lajoie himself, plus his teammates — Bill Bradley, Elmer Flick, Charlie "Piano Legs" Hickman, Addie Joss and others whose names were magic in that period in baseball history — was enough to stir the emotions of Fall River fans. But more was on the menu: By pre-arrangement, two of the home team's heroes were to leave town with the big leaguers after the game and have their own shot at fame. Harry "Cy" Morgan, a pitcher, and Benny Bowcock, an infielder and Fall River native, were rated as prospects.
When Lajoie came to bat, he was presented a $200 diamond stud by Mayor Grime. (“The big fellow responded briefly, but earnestly,” the next day’s account of the game said.) Grime said, in part: “... We have watched your career with great and ever increasing interest and pleasure. Your success has demonstrated to our youth that earnest endeavor and diligence will receive its proper reward ... We consider it a special honor that the Fall River club has furnished to the baseball firmament the greatest and brightest star that thus far has ever appeared in its galaxy ...” (His Honor wasn’t exaggerating. By the end of the season, Lajoie would sport an overall BA of .362.)

The Cleveland moundsmen of the day was Jesse Stovall, who was spending the waning days of the '03 season with Manager Armour’s crew.

Fall River won the game, 6-2. Morgan pitched, and thus did his cause no harm. (Morgan left with the big club but never hurled an inning for Cleveland; he became St. Louis Browns property and in the 1907-11 span, enjoyed good seasons in the majors with Boston and Philadelphia in the AL. Bowcock also became a Brownie, played in 14 games in the '03 season — and dropped from the majors. Iott appeared in the Cleveland outfield three times in 1903 — his only major league games.)

Cleveland fans’ hopes for a 1904 pennant were high — or at least sports writers’ stories said so. Until mid-season, such hopes didn’t seem unrealistic. The Naps battled the Red Sox for top honors into July, then came on hard times. Internal dissension began to take its toll.

One day in a game against Chicago, umpire Frank Dwyer (Lajoie used to call him “Blinky”), a former Cincinnati pitcher, ruled on an attempted bunt that when the ball went to the backstop, the batter had not fouled the pitch, but the catcher simply didn’t catch it. Lajoie was infuriated, took his chew of tobacco from his mouth, and threw it into Blinky’s eye. League president Ban Johnson was in the stands. He suspended Lajoie for five days. The team — picked in a pre-season sports writers poll to win the pennant — hit the skids and could not mount a respectable winning streak. In September, with the team in fifth place, Manager Armour went to Charlie Somers and resigned. Armour told Somers the team didn’t want to be managed. He also accused his cigar store partner of being “not aggressive,” though he stressed that Lajoie was a great player.

Lajoie, already captain, was informally appointed to manage for the remainder of the season. The team spat a bit and crossed the finish line fourth.

As the 1904 season closed, Napoleon Lajoie had just reached 30 years of age — 29 if you believed the record books. He had just hit .377, and after eight seasons in the majors, he was hitting .364.

Managing interested him. He had not hesitated to agree when Charlie Somers asked him to take over and finish out the season.

When he first accepted the post of field general, Nap felt confident that he could solve the team’s troubles, but in later years he said that even before his end-of-the-season reign expired, he realized that he had made a mistake. Nonetheless, when he was offered the job for the 1905 season, he couldn’t bring himself to step down so soon.

He could see the burdens of his double duties early on; his hitting and fielding began to suffer. He was the leader, anxious to set an example for the team. He dearly wanted to be on a pennant-winning team, and he was trying too hard, with the usual results. Larry Lajoie entered into what would be the most trying five-year period of his life.

In 1905, Manager Lajoie brought his charges out of New Orleans spring training to occupy first place for much of May and June. On June 20, Chicago, Philadelphia and Detroit were winning consistently, but Cleveland led the league by nine games. Then disaster struck.

On Saturday, July 1, 1905, Cleveland was playing at home against St. Louis when Lajoie suffered a spike wound on his left foot in a play at second base. He continued in the game, and played all nine innings. But dye from his stockings infected the wound, and blood poisoning set in. When the team left for a road trip, first stop St. Louis, Lajoie had to remain in a Cleveland hospital. Replacing him at second base was Nick Kahl, a 26-year-old with a weak bat who was put in the eighth spot in a juggled lineup.

On July 6, Lajoie was “placed under the influence of chloroform” while surgeons lanced his foot and “removed a large quantity of pus.” It was estimated that the team’s player-manager would be out of action for three weeks. The estimate proved optimistic. Lajoie was virtually done for the season. The prognosis for a time was gloomy indeed. Stories out of Cleveland quoted the patient’s doctors as saying that amputation was a possibility. Gradually, though, Lajoie’s condition improved, and during home games, he was brought to the field where he watched games from a wheel chair.

Cleveland fell into a tie with Chicago on July 7 and dropped into second place on the 10th.

Nap’s injury just about shattered all pennant hopes, but if any were left they soon were dissipated as other misfortunes sidelinied Addie Joss, Bill Bradley, Elmer Flick and outfielder Harry Bay, called “Deerfoot” for his speed and base-stealing talents. Kahn proved inadequate as Nap’s substitute and was replaced by William “Jap” Barbeau and George Stovall, an infielder-outfielder who had joined the team the season before. Fan interest waned. At one early September game, paid attendance was 224.

Lajoie remained idle until August 28, when he played first base in a home game that Cleveland won against New
York, 5-4. He batted fourth and went zero-for-four. At this point in the season, Cleveland's pennant hopes were weak, but alive, as the team was only 4½ games out, with a 61-49 record.

On the three remaining dates in August — embracing four games — Lajoie remained at first, hoping to beef up the team's feeble offense. On the 29th, the Naps bowed twice to the Mackmen of Philadelphia, then lost two more to them. Lajoie went back to managing from the bench, and saw no more action as a player in 1905.

By Sept. 4, the team was trailing the pace-setting A's by nine games. The next day, with tempers short and another season of failure a foregone conclusion, Manager Lajoie and infielder Bill Bradley were ejected from the game with St. Louis for too much squawking to the umpires. Fifteen days later, the Naps were 13 games behind, and on Oct. 7, they staggered across the finish line fifth — 19 full games off the pace. The A's won, challenged only by Chicago, which touched the wire two games behind the Mack nine.

For the second time since Lajoie had signed on with them in 1901, the A's won the pennant — and neither time was he with them to realize his dream of playing in a World Series.

For Lajoie, it was a disappointing season. He played in fewer than half of the games, and his .329 average was almost 50 points below his 1904 mark. Cleveland was a good club, but it will never be known whether it might have copped the flag had Lajoie been available full time. Connie Mack's mound staff of Plank, Waddell, Coakley and Bender was top-flight and may have won anyway. Certainly the Naps would never have been humiliated with a second-division finish.

After the Lajoie blood poisoning episode, it is said the feet in player stockings were made only of white material, eliminating the peril of blood poisoning that the blue dye had caused in Lajoie's case. Hence the term "sanitary hose" for the white undersocks that players wear beneath their colored stirrups.

CHAPTER VIII
WEDDING BELLS AND MANAGING WOES

Except for pitching depth, Cleveland in 1906 could stand comparison with any other team. For most of the season, Cleveland, Chicago and New York fought toe-to-toe, but the "Hitless Wonders" from the Windy City uncorked a 19-game win streak in August-September and won the pennant. Cleveland finished third, five games behind Chicago, two behind New York.

Managerial woes notwithstanding, Lajoie checked in at .355, runner-up to batting titlist George Stone (George Who?) of St. Louis (.358). Nap's pitchers — Rhoads, Joss and Hess — had good years. Catcher "Nig" Clarke equaled Stone's leading average but played in only 57 games.

After the season, on Oct. 11, 1906, Napoleon Lajoie was married in Niagara Falls to Mrs. Myrtle I. Smith, described in a news story as formerly of Cleveland but at the time residing in Buffalo. The Woonsocket Call reported that Lajoie, whose age was listed as 31, had known the bride for about two years, and said she was divorced from her first husband. Her maiden name was reported as Myrtle Everturf. Myrtle's middle name was Ivy, and she disliked it. She often joked with Lajoie family members that "I don't like to be thought of as a clinging vine."

Manager Napoleon Lajoie led his team to Spring training in Atlanta in 1907. Here, in a non-baseball way, Nap made one of the most costly errors of his life.

The Coca-Cola company was then a relatively young outfit making a move to win its share of the soft-drink market. A high official invited the Cleveland players to be dinner guests of the company. In the speaking that followed he told of the firm's plans, thought highly of its outlook, and urged his listeners to buy stock in Coca-Cola. The price was $5 a share. Lajoie was making what was above-average salary for that period, but his conservative nature prevailed. He bought no Coca-Cola stock.

"If I had known that Ty Cobb (in later years generally considered to have become a rich man from his Coca-Cola investments) had bought some of the stock, I'd have gotten in, too," Lajoie said in his later years. "Cobb was a shrewd person — both on the field and off. Had I known he was in on it, I'd have bought some."

During spring training that year, Lajoie and the Cleveland club missed another fascinating opportunity (some say this happened in 1908, but 1907 makes more sense). Rumors in the Cleveland camp began to fly thick and fast that a big story might soon break. Telephone calls to and by team officials were frequent, and the team hotel was abuzz. Reporters were told "nothing for publication."
Finally, it came out: The Detroit team wanted to obtain Elmer Flick in a trade and was offering a promising young outfielder.

Frank Navin was the new Detroit president and some versions of this story name him as the "man on the phone from Detroit"; others say it was Manager Jennings. All agree that president Charlie Somers was active on the Cleveland end, but whether he alone made the final decision, or whether it represented a consensus by several high Cleveland officials, including Lajoie, is difficult to fathom. In any case, the decision was to reject the Detroit offer. "We'll stay with Flick," they decided. The other player was Ty Cobb, and Cleveland apparently passed on him because of his reputation as a trouble maker and a disruptive influence on his club.

Detroit went on to win pennants in 1907, 1908, and 1909, with Cobb leading the league with averages of .350, .324, and .377, respectively. The Tigers probably would have won none of those pennants without Cobb. With him, Cleveland would probably have won at least in 1908. It's one of baseball's most interesting what-ifs.

The Cleveland club made a few changes in its 1907 roster: From the Cornell campus came Joe Birmingham, an outfielder; George Stovall was installed at first base; Frank Delehanty (of the Cleveland Delehanty family), and Howard Wakefield (ultimately his son Dick would briefly light the big league skies and then head into an early twilight) were added, with no special impact.

Nap's wife, Myrtle, accompanied her husband when the team launched an Eastern swing in June. Sunday baseball was still verboten in Boston, so after a Saturday game against the Red Sox, the couple took a train to Woonsocket. Myrtle had never seen her husband's native city. They were driven to Sayles Street to visit Nap's mother Celina, only to find she had moved to the Chagnon Block on River Street. It was no great inconvenience: no Globe Village street was very far from any other, and as Napoleon well remembered, families went to new addresses with amazing frequency. A press account described Myrtle as a "handsome woman of charming personality."

Nap graciously found time for a rapid interview with a reporter, during which he voiced confidence in the team: "Constantly improving... Should be in first place... Once we get the lead, the others will have a hard time to oust us..." The next day, the Lajoies took a morning train back to Boston — and another ball game.

Injuries — and illness — dogged Lajoie for much of his career; it was in part, at least, a testament to the intensity with which he played the game. In a Wednesday doubleheader in League Park against Boston on July 10, 1907 — about a month after the Woonsocket visit — Lajoie was spiked in the ninth inning of the first game when Boston player-manager Bob Unglaub slid into him in a play at second base. The game was stopped while the Cleveland trainer washed and bandaged the wound, and Lajoie resumed playing. He played the second game, too (Addie Joss beat Cy Young, 2-0).

But the wound was more serious than had at first been thought, and it was announced the next day Lajoie would need "absolute rest" for several days and might be idled for several weeks. In one of those amazing episodes that dot the game's early history, the manager's duties were assumed by Charles Somers, the team's owner.

As in 1905 when Lajoie had blood poisoning, the lineup had to be overhauled. Lajoie was replaced by Pete O'Brien, a full-time infielder with St. Louis the previous season. He was a weak hitter, batted seventh and closed out the season with Washington. Harry Bay led off and Flick hit fourth. It was Aug. 5 before Lajoie recovered.

For Lajoie, the season would be noteworthy in a way he wished it hadn't been: For the first time since at least his sandlot days in Woonsocket, his batting average sank below the .300 level. He came in at .299. (It would have registered a .304 except for the altered sacrifice-fly rule.)

Detroit, under Manager Hughie Jennings in his initial season (after succeeding Bill Armour, dispensed with after two terms), finished the race one game ahead of the A's. Cleveland was fourth, two behind Chicago. For Lajoie, it would be another winter of miserable baseball memories.

Dissension among his players contributed to Lajoie's disillusionment. Nig Clarke wasn't talking to the skipper. George Stovall was suspended once and sent home; he had accused Lajoie of hiring outsiders to spy on the players, and he carried his charge to top front-office officials.

In an effort to get more punch in the batting order, Lajoie dropped Stovall down a few notches in the lineup. Stovall fumed. One night in a Philadelphia hotel, one angry word led to a few more. Stovall picked up a chair and hit Lajoie on the head with it before others intervened and restored peace.

Lajoie took no punitive action against Stovall. "George didn't mean anything by it," the manager said years later. "Besides, he was a good ball player and we needed him."

For three full seasons now, Napoleon Lajoie had struggled with a job he knew he didn't want soon after he got it. In his first season as manager, the team was fifth, two games under .500, and 19 out of first; in his second they improved to third, 25 games over the .500 mark, five behind the leader; and in his most recent effort, they slipped to fourth, 18 above break-even and eight away from the winner.

He had known more than his share of frustration, disappointment, physical abuse and mental torment. But he dearly wanted to win a pennant, and once again he'd stay at the post, both as manager and player. What he would have done had he known what lay ahead will never be known. But decades later, he'd say he thought that Bucky Harris, Joe Cronin and Lou Boudreau all made the same mistake when, at a young age and with some playing years still ahead, they became managers.
CHAPTER IX
BLOWING A PENNANT

In the first decade of the twentieth century, the baseball world could rest assured of one fact: The Cleveland team would always run into a ruinous slump that would disappoint its rooters, and dissipate dreams of a pennant. Through June of 1908, the race was close and the Naps were in the thick of it. Came July and the slump — and the team trailed by nine games.

But in August, the Lajoie hands caught fire and in one stretch won 15 of 18. The stage was set for one of the most dramatic pennant races ever.

By mid-September, the AL pennant race had boiled down to a four-team battle: Detroit, Cleveland, Chicago, and St. Louis.

Gradually, St. Louis faded.

Through Sept. 20, Detroit led Cleveland, but never by more than two games.

On Monday, Sept. 21, Cleveland took over first place by whipping the New York Highlanders, 5-3, while Boston edged Detroit, 4-3. But Chicago, in third, was only one game out.

Boston took the next two from Detroit by 4-1 scores while Cleveland took two more from the Highlanders. Cleveland led by two games, and Detroit slipped to third.

In the Highlander game at Cleveland on Sept. 23, Lajoie was hit by pitches three times. On the fourth time up, he walked. Jack Chesbro was the villain on two of the HPs, and rookie Harry Billiard, an Ohioan called up at season's end, plunked Nap the third time.

Washington then played "giant-killer," and took Cleveland two straight while Detroit won three and tied one with Philadelphia.

Detroit won a Sunday game on Sept. 27 from Philadelphia, 6-3, while Cleveland was idle. Detroit led Cleveland by ½-game.

On Monday, Sept. 28, Detroit beat Washington, 4-1 while Cleveland was rained out against Philadelphia.

On Tuesday, Sept. 29, the three leading clubs swept doubleheaders: Detroit from Washington, Cleveland from Philadelphia, and Chicago from Boston. Detroit led by five percentage points.

Both teams were idle on Thursday, Oct. 1.

On Friday, Oct. 2, Cleveland beat Chicago, 1-0 on Addie Joss' perfect game against Ed Walsh, who himself fanned 15 and allowed only four hits. Two accounts said Nap killed five or six sure hits by sensational fielding, but 30 years later he said Cleveland fielders didn't have a single difficult chance. Maybe he thought not! Nap had eight assists, two putouts, and no errors.

Cleveland's only run off Walsh came in the third inning. Joe Birmingham singled, then was trapped off first by Walsh but first baseman Frank Isbell's throw to second hit Birmingham and he raced to third. Aftershorthstop George Perring and Joss were retired, Birmingham scored when a Walsh pitch got past catcher Ossie Schreckengost and rolled to the grandstand. It was scored a wild pitch, but years later Walsh said Schreck should have handled it.


On Saturday, Oct. 3, the White Sox, still very much in the battle, were the opposition again. Cleveland fans were in a frenzy in the wake of Joss' masterpiece. 20,729 paid to see the clash. But the normally impeccable Lajoie disappointed them. He dropped a ball thrown by catcher Harry Bemis, and opened the gates to a pair of Sox runs. After six, the Naps trailed, 3-1. In the 7th, George Perring doubled off Frank Smith. Pinch-hitting for Glenn Liebhardt, Nig Clarke struck out. Josh Clarke singled through Lee Tannehill at third, but Perring was held at third. Bradley walked, filling the bases. Though he had pitched the day before, Ed Walsh was called from the bullpen. Hinchman grounded to Tannehill, who threw home, forcing Perring.

Lajoie stepped in. Bases filled. Two out. He already had two doubles in the game. The count went to 3-and-2. Three times, Walsh shook off Sullivan, who was calling for a curve. Walsh would explain later he thought a fast ball down the middle would catch Lajoie by surprise. It did. Larry didn't take his bat off his shoulder. Umpire Silk O'Loughlin screeched, "You're out!" The Naps finally lost, 3-2.

Meanwhile, Detroit was beating St. Louis, and the Tigers went up by ½. For the season finales, Cleveland went to St. Louis for a 3-game set, and Detroit came in to Chicago, also for three games. On Sunday, Chicago downed Detroit, 3-1, while Cleveland and St. Louis battled 11 innings to a 3-3 tie. Detroit: 89-62. Cleveland: 88-63.

The Naps' tie game in the St. Louis series opener was a heart-breaker, because Lajoie's men seemed to have victory in their grasp until an umpire made a ruling that even hometown fans thought a bad one.

St. Louis scored two in the third and one in the fourth, but Cleveland responded with single tallies in the fifth, sixth and seventh frames. In the Cleveland ninth, with two out and Addie Joss on third and Bill Bradley on second, Bill Hinchman grounded sharply through the box, but shortstop Bobby Wallace made a superb stop behind second.
Off balance, he threw to Tom Jones at first, but the throw pulled Jones off the bag. Joss crossed the plate, and seemingly the Naps led, 4-3. Bradley rounded third, and Jones, certain that Hinchman had been safe at first, threw home, but Bradley changed his mind and scooted safely back to third. At this point, umpire Jack Egan stepped in and informed one and all that Hinchman had been out at first.

Lajoie and his players surrounded Egan and angrily denounced the decision, but the ump did what all umps do on disputed judgment calls. He reportedly told Lajoie and the other Napa protesters that Hinchman could have beaten the throw but had “loafed.” Recalled Lajoie in his later years: “Even the St. Louis fans were yelling ‘Robber!’ . . . We had to replay the game.”

Chicago edged Detroit that Sunday, 3-1.

The scenario:

If Cleveland wins its three remaining games (including the replay of the tie), it would win the pennant regardless of the outcome of the Chicago-Detroit series. But if Cleveland loses just one of the three, Chicago could win the pennant by taking its two remaining games against Detroit.

Lajoie’s pitching choice was Glenn Liebhardt (15-16 on the season). His mound foe was Bill Dinneen (14-7 that season and in the twilight of a career that included four 20-victory seasons).

After 5½ innings, the score was knotted at 1-1. St. Louis scored in the first. Cleveland tied it in the fifth on George Stovall’s double and Liebhardt’s single.

In the Brownies’ sixth, outfielder Danny Hoffman hit a grounder to Lajoie, who threw wild to first, the ball rolling to the grandstand. Hoffman took second. Dode Criss doubled to left, scoring Hoffman. Outfielder Bill Hinchman was slow in fielding the ball, and Criss tried to make third. The relay — Hinchman to cutoff man and shortstop George Perring to third sacker Bill Bradl — was perfect and apparently had Criss at third; but Bradl “failed to put the ball on the runner.” Jimmy Williams followed with a single to left, scoring Criss.

There was no more scoring. Cleveland lost, 3-1. They were out of the pennant race.

Cleveland won the meaningless second game, 5-3.

That day, behind Ed Walsh, Chicago beat Detroit, 6-1.

The standing at day’s end:

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Now the pennant hinged on the Tigers-White Sox game. The winning team would win the pennant. Right-hander “Wild Bill” Donovan hurled a two-hitter for Detroit. The left-handed dentist, “Doc” White, started for Chicago but hits by Ty Cobb and Sam Crawford keyed a four-run first inning that proved more than enough. Ed Walsh and Frank Smith played reliever roles. Detroit won, 7-0, and took their second AL pennant in a row.

Cleveland finished second by winning the season’s final game, 5-1 over St. Louis on Tuesday. Some baseball historians have written that Cleveland lost the race to Detroit on the last day of the season. Not so. They were out of it when they lost to St. Louis and Dinneen in the replay of the tie — with two games still to be played. Because of the unequal number of games played by each team, it was a percentage points battle. The finish:

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(The NL, meanwhile, was contributing to the hysteria that gripped the nation’s baseball fandom. New York, Chicago and Pittsburgh waged a fierce battle for top honors, complicated by the Giant-Cub playoff for the pennant that stemmed from a ruling by league president Harry C. Pulliam that a Giant victory over the Cubs was actually a tie because Fred Merkle, on first base, failed to complete the run to second when the apparent winning run had scored on a hit to centerfield. The game was replayed when the Giants and Cubs finished the race in a dead heat, and in the jam-packed Polo Grounds on Wednesday, October 6, 1908 — in one of the most emotional days in sports history [a triple tie for first was a possibility!] — the Cubs won the pennant by a 4-2 win over John McGraw’s Giants before a crowd whose size has been variously estimated as between 26,000 and 35,000. Christy Mathewson was the loser. The World Series began the next day. The Cubs went on to a four-games-to-one World Series triumph over Detroit.)

The sting of Cleveland’s 1908 failure stayed with Nap Lajoie the rest of his life. “I honestly believe that the 1908 race . . . took more out of me than three ordinary seasons,” he later said.

A St. Louis Star baseball writer, Billy Murphy, who saw Lajoie in the latter’s Planters Hotel room after the 3-1 loss to the Browns, wrote, a few years later:

“Lajoie at the Planters Hotel that night was a broken-hearted and bitter man.” The team would soon depart for home instead of leaving “to participate in the World Series. That is one hurt that time will never heal. Wounded he still bears the arrow in the wound.” Murphy made reference to the Hinchman “loafing” episode in the October 5 game, helping a game-clinching rally by St. Louis. Murphy implies Hinchman was a target of Lajoie’s wrath.

Stories have been written that claimed Napoleon Lajoie cried when his team’s chances for a 1908 pennant went aglimmering. His burning ambition to be on a pennant winner has been frequently recounted.

But Lajoie’s broken heart and moist eyes stemmed from more than the slender .004 by which Cleveland lost the race to Detroit. The cold fact is that in 1908 Lajoie had compiled his poorest batting average (.269) and lowest slugging average (.375) since launching his major league career 13 years before. Then he capped the season by faltering at key moments in two games crucial to the pennant race.
If goat horns were to be hung on anyone’s head, Napoleon Lajoie must have known he stood a good chance to wear them.

Cleveland seemed jinxed. Usually a favorite in the spring, they’d do well in the early season, but always hit a slump, or injuries, or bad luck, and be just another also-ran. One wiseacre scrivener suggested the team’s nickname should be the “Napkins” — they fold so easily.

CHAPTER X
THE “AUTOMOBILE RACE”

It is a testament to Napoleon Lajoie’s iron will and sturdy constitution, as well as to his determination and the intensity of his dream to be on a pennant winner, that he began the 1909 season still in the manager’s seat, hot as it was. But there were signs that “King Larry’s” hold on the throne was growing shaky. A losing team becomes an unhappy team, and unhappiness breeds dissension. Players tired of losing look for someone to blame, and the day-to-day decision maker is a handy target.

Hopes were high (as usual) as the ’09 season neared, Cy Young had “come home” from eight shining years in Boston, and though he was 42, he had won 21 and 19 games in the two previous seasons. From the opening bell, Lajoie showed signs of rebounding from his mediocre year of ’08. But Addie Joss began to have physical problems, and except for Old Man Young, the pitching was proving inadequate and the wolves were baying at Lajoie.

The papers began to get on Larry. So did the fans. He became cranky and short-tempered. There were reports of erosion in his relations with the other players. Twice, it developed later, Lajoie approached Charlie Somers, vice president, and John F. Kilfoyl, president, and told them he thought it best that they name someone else to manage. They talked him out of it.

But the Naps simply could not turn things around. Late in the season, the team was 55-54 — eleven and one-half games behind the first place A’s, and trailing both Detroit and Boston. After a poor eastern swing, Lajoie, intent on quitting at the end of the season anyway, told Somers and Kilfoyl he definitely wanted out — and now. He thought it best that they name someone else to manage. They talked him out of it.

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“... I feel that my obligations to you, to the public and to the players compel me to take this action now... You have given me liberal support... I feel that if anyone (else) is able to accomplish more than I, you deserve an opportunity to take advantage of the same.

“The public has been very loyal to me... I feel any criticism directed toward me is solely because of a conscientious desire to see Cleveland have a winner... It is but natural for them to put the blame on the man who does not give them one. I pledge I shall work just as hard as a player to give them the winner they so richly deserve.”

Kilfoyl: “I am sorry Lajoie has reached this point... I am not ready to condemn him. He has not won a pennant, but every year the team had always been a factor in the race in spite of serious handicaps for which he could in no way be held responsible.”

Somers: “I tried to induce him to change his mind... He thought the new manager would benefit by taking over now, and I do not know but that he is right. We wanted Larry to manage a winner — just as he wanted. We spent money freely for talent. That we weren’t as fortunate as other clubs in the men we selected was no fault of Lajoie.”

With Cleveland 57-57, one of Nap’s coaches, Jim “Deacon” McGuire, who had previously managed at Washington and Boston, took over.

The next day, now just a player in the ranks, Nap was accorded a rousing ovation each time he stepped to the plate; he doubled twice and was flawless in the field as Cleveland swept a double-header from St. Louis.

Hardly had Nap signed his resignation statement than the Cleveland Press decided to run another contest — to choose a nickname for the team other than “Naps.” But it misread Lajoie’s hold on the Cleveland fans — Manager Lajoie or just player Lajoie. The fans voted to retain the “Naps” label and the Press editor walked into the contest editor’s office and slapped him on the wrist.

Under McGuire, the team ran out the string at 14-25, finished sixth, and added still another chapter to the story of Cleveland’s disappointment with pro baseball.

Napoleon Lajoie hit .324 in 1909, the American League’s third highest. But he was a full 53 points below the 22-year-old Georgian, Ty Cobb, whose .377 earned him his third batting championship in a row. Eddie Collins was runner-up at .346.
Fans wondered just how much validity there was to the theory that managing and playing at the same time takes its toll — like trying to run the hot dog concession stand and the public address system at the same time.

They'd soon see. Lajoie could now concentrate on his playing duties. He was 35 when the 1910 season opened, in the twilight of his career. Cobb's star was rising, and he was at an age that signalled a future that boggled the mind. No one could foresee that the 1910 season would offer a batting title race between the two that would capture the interest of fans throughout the nation.

Cleveland needed a morale booster badly. Its League Park had been refurbished but that wasn't enough. Cy Young was but a single season removed from the end. Addie Joss was ailing. A nondescript year was in the offing as the public address system at the same time.

Islander from Globe Village. The pennant races generated no suspense as the AL A's and the NL Cubs were runaway victors.

Cobb and Lajoie were both enjoying banner seasons at the plate. Neither Detroit nor Cleveland was a factor in the pennant race — Detroit, the defending champ, was staggering to a third-place finish; Cleveland was trying to come back from a sixth-place, 71-82 - .464 finish, 27 games behind the winner. It "improved" to the extent of a fifth-place, 71-81 - .467 finish, but it was 32 games off the pace.

The spotlight centered on Cobb and Lajoie, and their batting averages. And the ingredient that had the nation's fandom transfixed at the battle was the fact that the Chalmers automobile manufacturers had offered to give a car in 1910 - and the idea of having one足够 to own a car in 1910 - as an "automobile race."

As August ended, the pair was separated by only three percentage points, Cobb leading .362 to .359.

In the first half of September, Cobb was idle often, playing only six games and going seven-for-17 — a .412 clip. For the same period, Lajoie went 20-for-53 — a .377 pace.

In the second half of September, Cobb appeared in nine games, and went 13-for-27 — a .459 clip. Lajoie was gathering 20 safeties in 53 trips, but was hurt on Sept. 27 and had to sit out two games (Sept. 28 and 29), the first games he missed all season. Neal Ball and George Stovall shared second base duties. Nap returned Oct. 1.

Adding to the excitement, as well as to the frustration, was the fact there was no unanimity on exactly what the averages were at any one time. There were repeated statements about "official" and "unofficial" figures. Going into October — Cobb and Lajoie were nip and tuck all season — it was "anybody's auto." On Oct. 1, Nap was three-for-four against Chicago, while Cobb was one-for-three vs. St. Louis. On Oct. 2, a Sunday, Cobb went four-for-five against St. Louis; Nap was nothing-for-three at Chicago. Still — according to one set of figures — Nap led Ty, .370 to .366. Another headline had Nap up by six points — .374 to .368 — but that included only the games through Sept. 29.

After a day off and a rainout, Cleveland and Detroit split a double-header at Detroit, and Nap and Ty also "split": three-for-six. Then the Naps went into St. Louis and the Tigers headed to Chicago. The Naps' stay in St. Louis would make history.

On Oct. 6, a Thursday — with the season due to wind up on Sunday — Nap went three-for-four in St. Louis and Ty two-for-four in Chicago.

On Friday, Cleveland was rained out. Cobb put in a two-for-three day in Chicago. A news story informed a breathless fandom that records for the whole season were being reviewed by official scorers of the league. Records being carried in the press differed from unofficial records as telegraphed at the end of each game. One set of figures tabbed as "official," through Oct. 6, gave Cobb an eight-point bulge, while a set of so-called "unofficial" figures had Lajoie leading by a point and a fraction. League headquarters warned that it was so close "the result probably will not be known until (League Secretary) Rob McRoy gives out his figures."

Cobb apparently had a set of figures that showed him with a substantial lead, although later a story reporting figures through the games of Thursday showed Lajoie at .379 and Cobb at .375. In any case, Cobb sat out the final two games of the season, both against Chicago.

(Cobb's reason for staying out of the lineup the final two games is in dispute. One account was he was satisfied he led Lajoie by a sufficient margin to guarantee the batting title, and didn't want to risk losing it. So he left for New York, the story goes, to see a Broadway show. Another account ascribes Cobb's sit-out to a recurrence of an eye ailment that had afflicted him earlier in the 1910 season.)

On Saturday, Oct. 8, the Detroit outfield consisted of Jay Kirke lf; George Mullin "m"; and Sam Crawford rf Mullin, a mound mainstay and fair hitter, had been assigned to the outfield only nine times during his eight previous seasons. Kirke, in his first Tiger year, was an infielder-outfielder.

That day, at St. Louis, Nap was one-for-four in a 2-0 win.

The next day, at Chicago, Cobb was still idle, presumably satisfied the final figures would show him leading Lajoie.

In St. Louis, the Naps prepared to engage the Browns in a double-header. The host nine was managed by Jack O'Connor, a home-grown product who had achieved a two-decade career in the majors with seven teams and chiefly as a catcher and outfielder. Seven of those seasons
were with Cleveland — then in the NL — and for several of them, O'Connor had played against Lajoie, then in his early years with the NL Phils. In any case, the Browns were so awful (they had lost 106 games) that they had long since clinched eighth place. So to O'Connor — and his men — the outcome of these games was no life-or-death matter.

That should be understood.

So should this:

Ty Cobb, in his fifth full season and seeking his fourth consecutive batting title, had the league's worst average in popularity. By 1910, his snarling and pugnacious personality had alienated everyone and had made him the most hated man in the game. He was disliked by his own teammates. Lajoie, by contrast, was respected by fans and all other players — except perhaps by a few who worked under him when he was managing. The AL players to a man were in Nap's corner in his fight to wrest the batting title from Cobb. Thus Nap closed out the season with an eight-for-eight day, plus a sacrifice.

The outcome of the games was of little or no interest in view of the Cobb-Lajoie "touring car battle," but for the record, St. Louis took the opener, 5-4, and Cleveland won the season finale, 3-0.

News coverage of baseball in the century's early years was limited. A couple of paragraphs per game in out-of-town papers was the common practice. One paper coolly headlined the Sunday game story: "Larry Does Great Work at St. Louis." Sparse mention of the effect on the batting title, and nothing made of the fact six of his hits were bunts, all toward third. The Monday New York Times ran a one-inch story saying unofficially Lajoie went ahead of Cobb .3868 to .384.

The St. Louis Globe Democrat detected a bad odor and promptly said so in its Monday story, pointing to the "poor effort of St. Louis players" and saying an "open scandal" had developed.

The story bluntly stated that the game was "marred by a palpable attempt to shoo Larry Lajoie into the batting leadership and gain for him" the Chalmers automobile. Had Corriden played his position as "he should have," the story said, "Lajoie now would be the owner of but one hit."

The following day, the unusual scenario was in the headlines. Five St. Louis sports writers charged, in stories in Tuesday's papers, that "certain St. Louis players allowed Napoleon Lajoie to obtain base hits with the aim of letting him beat out (Ty) Cobb for the batting title ... Lajoie and others say there was no trickery — just cleverness and misjudgment combined."

St. Louis club president Robert L. Hedges said he had questioned Manager O'Connor about what went on, and he quoted O'Connor as saying "Lajoie outguessed us."

The season over, Lajoie and his teammates headed home, but in Cincinnati, where reporters were waiting for his train, he sent a telegram to a St. Louis newspaper:

"After I made my first hit, a clean drive to center field for three bases, the St. Louis men played deep, expecting me

Here is what Lajoie did in his nine trips to the plate in the Oct. 9, 1910 double-header against St. Louis:

- Tripled over the center fielder's head.
- Bunted down the third-base line six times and was safe at first each time, thus getting credit for six hits. Rookie third baseman Red Corriden played extra deep each time Lajoie came to bat. On some bunts, Corriden didn't even make a throw to first.
- Bunted down the third-base line a seventh time, advancing a runner. This time he was credited with a sacrifice hit, though there was wide agreement the bunt was so well placed there was no chance to retire either the baserunner who advanced or Lajoie himself. But since a throw was made to try to cut down the runner, the bunt was ruled a sacrifice.
- Grounded to the left side of the diamond where 36-year-old shortstop Bobby Wallace fielded it but threw wildly to first. Lajoie was credited with a hit on the premise even an accurate throw wouldn't have retired him.

Napoleon Lajoie
to pound the ball out every time. I fooled them right along. The pitchers did their best to deceive me, I am certain.”

In St. Louis, reporters’ efforts to track down Corriden and the two Brown hurlers, Alex “Lick” Malloy and Albert “Red” Nelson, to ask a few questions were unsuccessful.

Cincinnati reporters popped questions at Lajoie about his eight-hit performance.

“I deserved nine hits,” he responded. “I made the eight in a genuine manner.” Pressed for more details, he replied, “That’s all I have to say on the subject.” (Lajoie’s apparent reference was to the bunt that was scored as a sacrifice. It advanced a runner from second to third, and the pitcher made a throw to third, but it was argued (by Nap’s teammates and concurred in later by umpire Billy Evans) that the bunt was so perfectly placed the runner going to third could not have been retired, nor could Lajoie, had the pitcher chosen to throw to first.)

Told that Detroit owner Frank Navin, naturally anxious for Cobb to win the title, was suspicious, Nap replied, “So it looked suspicious to Navin, did it? Well, he knows what he can do, and if he takes it before the league, I will certainly have my say . . . .”

When Cobb arrived by train in Philadelphia to attend the World Series, he was surprisingly gracious: “I’m sorry that either Lajoie or I did not win the prize without anything occurring that could cause unfavorable comment. I’m not prepared to make any charges against either Lajoie or members of the St. Louis team.”

(In the other league, Philadelphia’s Sherry Magee’s .331 gave him the Chalmers car.)

Papers in the nation’s largest cities disagreed on “Who won?” The Sporting News said it was Cobb — by 4/10,000ths of a point. Three other papers gave it to Lajoie by from three to a fraction of a point. Ban Johnson stated that the National Commission had not yet received official figures from either league, and again stressed that only when AL secretary McRoi gives out the official figures would the victor be known. And that would take a while. An angry Johnson said the National Commission would permit no more awards or bonuses. Commission member August “Garry” Herrmann voiced an identical warning.

Johnson didn’t like the looks — or smell — of things, and he summoned Manager O’Connor, Corriden, and Browns coach Harry Howell to his office. Chalmers officials expressed regrets over the brouhaha they had unwittingly precipitated, and offered to give Cobb and Lajoie each a car.

The summoned trio were slow to present themselves before Johnson, but when he warned them he meant business, they showed.

Rookie Corriden, the third baseman, explained he had been warned by Manager O’Connor to play deep for Lajoie in the interests of survival. “I knew of Lajoie’s reputation as a hard hitter, and I attached no suspicion to the order,” he told Johnson. Johnson cleared Corriden of any wrongdoing, in his decision, said there “had been some misinterpretation of the nature of Lajoie’s hits” — misinterpretation by whom he didn’t say. “One represented as a bunt was a low, rifle drive that would have been dangerous to field. Others were cleverly placed bunts. Lajoie can fool veterans (so) he can fool rookies . . . .” Johnson’s words were no model of clarity, and left nagging questions in many minds. Was the “low, rifle drive” the grounder Wallace fielded with no visible danger or damage to his person? There is no evidence anyone included that as among Lajoie’s bunts. How, exactly, was rookie Corriden “fooled”?

Additional angles on the events of that “Eight-for-eight Sunday” gradually surfaced. Lajoie admitted he had telephoned the home of the official scorer of the games (named Parrish) to see if he (Lajoie) had been credited with nine hits. The scorer said Lajoie told him that Umpire Billy Evans and all the other Cleveland players “thought I should be credited with nine.” When the scorer replied that Lajoie had been given eight — this according to Parrish — Lajoie asked if there was any chance for Parrish “to see nine hits.” One story had Parrish saying he was invited to go down to a hotel but he hung up.

Coach Howell — a pretty fair pitcher in the majors for the previous decade but fading now at age 33 — went to the press box several times during the game, asking just how Nap’s plethora of bunts was being scored. Adding to the aura of mystery was a note — some latter-day stories say it was unsigned, others say it was signed by Howell — promising the scorer a new suit of clothes if he’d be lenient in his hit-or-error decisions.

O’Connor, completing his first year as a major league skipper, was discharged by St. Louis officials; so was Howell (who later did some minor league umpiring). Johnson insisted on this. A league poobah could in those days. Corriden went to the minors for a spell but returned to a brief, mediocre major league career. He later coached with several teams, and managed the White Sox in 1950.

O’Connor had reportedly been a factor in helping Ban Johnson lure some Pittsburgh players into the AL camp a decade before when O’Connor had been on the Pittsburgh roster and Johnson was raiding everywhere to sign the personnel needed to get his new league off the ground. It almost seemed to be a case of “old friends aren’t dragged through a trial, they’re allowed to just fade away,” O’Connor later said and collected $5,000 on his 1911 contract. Later-year summaries of events of that Oct. 9 Sunday in St. Louis vary widely. Some say Lajoie bunted eight times; others say seven; still others say six. Some even say Nap’s triple was deliberately misjudged (the outfielder was Hub Northen); one story had the ball lost in the sun. Ban Johnson, as already noted, muddied the waters further with his allusion to “the low rifle drive dangerous to field. Ban Johnson never brought Lajoie’s name into his statements on the incident. The incendiary issue gradually became defused when the Chalmers firm made its offer to give Cobb and Lajoie each a car. The big prize seemed to
carry far more significance to fans everywhere than the
title of batting champ. The issues were complex. The
general hatred — among players and most fans — for
Cobb, and the equally general popularity of Lajoie hung
over the whole controversy. Nap’s version that “I fooled
them” had an empty ring to it. It is unanimous that
Corriden played ridiculously deep that day and six safe
bunts to the same part of the infield has to stir skepticism.
And if Ban Johnson owed a debt of a type to O’Connor, he
owed one a hundredfold to Napoleon Lajoie, whose shift
to the AL is acknowledged by all as a chief reason the AL
gained immediate respect in 1901.
The full story of the odd goings-on of that late-season
episode may never be known, particularly Johnson’s ratio­
nale for the punishments he meted out — or didn’t mete
out. It will suffice here to say that the game was still in an
era where the rigid ethical standards as Kenesaw Mountain
Landis would enunciate them lay in the future.
Interestingly, Manager O’Connor inserted himself into
the second game that Sunday as a late replacement for Bill
Killefer. It was the only official action he saw all season.
Whether he had any motive other than to rest Killefer
(who had also caught the first game) will probably never
be known.
Anyway, who did win the batting title?
It was Nov. 21 before Mr. McRory had all the data
collected and organized, and issued the long awaited
press release. And the winnah . . . was Joe Jackson, with
an average of .387!
Jackson, a late-season newcomer to Cleveland, was in
only 20 games. Then the release straight-faced the fact
that Cobb had batted .385 on the season and Lajoie came
in at .384:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Games</th>
<th>At Bats</th>
<th>Runs</th>
<th>Hits</th>
<th>HR’s</th>
<th>BA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cobb</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>509</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>196</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>.385</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lajoie</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>591</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>227</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>.384</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(For reasons unrelated to the “bunt” episode, doubt has
recently been cast on the accuracy of the figures above.
Research by Paul MacFarlane, The Sporting News histo­
rian, archivist and associate editor, strongly indicates
errors were made in computing both Cobb’s and Lajoie’s
averages, and concludes Lajoie actually won the title, .383
to .382. However, then-Commissioner Bowie Kuhn refused
to authorize an official change in the records.)

Lajoie never spoke much in later years about the dis­
puted batting championship, but he felt strongly about it.
“When Napoleon had that close race with Ty Cobb,” says
his nephew Lionel Lajoie, “he was given a Chalmers car,
but he didn’t want to accept it. It was Myrtle who made
him accept. He just thought that he, not Cobb, had won
that championship and was angry that Cobb had been
ruled the winner.”

CHAPTER XI
TRAGEDY,
A FLORAL HORSESHOE,
AND 3,000 HITS

The Cobb-Lajoie batting title excitement in the
1910 season had ebbed, and Cleveland fans won­
dered what 1911 held in store. A third consecu­
tive second-division finish? Another promising start
followed by the usual collapse? And would Addie Joss’
arm, which hurt so much in 1910 that he managed only a
5-5 record, come back?
An underweight and listless Joss was several weeks late
in reporting to the Naps’ spring training site at Alexandria,
Louisiana. He came north with the club. In Chattanooga
for an exhibition game, he suffered a fainting spell on the
field, was briefly hospitalized, but accompanied the team
to Toledo for another tune-up series. Toledo had become
the Wisconsin-born Joss’ adopted hometown; he had
pitched there in his two minor league seasons before
joining Cleveland in 1902, for a time wrote baseball stories
in the off-season for the local paper, and recently had
become a partner in a poolroom venture. Still ailing,
though, Joss didn’t even go to the Toledo ballpark for the
two games. (One of the Mud Hen outfielders was Elmer
Flick, the erstwhile Nap trying to hang on. The elderly and
ailing Flick lived 60 more years.)
The Cleveland team headed to the season-opening series
in St. Louis, but Joss remained bedridden in his home. His
condition steadily worsened and the Cleveland team phy­
sician was sent to confer with the Joss family doctor. The
pitcher was beyond medical help.
A couple of hours past midnight on Friday, April 14,
Addie Joss died. He was two days past his 31st birthday. His
teammates heard the news as they went to breakfast in
their St. Louis hotel.
Wearing mourning bands, the Cleveland team took the
field that Friday, and defeated St. Louis, 7-5. The Naps then took the train to Detroit for another three-game series, but their minds weren’t on baseball. The teams split the first two games. A game was scheduled for Monday, but all the Naps were determined to attend the Joss funeral rites. 

League president Ban Johnson forbade it, and ruled Monday’s game could not be put off, despite the signed statement of the players that they were ready to strike in protest of Johnson’s edict. At the last minute, the impasse was resolved, and Cleveland official Ernest S. Barnard informed the players the game had been postponed. The players rode a special train car to Toledo.

The final service for Joss was one of the most widely attended in Toledo history. The throng of mourners overflowed onto streets surrounding the church. Joss’ former teammates, and a few Detroit Tiger players, sat in a special section. The eulogy was delivered, at Mrs. Joss’ request, by Billy Sunday, the pioneer outfielder-turned-evangelist who happened to be in the middle of a Toledo mission.

Sunday shifted oratorical gears, but was his usual spellbinding self. Not a dry eye was seen among Joss’ erstwhile teammates. Lajoie and Cy Young wept unashamedly throughout the service.

By today’s standards, Sunday’s panegyric was pompous, overly sentimental, mawkish and inappropriate, even though his subject was universally held in the highest esteem. But his words won high praise in the next day’s news accounts.

“... No more will the umpire walk in front of the grandstand and cry out: ‘the pitcher for Cleveland will be Joss.’ ...”

“Joss tried hard to strike out Death, and it seemed for a time as though he would win. The bases were full. The score was a tie, with two out. Thousands — yes, millions — in the nation’s grandstand and bleachers sat breathlessly watching the conflict.

“The great twirler stood erect in the box. Death walked to the plate. Addie’s muscles were taut, a look of grim determination was on his face. The ball shot across the plate. ‘Ball one!’ yelled the umpire. Joss again gripped the ball, doubled himself, and the smack of sphere was heard in the catcher’s glove. ‘Ball two!’ from the umpire.

“Again the ball sped plateward. Addie’s eyes became glassy, his muscles weakened, his mind failed. ‘Ball three!’ faintly rang in his ears.

“It was then that the great Master of the universe took the star twirler out of the box and sent him to the clubhouse ...”

“I hope when the season ends for us all, and the batting averages are checked up, the official Scorer of the universe will find no marks in the error column, [and that you will be found] eligible to be transferred from the league of this world to that other major league to which Addie Joss has gone and in which he will play the game in God’s big league forever.”

The Cleveland players stayed with their friend to the very end, attending the brief service at the cemetery in Toledo. It had been a memorable week for Toledoans: The Billy Sunday mission, still in progress, was drawing thousands; the two game Toledo-Cleveland series thrilled baseball fans; the Daily Blade newspaper building was swept with a damaging fire that forced Blade officials to ask the rival paper for permission to print the Blade in the Competitor’s plant, and the stunning death of Addie Joss and the subsequent obsequies.

The Cleveland team returned to Detroit where they lost the next day, 5-1, with Lajoie being ejected after a run-in with the umpire.

Less than two weeks later, manager Jim “Deacon” McGuire was canned, and team captain George Stovall was appointed. The outlook was bleak. Joss was gone. So was Bill Bradley — to the minors. Injuries turned the roster into a list of walking wounded — pitchers were made into outfielders, and one outfielder was a fill-in at third base.

At one point, the injured list included Terry Turner, Joe Jackson and Art Griggs. Off to his usual good start, Lajoie hit at a .371 clip in his first twenty-two games. During a Cleveland victory at St. Louis on Sunday, May 7, Lajoie ruptured a leg muscle. Except for a home game fifteen days later, he rode the bench until July 1, when he was sent in to pinch hit, a role he’d play eleven more times through July 28 (four for nine and three walks). Neal Ball was his main replacement at second.

Some of “King Larry’s” hits were factors in a surprisingly strong showing by the Naps (occasionally called the “Blues” again in news stories). On Saturday, July 1, at home against Chicago, Lajoie was sent up in place of outfielder Jack Graney with the scored tied 2-2 and the bases loaded in the eighth. He doubled over the left fielder’s head, and Cleveland won, 5-2. On July 13, he hit for pitcher Gene Krapp against New York with the Naps trailing 3-2 in the seventh, and he singled in two runs. Cleveland scored nine times in that inning and won, 9-6, for their ninth in a row. On July 20 against Boston, Lajoie, hitting for pitcher Willie Mitchell, singled in two runs in the sixth, helping his mates to an 8-7 win. Resuming fulltime duty, Lajoie spent most of it at first base — less demanding than second on his still-bad legs. The team hovered between third and fifth.

Within hours after Addie Joss died in April, Cleveland president Charles W. Somers had announced a benefit game would be played and the proceeds given to Mrs. Joss, who was left with two young children. When details were worked out, it was announced that a team of American League All Stars would play the Cleveland Naps on Monday, July 24, at League Park. Washington manager Jim McAleer (who had managed Cleveland in the American League’s first year, and had subsequently led the St. Louis Browns) would manage the Stars, selected from every team in the league except Chicago.

Fourteen players were chosen, and eleven of them were
The Naps managed eight hits, but mainly spend the afternoon grounding out. The All Stars had 17 assists, six by Eddie Collins and seven by Rhody Wallace.

The All Star lineup was a thing of beauty:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Player</th>
<th>AB</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>H</th>
<th>O</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>E</th>
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<tr>
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<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Collins (2b)</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<tr>
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<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<tr>
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<td>1</td>
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<td>17</td>
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<tr>
<td>Johnson (p)</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>TOTALS</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SCORE BY INNINGS:

Cleveland 0 1 0 0 0 0 2 0 — 3
All Stars 2 1 0 1 0 0 1 0 0 — 5

The Cleveland lineup:

- Graney, lf; Olson, ss; Jackson, rf; Butcher, rf; Stovall, 1b; Lajoie, 1b; Birmingham, cf; Ball, 2b; Turner, 3b; Smith, c; Easterly, c; Young, p; Kahler, p; Blanding, p; Griggs, ph.

Ernest Barnard announced that the day's gross receipts were $12,914, mostly from admission varying from $1.25 in the first-tier boxes to 25 in the bleachers. Some $1,600 was added through subscriptions from the A's, Red Sox, Browns, and Tigers; the Dayton ball club; Connie Mack ($25); and umpires "Silk" O'Loughlin and John J. Egan. Magazine sales yielded $58 more.

During Cleveland's early August series with Boston, Nap visited his oldest brother, Jeremie, in Woonsocket. Jeremie — Napoleon's godfather — was in the final stages of a two-year bout with cancer, involving seven operations. Larry knew Jeremie's days were numbered. The telegram came to him in Cleveland on Thursday, Sept. 14: Jeremie had died early that morning. Nap and Myrtle headed at once to Woonsocket. On Friday, all American League games were rained out, and coincidentally Cleveland's next foe was Boston, in Boston. Lajoie's name was absent from the boxscore of the Saturday double-header that Boston swept. The youngest Lajoie joined in paying tribute to the oldest of the eight children of Jean Baptiste and Celina, and the first to die. Present at the church services and attendant ceremonies were firemen, and representatives from virtually every segment of Woonsocket life.

Lajoie did not play in Monday's game in which Cleveland beat Boston, 4-1, but rejoined the team for the five-
game series against New York, and then he was at first base in the closing sets against Washington and Philadelphia, on the road; and Detroit at home, and a Saturday double-header in Chicago that brought down the curtain.

Cleveland finished third. Lajoie, in only 87 games, batted .374 (Cobb's .417 was tops in the league). In the best-four-of-seven “Ohio Series,” Cincinnati prevailed, four games to two.

Except that the team was showing no strong signs of being a pennant contender, Lajoie was happy. The players liked Stovall and a new spirit pervaded the team. Players and fans alike assumed he'd be given a chance to guide the club in 1912, and there was disbelief in Cleveland when Charlie Somers announced that the '12 manager would be Harry Davis, who had been a “first baseman/assistant manager” with the Mackmen. Davis had been secretly pledged the job and Stovall's tenure was purely an interregnum — though only Mack, Davis himself and Somers knew about it. Lajoie had great respect for Davis, and hit at a .368 clip in 1912.

Nineteen-twelve gave Napoleon Lajoie one of the most memorable days of his life, unrelated to base hits or game-saving defensive plays, one that he would look back upon in his retirement years with undisguised pride.

June 4, 1912, was the 10th anniversary of the day he'd made his debut in a Cleveland uniform. He had left his baseball limbo in Philadelphia during the injunction squabble and joined the Bronchos, a franchise then fighting for its life. Now, 10 years later, having virtually saved the franchise and as player and manager won the adulation of the city's baseball fandom, he was to be honored on “Lajoie Day.”

It was a Tuesday, Boston was the opposition, and an amazing crowd for a weekday assembled to honor “King Larry.” The Cleveland Athletic Club was in charge of arrangements. Just before game time, a striking nine-foot-high floral horseshoe was brought onto the field, and personnel of both teams lined up alongside of it. Held in place with tin strips were 1,009 silver dollars, the gift of fans. (In addition, Nap's teammates chipped in and gave him a $125 gold purse.) Nap was photographed standing under the dome of the big shoe — it's one of the classic photos recapturing the game's early years.

Horseshoes, then as now, were a symbol of good luck, and it's said that once the oratory was over, all the Cleveland players jumped through the horseshoe. To wipe out that advantage, the Red Sox players ran through it backwards. Then the band played “Hail to the Chief,” and the game began.

Nap and his teammates proceeded to break the unwritten rule that honored ballplayers fall flat on their faces on their “Day.” The Naps beat Boston, 5-1. Lajoie drove in the first run, scored another, and was two-for-three on the day, including a double, and had a sacrifice hit. The oldest active player on the Cleveland roster, he played first base, with Neal Ball at second.

Nap never forgot what was done for him on June 4, 1912. It wasn't so much the cash — though he was still out for the “stuff” and this helped. The tribute warmed his heart; it meant he had a lot of friends . . . it meant that his ball-playing efforts were appreciated. Nonetheless, he worried all during the game about those 1,009 silver dollars — it's a wonder he had such a good day. Right after the game, the money was carted to a bank and Nap felt relieved. The euphoria lasted at least through the next day though: Nap went three-for-four, and Cleveland won again over Boston, 7-0.

The 1912 season was a significant one to Lajoie. He played his heart out for his friend and manager, Harry Davis, and batted a solid .368, the team's best except for Joe Jackson's .395. But the team was to be a disappointment again, and Davis quit with about a month of the season remaining.

In late May, when the Cleveland team was on its eastern swing, and was playing Boston, Nap went to Woonsocket to visit his mother Celina, who had been ailing for almost a year. On July 11, when he was on the road with the team for a series against Washington, he received a phone call from Woonsocket telling him that Celina had died.

Lajoie and Myrtle came to Woonsocket Saturday after the game. The wake was held in the Globe Village home of Nap's sister, Celina Harpin. Floral pieces included those sent to the home by Cleveland owner Charles Somers, and by Nap's Cleveland teammates and other Cleveland friends.

Nap returned to the team, but he played in no games.
between July 11 and July 27. Ivy Olson, the shortstop, was moved to second, and returned to shortstop when Lajoie was reinserted at second base. At shortstop during Nap's 2-week absence was a Brown University rookie, Ken Nash, and Roger Peckinpaugh, a Cleveland high school phenom who had spent two years in the minors and whose bat wilted at the sight of a curve. He was soon traded to New York.

Except that the team never was a factor in the pennant race, the season was a good one for Lajoie. He was hitting, playing well enough to see most of his action at second base, and he was happy under the Davis regime. And there was the floral-horseshoe day he'd always remember.

Then came the appointment of outfielder Joe Birmingham as manager, after Davis' resignation. A product of Elmira, N.Y., and a graduate of Cornell University, Birmingham left that campus in 1906, and had been a regular since 1907. His assumption of the managerial chair was the beginning of the downhill slide for Lajoie. The two never did hit it off, and they argued bitterly in the dugout. In talking to newsmen, Lajoie was open in his criticism of Birmingham. Though Birmingham benched Lajoie one afternoon in 1913 and inserted Terry Turner at second base, Nap's chief gripe was his belief that Birmingham had not put out fully when Davis had had the club, and that he'd been in an "anti-Davis" clique that had hurt the team. Lajoie resented the way Birmingham used his new authority, and steamed at his new boss' practice of teaching the art of batting to him and Joe Jackson.

"It's ridiculous when a bush league player like him tries to tell a club of old veterans how to play ball," Lajoie said later. "I was hitting .300 when he was in primary school. He did the same with Joe Jackson as he did with me, and Joe was hitting .400. Birmingham never hit over .250 in his life. Where does he get the license to pose as a teacher?"

"Birmingham can't tell a man what to do without speaking to him as if the man were a dog," Lajoie fumed. These were rare words, indeed, from the lips of one whose practice was to speak well of people, or not speak at all.

(Nap, incidentally, was off base — but by a small margin only — when he charged that Birmingham never hit as high as .250. In six full seasons with Cleveland, Birmingham hit .289 in 1910, and .304 two seasons later. No power hitter, he had only six home runs in 2,630 at bats. He had the good sense to bench himself most of 1913 and 1914.)

The inevitable rumors were making the rounds that Lajoie was not long for Cleveland. Whatever Birmingham's shortcomings, he had one important asset: The team began to win once he took it over. After Davis yielded the reins in late 1912, the team won 21 of the final 28 games under Birmingham. And in 1913, the club that hadn't made a serious run at the pennant since Lajoie himself led the charge in 1908, had a shot at ousting the pace-setting A's as late as the Naps' final eastern swing.

Then, "Cleveland luck" took over.

After New York, the team headed to Washington for five games against the third-place Senators, whose Walter Johnson was closing in on a 36-victory season. In the Pullman car en route, pitchers Vean Gregg and Cy Falkenberg were engaging in some friendly horseplay in the aisle of a car when they suddenly fell to the floor. Gregg was a southpaw, in only his third year in the majors and headed to his third 20-win season. Falkenberg was a 32-year-old right-hander formerly with Washington, and was a Nap mound mainstay having his best season — he'd win 23. As Cleveland luck would have it, both pitchers landed on their pitching arms.

Falkenberg was sent to Cleveland for a shoulder examination. Gregg tried to pitch the opener. The runner-up Naps trailed the A's by six games and were five up on third-place Washington. They'd meet the Senators five times, then head to a three-game set with Philadelphia. It would take some doing, but a pennant was in their sight if not in their grasp.

Washington proceeded to take all five games. Gregg started the opener of a double-header on Tuesday, Sept. 9. He had to quit after one full inning. The Naps went under, 8-1. They lost the second game to Walter Johnson, 8-2. Gregg tried it again in the third clash, allowed six hits in seven innings when pulled for a pinch-hitter. Washington won, 2-1. On Thursday, the Senators scored seven unearned runs in the 7th inning and won 7-3. The loss went to Bill Steen. Cleveland nerves were taut; Manager Birmingham and catcher Steve O'Neill were ejected from the field in the seventh inning for protesting too vehemently. The debacle terminated when the redoubtable "Big Train," Walter Johnson, hurled a 4-hit complete game and walked off with a 6-1 win. The Cleveland lead over Washington had shrunk to one-half game. Lajoie was 0-for-15 in the first four games, but in the final meeting, he went one-for-four against the redoubtable Johnson and closed out at one-for-19.

A shaken Cleveland team headed to Philadelphia for three games with the A's. Falkenberg rejoined his mates there and turned in a complete-game 3-1 win. After a Sunday off, the Naps reverted to old ways, however, and dropped the remaining pair, 8-6 — Gregg hurled the first six innings — and 8-7 in 10 innings, with Steen in the points for the first five frames. In the Monday loss, the A's were aided by an unassisted double play by outfielder Rube Oldring who caught Gregg's line drive, then raced in to second base before baserunner Terry Turner could return to the bag.

It was all over but the shouting — of which there'd be a minimum on the part of Cleveland fans.

Few teams in history have gone from relative respectability to utter collapse in successive seasons as the Cleveland teams of 1913 and 1914. The Federal League was essaying its first season, but its raids on Cleveland were minimal — chiefly pitcher Cy Falkenberg and the playing personnel was largely the same. But time was
Nap Lajoie and his hitting crumbled. Pitchers Vean Gregg and Fred Blanding combined for only 11 wins compared with 35 in 1913. (Gregg was traded to Boston.)

The Woonsocket-born Frenchman was nearing his inevitable rendezvous with stark reality. Time was eroding his skills, though his stats may not have been as unspectacular had he been playing in a milieu of relaxation and good morale. Under Birmingham, he had neither, and his BA had skidded to a measly .258.

But 1914 had a shining moment for Lajoie: He reached the 3,000-hit plateau. The newspapers of the day were giving baseball good, but hardly excessive, coverage, and there was no “stop the presses” excitement. Rather casually, and in a few paragraphs, the press stated that Lajoie hit No. 3,000 in Cleveland on Sept. 27, 1914, only the third in baseball history at the time to make that many. Cap Anson was the first, and John Peter “Hans” Wagner had attained that total earlier in the ‘14 season.

Lajoie’s 3,000th is a complex story. In 1914, it had been assumed by all record-book publishers that he had made 220 hits in 1901, rather than the 229 with which he had been credited until an “error” was uncovered. Subsequently, it was proved that 229 was his correct total for ‘01 and that those nine hits should never have been deducted. Thus, in retrospect, Nap had actually reached his 3,000th hit on Sept. 17, 1914, in a game at Cleveland against Boston. The pitcher was Rube Foster. At the time, the hit was thought to be his 2,991st; Foster notched an 8-1 win while yielding six hits. Lajoie was one-for-four.

When Lajoie hit what was mistakenly thought to be his 3,000th safety, umpire Bill Dinneen delayed the game a minute (in violation of the rules) so that the ball could be given to Lajoie as a souvenir.

Other events would help determine Lajoie’s future. Connie Mack had just won a pennant — but had lost the World Series to Boston in four straight, and was being raided by the Federal League. His club finances were in poor shape. He sold second baseman Eddie Collins to Baltimore, which had an outstanding team but couldn’t stand the competition and settled deeper and deeper into red ink. Owner Jack Dunn, NL pitcher back around the turn of the century, needed cash and began selling his players to major league teams. Southpaw George Herman “Babe” Ruth had first offered to Connie Mack, who was almost as financially strapped as Dunn. So Dunn sold Ruth to Boston for a reputed $2,900. Three days later, Ruth made his major league debut at Fenway Park as the opening moundsmen against eighth-place Cleveland, in for a four-game series.

Napoleon Lajoie was the fourth hitter that Babe Ruth ever faced as a major league hurler. (The first three were Jack Graney, Terry Turner and Joe Jackson.) The 19-year-old

Ruth, some five months out of a Baltimore reform school, yielded only five hits through the first six innings, and enjoyed a 3-1 lead. He faltered in the seventh, and the Naps tied the score on three hits and a sacrifice. Ruth finished the inning. In the Boston seventh, Tris Speaker singled home what proved to be the only other run of the game. Left-hander Dutch Leonard then hurled a hitless innings for Boston and fanned four. Ruth was the winning pitcher. Lajoie played the whole game at second base with neither an assist nor a putout, and went 0-for-four at the plate.

With “King Larry” nearing the end of the major league road, there would be only 27 more Ruth-Lajoie confrontations 60 feet apart. Lajoie would hit safely in only five of them — .165.
The star second sacker of the Philadelphia Phils, batting at the Polo Grounds ca. 1898.
Clockwise from the top left, four of Lajoie's teammates: from Fall River, pitcher Fred Klobedanz and outfielder Shorty Geier; from Philadelphia, Billy Nash and Ed Delahanty. On the facing page, a Napoleonic stance assumed during the California tour of 1901-02.
Lajoie's combatant with the Phils, hard-hitting (and hard-to-hit) Elmer Flick, batted as high as .378 in the National League but never won a batting title. Moving over to Philadelphia of the American League one year after his teammate Lajoie, Flick also went on to rejoin Nap at Cleveland. There, in 1905, he took the AL batting title with a mark of .306 that stood as the all-time major league low until Carl Yastrzemski’s .301 took the AL crown in 1968. Penobscot Indian Lou Sockalexis, shown here in a studio portrait of 1900, played for Holy Cross against Lajoie’s Woonsocket nine in 1895. Incredibly, the Cleveland team would in turn take its name from each of them: first, as the Naps; last, as the Indians. At the bottom right is Harry Steinfeldt, the answer to that celebrated trivia question, “Who played in the infield with Tinker, Evers and Chance?” More to the point for Larry Lajoie, Steinfeldt was in 1899 the Cincinnati third baseman who barreled into him at second base and put him out of action for two months.
Larry times four.
Supporting players in the Lajoie drama: opposite, clockwise from top left: Connie Mack, Socks Seybold, Pongo Joe Cantillon, John McGraw. Above, the Indians on the road, with manager Lajoie second from the left. Below, left to right, Indian teammates Bill Bradley (3b), George Stovall (1b), and Harry Ray (cf).
Opposite the big man at the left are some of his notable opponents of 1906-08. Clockwise from the top left are: George Stone, St. Louis Browns' outfielder who nipped Larry for the bat crown in 1906; Bobby Wallace, Browns' Hall of Fame shortstop; A's catcher Ossee Schreckengost; Boston's Bob Unglaub, who spiked Lajoie in a game in 1907. And at the immediate right is Cleveland pitcher Glenn Liebhardt, who was on the mound for the loss that knocked Cleveland out of the 1908 pennant hunt.
Here are some of the principals in the fiasco surrounding the 1910 American League batting title. Below, Ty Cobb, who won the title and the Chalmers car that went with it. At the right, Lajoie, who in truth won the title but at the time was thought to have fallen short (he also got a Chalmers car). And flanking this caption, on the left is Browns' manager Peach Pie Jack O'Connor, who ordered third baseman Red Corriden to play back and let Lajoie bunt if he wished; on the right is Harry Howell, Browns' pitcher who tried to wield extra influence in the press box.
Six notable Cleveland teammates, clockwise from top left: Joe Jackson, Terry Turner, Bill Wambsganss, Cy Young, Ray Chapman, and Joe Birmingham. Turner and Chapman played shortstop alongside Lajoie; Wamby replaced him in 1915, when he returned to the A's.
In Philadelphia Nap was reunited with Connie Mack and (below) Harry Davis. Chief Bender (right) and Eddie Collins (below) had just departed as Mack broke up the A’s dynasty of 1910-14.
Wintering in Florida in 1929, Lajoie tried his hand at bocce. In
1943 he made the citrus state his permanent home. Below, the
baseball pantheon at Cooperstown on June 12, 1939. From left
to right: (top) Honus Wagner, Grover Alexander, Tris Speaker, a
beaming Nap Lajoie, George Sisler, Walter Johnson; (bottom)
Eddie Collins, Babe Ruth, Connie Mack, Cy Young. (Ty Cobb
was late arriving that day.)
Late 1914 was a tempestuous period in Philadelphia.

Connie Mack's A's had, incredibly, lost four straight World Series games to the Boston Braves. The Federal League had been a season-long thorn to Mack. Its well-heeled owners spread unrest by dangling tempting pay offers before Mack's players — just as Connie himself had done a decade and a half before to National League players, when he was helping to bring the American League into being.

The four straight humiliating losses to Boston angered and disappointed Mack, but the "breaking up of the A's" transcended anger: he was on the verge of losing some of his players to the Feds. So to salvage what he could, he sold some — the biggest one was Eddie Collins to Chicago — and gave unconditional releases to others who had accepted the Federal League's blandishments.

Meanwhile, Charles Somers had become convinced Lajoie had outlived his usefulness in Cleveland. During the winter he had put out feelers to other owners.

Envisioning him as a stabilizer for all the newcomers in the lineup, and in need of a new keystone with Collins gone, Mack went to Cleveland and, it was announced, purchased Lajoie "in a straight cash transaction." This, it later developed, meant that Mack was going to pay Lajoie $4,500 a year and Somers would pay an equal amount. In its time, half of Larry's $9,000 salary represented an enormous year's pay for a major leaguer.

Rumors that Nap was headed out of Cleveland had been making the rounds the previous season when his troubles with Birmingham were common knowledge. Many also thought that Lajoie's failing stick work no longer outweighed the defensive deficiencies nearly 40-year-old infielders were prone to.

Two days before Lajoie learned of his transfer to the A's, he had begun a personal small-scale physical conditioning program while living in South Euclid. Every morning before breakfast, he'd walk from eight to 10 miles. So when he headed to Philadelphia 10 days before the team's scheduled departure for its spring training site in Jacksonville, Florida, he said he had to lose only 10 pounds, contrasted to the usual 30 in other years. No rubber shirts or vapor baths, he declared, and he let go at some of the stories that had reminded the fans he wasn't so fast as he once was.

"No one can show the same speed he did 15 years ago," he told interviewers. "You guys think Terry Turner is fast, don't you? Well, he stole only three more bases (17) than I did last season. Joe Jackson is a streak getting down to first base, but he stole only eight more bases (22) than I did — and he reached base 50 or 60 more times than I did." (Turner, the 1914 third baseman, and rookie Bill Wambsganss ("Wamby") shared the second base duties in 1915 for Cleveland.)

And how did he feel about the switch that brought him back to Philadelphia after a 12-year absence? "I'm pleased. Cleveland fans treated me royally, but maybe coming here will give me my life's ambition: To play in a World Series. I feel it's in the best interests of everyone that I make the shift. I have several years of baseball usefulness ... You'll find me right up there in the .300 class."

Until the bell rings for real each April, baseball quotes drip with optimism. Connie Mack's were no exception: "... Nap has much good baseball left in him and he'll get it out with Jack Barry and Stuffy McInnis playing on his flanks."

Eight thousand fans in wraps and overcoats turned out on a chilly Wednesday, April 14, as the 1915 season opened at Shibe Park, with the Mackmen meeting the Boston Red Sox. The "sun parlors" (bleachers) were filled early. It was designated as "Larry Lajoie's Local Debut" and featured the players marching to the flagpole in center field with the band playing and the fans cheering — especially when the White Elephant championship flag, emblematic of the 1914 league title, was unfurled in the strong breeze. There was excitement outside the park too: The fans had come by train, trolley car, auto, and jitney bus — and it was the "jitney express" that caused the stir. Many of them took aboard their passengers at City Hall and drove them direct to the ball park and charged an unheard of fee of 25 cents "and got it, too, without murmur of protest." The trolley company, whose fare was five cents, dispatched counters to estimate how much it had lost by this jitney intrusion.

The first ball was thrown out by Mayor Blankenburg from his reserved seat in the lower grandstand. The custom of the day had the umpire-in-chief catching the ball, in this case Tommy Connolly — the same Tommy Connolly who was calling 'em in the New England League in Nap Lajoie's baptismal season there in 1896. Connolly muffed it and was cheered in the manner all umps have been cheered over the years when they drop a ball or blow a call, or even just walk onto the field.

The A's won the game, 2-0. Herb Pennock yielded only one hit, and that in the ninth inning.

NAPOLEON LAJOIE
A week later, the same two clubs met in Boston. The date was April 22, one that Lajoie would want to forget but never could. He bobbled five ground balls, and partly because of his fielding ineptitude, the A’s — leading 6-2 after six innings — lost 7-6. Larry took no solace in the double and single he hit that day.

The five-bobble day became one of Larry’s favorite stories in his retirement years. Disgusted at his performance, he’d recall, he sat in the clubhouse after the game, muttering to himself. “At first, Mr. Mack said nothing. Then he came over to me and said, ‘Stick with it long enough, Larry, and you’ll get one.’”

A couple of weeks later, on May 9 (by which time the Mack nine, after a short-lived opening spurt, had sunk to seventh place), the A’s went to Cleveland for a series. The city was excited as its hero was returning for the first time since being sold. A crowd of 10,000 turned out though the day was cold and cloudy. “Lajoie Day” had been proclaimed. When “King Larry” stepped to the batter’s box for the first time in the game, “… it seemed that a 42-centimeter gun had been turned loose. Every human in the big enclosure stood up and cheered and applauded the idol for several minutes.”

But for the A’s, the 1915 season had few redeeming athletic values. They finished last, 43-109 — .283. If there was any consolation in the season for Lajoie, it may have come from the fact that Cleveland finished seventh, and Joe Birmingham had been canned as manager after only 28 games. Nap, who had reached his 40th birthday a few weeks before the season ended, hit .280, third highest among the regulars.

Mack had sold or traded several of his 1915 team during that season (Jack Barry, Eddie Murphy, Jack Lapp, Herb Pennock, and Bob Shawkey). His 1916 outfit was sad. It won only thirty-six games and lost 117 for a .235 percentage. Everyone feasted on the A’s, so voraciously that the seventh-place team, Washington, finished with a 76-77 record, forty games ahead of the cellar dwellers, and only 14½ out of first. The A’s were 54½ games out.

On Aug. 26, the A’s and Cleveland (now the “Indians” under Manager Lee Fohl and headed toward a .500 season) met in a meaningless contest at Shibe Park that turned out to be an historic engagement. Joe Bush was on the mound for the A’s, Stan Coveleski started for Cleveland. Bush walked the game’s first batter, Indian left fielder Jack Graney. He then retired the next 27 batters. A no-hitter that the A’s won, 5-0. And except for that first batter, it was a perfect game that would have earned Bush a niche in American League history next to Cy Young, who (thanks in part to Nap Lajoie’s defensive work) had done it for Cleveland in 1908.

But it was a game for the record books for another reason: It proved to be the last major league game Napoleon Lajoie ever played. The next day, at a pre-game practice, he suffered an injury that proved bad enough to prevent him from seeing any more action that season. In the Bush classic, Larry had come to bat in the sixth inning. By then, the Cleveland pitcher was Fritz Coumbe. Lajoie hit the first pitch over Tris Speaker’s head for a triple. He had one more at bat: He flied out deep to right. That was his farewell to the majors.
CHAPTER XIII
A LAJOIE RETURNS TO CANADA
— AND A PENNANT

During the Fall and Winter of 1916, Napoleon Lajoie’s status was obscure. One story, without furnishing sustaining data, said Nap would be managing in the high minors in 1917. Shortly after Christmas, he announced his retirement from major league baseball, then faded from the news columns. Sports writers noted that 1916 was a farewell year for a spate of the game’s stars: Christy Mathewson, Mordecai Brown, Nap Rucker, Rhody Wallace. Honus Wagner, in a salary row with Pittsburgh, was on the list until he asked for reinstatement and played half a season. (Sam Crawford joined the ranks after 1917.)

One Class AA (then the top minor league classification) team that was a potential site for Lajoie was Toronto of the International League, but that job was filled by Chief Bender — or so a nationally distributed news story reported. Then, on Jan. 15, 1917, Toronto officials announced that Napoleon Lajoie had been formally signed to lead the Leafs in the ‘17 campaign. Lajoie’s long delay in pinning down his 1917 employment was widely reported as being due to his efforts to obtain a contract that gave him part ownership of the team. He did not succeed.

Lajoie headed to Toronto 10 days later to discuss with team officials various aspects of the impending season. Training camp sites were discussed and it was ultimately decided to change from Jersey City to Petersburg, Va.

It was a time of tension and turmoil and uncertainty. World War I was raging, and Canada, as a British dominion, was on a war footing, with a first-hand knowledge of casualty lists. The league’s future was shrouded in doubt, for inter-league (International and American Association) play. The Washington American League franchise was wobbly, and there was support for transferring it to Toronto. The Players Fraternity, headed by Dave Fultz, Lajoie’s former teammate on both Philadelphia teams in 1898-1902, was raising owner hackles with a strike call over abolishing the Double-A draft and defying the National Commission. Lajoie, once a Fraternity dues-paying member, broke with Fultz, and quit the Fraternity.

“Fultz is ill-advised,” said Lajoie. “Major league, Double-A and Single-A players have no kick coming. We’ve been getting everything we asked for. No set of salaried men has ever been better treated than we have been by the magnates.” He cited the dwindling number of minor leagues (cut in half). No dividends were being paid. “Every Tom, Dick and Harry is a stockholder and they’re assessed each year. This is no time for Mr. Fultz to impose additional hardships. I doubt if any great number will obey him.”

“Stormy ‘17” was stormy from Day #1. The Toronto players were ordered to report to Petersburg March 28, a Wednesday. The next day, only six were in camp. On Monday, the total had risen to nine. Dawson Graham, prospective first baseman from Nashville, arrived on April 4. Southpaw pitcher Bunny Hearn, due to play a pivotal role on the pitching staff, arrived 10 days after the season opened; a former National and Federal leaguer, he had been tied up coaching a team in his native Chapel Hill, N.C., and just did avoid Lajoie’s threatened suspension.

The Leafs managed to get in four games against Petersburg, winning three, and one against Norfolk (a 10-0 romp). The day before the regular season opener against Baltimore, the team took a boat from Norfolk up Chesapeake Bay to Baltimore to play Jack Dunn’s Orioles.

Except for his half-season-plus at Fall River more than two decades before, Lajoie was a stranger to the minor leagues. It was a different world in many ways from the majors. His debut game against Baltimore didn’t help his mental state. The teams went into the 13th inning, tied 2-2. The runner was safe. Then came a walk, a single, and loss number one. Nap went hitless. The Leafs lost two more of the next three, though the manager went seven-for-fourteen. He homered twice — in his last at bat in the third game and first time up in the fourth game. Ironically, his full-season homer total would be only five. Lajoie had received a rousing reception from the fans, who were thrilled to see the man who had dominated the game in his day much as Cobb was dominating it in 1917, much as Babe Ruth would soon dominate it, and who had been rivalled only by Honus Wagner in their parallel careers.

In fact, Lajoie’s first swing around the eight-club circuit was a continuous tour of triumph with deafening applause added to oral encomia and here and there topped by gifts of glittering silver. “Lajoie Days” were the fare in every city. In Richmond, 4,000 turned out on a Sunday to see the living legend.

But all was not euphoric. Toronto lost seven of its first 11 games (Newark, off to a seven-of-eight start, led the loop), and first baseman Dawson Graham refused to switch to
As the Leafs headed to Buffalo to open a road trip (their cargo included rifles with which they drilled daily), the Boston Braves and the St. Louis Browns came to town for the first exhibition in city history between two major league teams. The Braves won, 4-3, in a six-inning, rain-shortened contest that merits mention for two reasons: The Toronto Globe story the next day made no mention of attendance; and Hank Gowdy did not accompany the team to Toronto. He headed to Cincinnati, then to his home in Columbus where he enlisted in the Ohio National Guard and thus won a niche in baseball history: the first major leaguer to volunteer for service in the First World War.

Lajoie’s Leafs were unable to mount a long winning streak, but still managed to remain within hailing distance of Newark, Providence, Baltimore and Rochester. Injuries hurt, and Lajoie — the strain seemingly showing — was suspended twice by league president Ed Barrow for umpire baiting. The action came as a surprise for he had no overt confrontations with any arbiters; apparently he did his needling subtly and out of earshot of fans. Dan Costello, a first baseman, finished his law studies at Harvard and came on board but a month later was sent to Kansas City. Hurler Jack Warhop was picked up from Baltimore. Ex-Brooklyn-Pittsburgh infielder Joe Schultz was signed.

In mid-June the Leafs lost four of five, and Lajoie shook up his lineup just prior to heading to Rhode Island to take on the Grays. There Lajoie was honored by Woonsocket friends, being presented a sterling silver baseball as he came to bat in the first game of the series. Toronto spurted briefly in early July, then slipped, then won seven of eight from Buffalo and Baltimore and found itself tied with Providence for the runner-up spot in mid-July, only two games in arrears of Newark.

However he was coping with the managerial woes, Lajoie was holding up his end offensively. Rochester Manager Mike Doolan, a former Phils and Federal League shortstop, led the league with .355, just five points up on Lajoie.

The major leagues — at least two or three clubs, the gossip was — were keeping an eye on Lajoie. Washington skipper Clark Griffith (who deserted the National League in 1901 and helped persuade Lajoie to do the same) casually let drop a remark that Nap could help the weak-hitting Nationals, then had to rush into print with a denial that he had made, or intended to make, an offer for Nap’s services.

July proved a key month for Toronto and Lajoie. The team bought back second baseman Frank Truesdale from Baltimore (he had been with the Leafs in 1916 but had been traded for pitcher Dan Tipple because Lajoie was slated to be the Toronto ‘17 keystone). Truesdale was a 31-year-old who had major league experience with St. Louis and New York.

Lajoie also latched on to 23-year-old Billy Murray, re-
cently out of Brown University, and whom Nap first saw working out with the Grays when Toronto was at the Providence ballpark.

Truesdale took over second: Lajoie moved to first; Murray, after a week's delay in reporting, took over shortstop (and made three errors in his first game). First baseman Dawson Graham, at constant odds with Lajoie, was let go.

Results were slow in coming, as Lajoie had only Bunny Hearn and Harold Thompson as dependable pitchers. Toronto lost an exhibition game to Detroit, 13-6 (rivals Cobb and Lajoie on the same field again! Nap was two-for-five; Cobb one-for-five). They lost two twin bills to Newark, then recovered and went 7-1-1. Sniffing a pennant, Lajoie went eight-for-sixteen over one stretch. The team averaged 12.7 hits a game over a 21-game skin, and on Aug. 12 was in first place, though only by percentage points. A "Lajoie Day" in Montreal drew 3,000. The Leafs lost two games. Lajoie received applause galore, but, inexplicably, no gifts.

President Wilson added a cheerful note to the general uncertainty around baseball when he declared he "saw no reason to stop or curtail baseball schedules."

The Leafs gained a split of another doubleheader with Montreal by winning the second game, 2-1, edging "Wade Hoyt, the Brooklyn high school youngster who belongs to the New York Giants." Lajoie had a part in both Toronto runs. At one point, the Leafs ran out ten wins in a row. They were not only hitting with power, they were hitting with exactitude. In a game at Richmond, both Lajoie and Joe Schultz hit a prize sign on an ad on the left field fence, and were awarded $50 each. The very next night, Billy Murray emulated the feat.

Official averages released in the first week of August had Nap at .361.

The dog fight for the league lead was to last through the final out of the season. Newark had shown signs of wilting, but regrouped and were a threat almost to the end. Mainly it was Toronto, Providence and Baltimore changing places in the standing almost daily. The 16-player limit expired on Aug. 15, and teams beefed up their rosters.

The standing after the games of Aug. 22 was typical:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Team</th>
<th>.500</th>
<th>.575</th>
<th>.596</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Toronto</td>
<td>74-50</td>
<td>.596774</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providence</td>
<td>71-48</td>
<td>.596629</td>
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<tr>
<td>Baltimore</td>
<td>69-51</td>
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<tr>
<td>Newark</td>
<td>69-51</td>
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Toronto met Newark at the Island Stadium on Monday, August 20. The International League race was the hottest in its history, but it wasn't heat that the 4,000 spectators would remember about that day in the Canadian city.

Toronto was batting in its half of the seventh inning. Newark had scored three in its half, tying the game at 3-3. Suddenly, from out of the North came drenching rains and a howling gale. For the next five minutes, chaos reigned. The brand new scoreboard, just repaired from wind damage suffered a month previously, was blown flat. The grandstand creaked and swayed, and confused and panic-stricken fans headed to safer spots, wherever that might be. Many ran to the infield area and just stood there, backs to the storm. The vicious winds ripped off a section of the grandstand roof and angrily flung it to the ground, barely missing a group of newspapermen who were seeking a haven.

The meteorological phenomenon seemed to focus its fury not just on the general stadium area, but on the ball field itself. It lasted for about five minutes, then died out. But Toronto was unable to finish its seventh inning, and thus Newark's three-run seventh was both blown and washed from the flattened scoreboard. The next day, against a backdrop of war-like ruin and destruction, the teams played — and split — a doubleheader. Never was nice baseball weather more appreciated. As August ended, Providence led by .013 when Baltimore nipped the Lajoie crew, 1-0 and the Grays swept a twin bill from Rochester.

Opening its final home stand, Toronto lost two of three to Rochester, then grabbed the top slot again with a doubleheader victory over Buffalo (with Lajoie going five-for-eight). They then staggered to a 19-16, twelve-inning win over Montreal with Nap hitting two home runs; and then winning two in a day from the Royals.

The Leafs headed to Rochester for two doubleheaders that would wind up the season, and Lajoie sent his pitching crew ahead a day early to assure them plenty of rest.

The teams split the Friday doubleheader, the Leafs losing 5-1, then prevailing in the nightcap, 9-6. Lajoie was six-for-eight.

On the evening of the final two contests, Toronto led Providence, .598 to .594. Baltimore was "far behind" with .590. Providence had three games left with Newark. The situation that Saturday was as follows:

If Toronto swept, it was in — regardless.

If Toronto won one of its games and Providence lost one of its three, Toronto had the pennant. If Toronto lost one of its final two at Rochester, and the Grays won all of their final three, Providence would win the pennant by .001. Of course, if the Lajoie team was beaten twice and the Grays swept, the Grays would be "easy" victors.

Toronto ended all the tension by taking both ends of the doubleheader, 1-0 and 5-1. The only Rochester run of the day stemmed from an error by Lajoie. (Playing first, he rushed to cover the bag when a sharply hit ball headed to the left of second base. Actually, pitcher Bunny Hearn speared it and threw to first, but Lajoie, expecting the throw from the shortstop, didn't see the ball, and was charged with an error.)

With two out in the ninth and his team ahead, 5-1, Lajoie was nearing the most satisfying moment of his baseball career. The batter grounded to Murray at shortstop. Murray threw to Lajoie. The Globe reported:
“A broad grin overspread Lajoie’s features when he took the throw from Murray for the 27th out.” Well it might have. He was on his first pennant winner, and he was the manager. Whatever the Grays did no longer mattered. All doubt was gone now. The pennant was Toronto’s. (At this moment, no one knew it, but the Grays beat Newark that day, split with them the next.)

Said Manager Lajoie after the game: “If my error, which gave Rochester a run in that second game, had lost the game and the pennant, I don’t believe I could have gone to the clubhouse and faced the boys.” With customary modesty, he did not mention that without his consistent bat, those “boys” would not have been even in contention for the pennant. His .380 average led the league.

In keeping with the custom of the day, the Toronto players went the exhibition route in quest of a few extra dollars. They opened with a game against Cleveland, and lost 1-0, with Lajoie making one of the loser’s three hits and one of the loser’s two errors. The game offered Lajoie a chance for a limited reunion with teammates of his Cleveland days. Holdovers were only four: Jack Graney, Ray Chapman and Fritz Coumbe, and Manager Lee Fohl, a coaching staff member during Nap’s final year in Cleveland and a man for whom Nap had a high regard.

Then came a tour of five communities in Western Ontario — involving a minimum of travel from Toronto. The Leafs won all the games (played in Kitchener, Brantford, Guelph, St. Thomas, and London against local semi-pro teams before crowds ranging from 800 to 1,500). Each Leaf player netted $100 for this effort.

A best-four-of-seven series revived, pitting the IL titlists against the American Association winner, Indianapolis, for the Class AA championship. The last one had been played in 1907. The Indians made fast work of the Leafs, taking the first and third games in Toronto, then winning the first two in Indianapolis. Lajoie was as inept as the other Maple City performers: He went three-for-eighteen. Financially, this series was an improvement. Each Leaf picked up $304. Another exhibition set-to with Cleveland on the eve of the World Series was called off due to cold.

So pleased was the Toronto management by Lajoie’s pennant-winning effort, and the attendance it generated that the skipper was given $1,000 by the club. Less enchanted by the Leafs’ post-season activities were the IL bigwigs who denounced the Indianapolis series as a “farce” that was not played under National Association jurisdiction.

Lajoie’s .380 average, and the fact that Toronto won the pennant under his managerial aegis, were known by all the major league poobahs, and the fall and winter sports pages carried periodic items about Larry. He was reported as headed to the Boston Red Sox (“but if Jack Barry, Navy-bound, is quitting, Dick Hoblitzell is said to be in line”). A vacancy was brewing out in St. Louis Cardinal country (Miller Huggins was New York Yankee-bound) but “Branch Rickey wants a college man with a degree to take over” (Huggins was a Cincinnati lawyer). The Chicago Cubs were said to be interested in King Larry. Two columnists in New York papers had been beating the drum for Lajoie as the best choice to succeed “Wild Bill” Donovan of the Yankees (it was an open secret Donovan would not be renamed), but that plum went to Huggins.

The war was still raging and American troops were increasingly on the firing line, and IL president Ed Barrow said he thought the loop should not open shop in 1918. Almost within hours, his salary was cut in half, or from $7,500 to $2,500, depending on what account you believed. He resigned. He landed on his feet, though — he was named to manage the Red Sox, in place of Barry. When Toronto infielder Lena Blackburne was picked up by Cincinnati, the guessers predicted Lajoie would return to Toronto where stories had Blackburne as likely to manage in 1918. In New York City, Lajoie told reporters Toronto “ought to be in the American League in place of Washington. We played to big crowds even though Toronto was hard hit by the war.”

Despite the club’s $1,000 gift, and Lajoie’s high words of praise for Toronto as a baseball city, relations between King Larry and the front office were soon to take on a bitter and unpleasant tone.
CHAPTER XIV
LEADING THE "INDIANAPS" AS WORLD WAR I GUNS ROAR

With the guns of World War I roaring with ever-increasing fury, Napoleon Lajoie headed home to the relative peace of Ohio. Over the winter, Ohio would prove to be a synonym for limbo, largely because a majority of International League owners were openly stating they thought the league should lock up shop until the war ended.

Toronto president James McCaffery talked of his team's going independent, playing major league and semi-pro aggregations. The attitude among American Association moguls was in sharp contrast: They declared their league was definitely going to function in 1918.

A managerial vacancy existed in Indianapolis. Jack Hendricks, who had piloted the club to the pennant in the season just past, had been named skipper of the St. Louis Cardinals. Lajoie hadn't scintillated in the Toronto-Indianapolis series, but he had made friends, and his name soon surfaced as a possibility to succeed Hendricks. In mid-January, he admitted he had been offered the job, and team president James C. McGill conceded that Lajoie was the man he wanted. But the status of the International was confused, and by contract Lajoie would have to return if the league functioned.

Both Lajoie and McGill were cautious in their statements — Lajoie would say merely he was "undecided" — and the manager issue dangled for weeks on end. McGill was absent, spending time in California and Florida. The rumor mill bustled, and names of other possibilities for the post saw print regularly: Sam Crawford, Frank Chance, Johnny Evers, Big Ed Walsh and George "The Chair Man" Stovall.

Lajoie's relationship with Toronto club executives — McCaffery in particular — gradually worsened. First, McCaffery put a price tag on Lajoie — either $3,500 or $3,000 — and in less than elegant French, Larry screamed "No way!" He said he would quit baseball rather than be peddled by Toronto, and if the IL suspended operations, he'd insist on his release so that he would be free to negotiate with anyone. Lajoie and McGill set up a meeting in Indianapolis. To avoid newsmen, Larry registered at a hotel as "John Murphy." He and McGill had no problem agreeing on terms, but no contract was signed. Lajoie asked McGill to be patient. McGill understood the predicament Lajoie was in, and agreed.

"I want to manage the Indians," Lajoie told newsmen. All the AA owners hoped he would, too. They saw him as a magnet at the gate in cities that had read about him but had never seen him during his 21-year career in the majors.

McCaffery was blunt: "Lajoie won't be given his release." And in mid-March, Charles Ebbets of the Brooklyn team of the National League announced he had bought Lajoie's release for $3,500. McCaffery didn't confirm the deal. A Brooklyn sports column reported Ebbets had talked to Lajoie and concluded that Lajoie had no objection to joining Brooklyn — though Ebbets stopped short of saying that Larry had agreed to play.

Lajoie had written several letters to McCaffery about the fate of Toronto and the rest of the IL for 1918. Finally, McCaffery wrote him: "I read you're going to sign with Indianapolis. No one has talked to me about getting you, and if they want you, they must see me first."

Lajoie told a newsman: "Guess that means McCaffery expects any club that gets me to pay for my release. Nothing doing. Connie Mack declared me a free agent a year ago so I could play anywhere I wanted. I had plenty of offers . . . Toronto didn't have to pay one cent for my release, so why should McCaffery try to get some money out of my release when his league has gone up? I'll quit rather than be peddled."

"And it isn't true that I'll report to Brooklyn. I won't permit Toronto to peddle me without my having a say. I gave Mr. McGill my word that I'll manage Indianapolis if the International League suspends. I don't care about going to the National League. I was in it before, and never got anywhere in baseball until I left it."

McCaffery never consulted with Lajoie about negotiating with major league teams.

At the urging of the Army, Indianapolis had arranged to do its spring training in Hattiesburg, Mississippi. Camp Shelby was only 10 miles away and many Indiana draftees were stationed there. The player-reporting date was March 24, and Indianapolis was to open the regular AA season May 1 in Columbus. Herman Bronkie, an "up-for-a-cup-of-coffee" major league infielder, was appointed pro-tem manager to direct training sessions. Games were played against Mobile and the 151st Infantry.

An impatient Lajoie went to an IL meeting in New York and confronted McCaffery, vowing to appeal to the National Commission rather than report to Toronto. "And if
Lajoie was a free agent. He caught the next train to the National Commission turns down my request, I'll quit.” McCaffery based his plea to the commission on the claim that McGill was guilty of “tampering” with Lajoie.

On April 13, the commission announced its finding: Lajoie was a free agent. He caught the next train to Indianapolis, signed to manage the team, then handled infield practice as his players prepared to meet the Cleveland Indians in an exhibition game. He was happy as he answered reporters’ questions, swapped small talk with his friends of Cleveland days, and coached third base.

“How do I feel? Well, I have a crick in my back . . . I haven’t had a ball in my hands since last season. All I did all winter was shovel snow.”

The commission’s pro-Lajoie ruling — at least one version of it — seemed to border on the capricious. It noted that the $1,000 promised the manager if Toronto won the pennant was not part of his contract; each contract specifies that all terms, conditions and promises must be made part of the contract — otherwise the contract is null and void, and the player must be given his unconditional release. Another printed account cited the role the Players Fraternity — which Lajoie had left over the organization’s strike threats the previous year — played in the case as it noted a baseball rule that any player who had 15 years in Double-A or the major leagues was entitled to become a free agent.

Six thousand turned out for the opener in Columbus, and the guest nine — often tabbed now in news columns as the “Indianaps” — blanked Joe Tinker’s men, 9-0. Nap played first base and was two-for-five. The draft was making inroads on his personnel. He lost 23-year-old Walter “Butch” Henline, a catching prospect. Trainer Windy Lotshaw was added to the player ranks. Spithaller Dana Fillingim was traded to the Boston Braves for first baseman Clarence “Tex” Covington and a pitcher. Over the winter, the AA had forbidden the spitball and Fillingim was unable to develop a respectable curve. Four days into the season, Toledo manager Roger Bresnaham — a local boy despite his “The Duke of Trate” nickname — released outfielder Joe Birmingham. So far as is known, Lajoie shed no tears.

Opening the season with the “Indianaps” was another player from Lajoie’s past: Johnny Corriden, who had played that deep third base for the Browns on the last day of the 1910 season. Presumably he played shallow or deep — whatever Manager Lajoie commanded.

A week into the season, Lajoie moved to second base and Tex Covington took over first. Lack of spring training seemed not to handicap Lajoie: he was ten for his first thirty trips. Out of respect for the war, Indianapolis dispensed with the traditional opening day ceremonies — no parade, no bands, no first ball by the mayor.

The war was being fought on distant fronts, but it was making life hard for baseball on the home front. Besides Lajoie himself, Bronkie, and Lotshaw, only one Indian was over draft age. Within five weeks of the opener, six players were lost to enlistment or took jobs in steel mills or shipbuilding plants. Baseball’s status remained fuzzy in the wake of War Secretary Newton Baker’s “work or fight” edict. Casualty lists made game results seem unimportant. All teams headed a “Clark Griffith Ball and Bat Day,” turning over proceeds to a fund to buy sports equipment for the troops on all fronts.

The Southern Association disbanded June 30, and the Pacific Coast League followed two weeks later. The riddled AA signed some of those players to its 16-man rosters. American League president Ban Johnson issued a scathing denunciation of major league players who sought to duck service by taking shipyard jobs. “I hope (Provost Marshal) General Crowder will yank any 1A players from shipyards and steel works by the coat collars and place them in cantonments to prepare for future events on the Western front.”

Covington donned a Navy uniform in early June, and Lajoie had to go back to covering first base. Lajoie sent an SOS old friend Clark Griffith, seeking a moundsman or two. Replied Griff: "Larry, if I had a pitcher who could stand in the box, I would hug him.” He wasn’t kidding: The day before, he had pitched Nick Altrock, whose innings on the mound in the previous eight years totaled 13.

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The war was brought home in tragic fashion to the Indianaps and their fans. With the team playing in Louisville, Washington Park, its home grounds, was to be the site of a game between an Aviation team and an amateur nine. A plane that was to drop some balls onto the field just before game time went out of control suddenly and crashed near second base. A captain — a passenger — was killed. The pilot, a major, was injured. The game was canceled.

Among Lajoie’s additions to the roster was infielder Christian Frederick Albert John Henry David Betzel. He had played for the St. Louis Cards but in spite of his handle, he was only one person. They called him “Bruno.”

In the season’s early going, the Indianaps occupied chiefly fifth place — occasionally fourth, sometimes sixth. Louisville, Kansas City and Milwaukee all took turns in the top slot, but Indianapolis remained within reasonable striking distance. Larry was swinging the bat effectively, the crick gone and muscles aching less and less. He was .311 after three weeks and .349 after five, third best in the AA. He went three-for-four on May 18, with five RBIs in a 7-2 win over Columbus. A week later, he hit a three-run homer off Milwaukee’s Dickie Kerr, who would come through the next year’s Black Sox World Series scandal as clean as the proverbial hound’s tooth. On June 1, Larry solved Cuban Adolfo Luque’s slants three times in five trips, but Indianapolis lost to Louisville, 3-2. On June 12 he hit what was to be his final home run as a pro — and it was a freakish one. He slammed a vicious line drive near the foul line in left; Milwaukee outfielder Austin McHenry ran to field it, and as he stabbed at it wildly the ball hit his hand, rolled up his arm and shot into the bleachers.
Lajoie stepped to the plate in a Sunday game against St. Paul in mid-June. There were two on and none out and Larry belted one to deep right. It was caught and the throw to the plate nipped the runner in a fiercely disputed play that necessitated a police convoy for the umpire after the game. The outfielder was Johnny Corriden, sold by the Indians to St. Paul a month previously. He had been playing Lajoie deep, naturally.

In a late-June game, St. Paul infielder Artie Butler led the Apostles with three hits against the Lajoie crew, but the Indianaps won, 5-3. Butler was from Fall River and some 13 years Lajoie’s junior; they became lifelong friends.

The Indianaps went on to a 10-1-1 streak in July and were in second place on July 20. Lajoie had slumped miserably at bat, going nine-for-sixty-three in one stretch. But with the weekend of July 20-21, baseball suddenly took on a new perspective. First, Secretary Baker, in Washington, ruled that baseball was non-essential. Second, a German submarine attacked the tug Perth Amboy three miles off Orleans on Massachusetts’ Cape Cod. In 90 minutes, four barges were sunk and the tug burned to the water’s edge. The war that had been “way over there” was all of a sudden “right here.”

The Baker edict was the long-awaited official verdict that finally clarified baseball’s place in the national scheme of things. Specifically, Baker turned down veteran Washington catcher Eddie Ainsmith’s appeal from his local board’s ruling revoking his deferment. Ainsmith had a wife and child. Literally within hours, the American Association closed up shop and its players headed home. Baker’s words were unmistakable: “The non-productive employment of able-bodied persons, useful in the national defense, either as military men or in the industry and commerce of our country, cannot be justified.”

It didn’t help matters that, at this time, an editorial in the Stars and Stripes was reprinted in the states, denouncing athletes who were not in uniform, and contrasting the attitude of young Americans fighting and dying in Europe with that of some at home who were “thinking” of joining the colors.

Lajoie stayed in Indianapolis a few days, winding up team affairs, then drove home to South Euclid. He received a telegram from John McGraw of the Giants, asking if he’d finish the season playing for New York. Lajoie asked for further information, conceding (in a softening of a previous assertion) that he might again become a National Leaguer “if the inducements are suitable.” He had offered his services to his draft board but was told in effect: “Don’t call us, we’ll call you.” He was a month away from his 44th birthday.

Nothing developed from the McGraw offer.

Lajoie was informed of plans to operate an Ohio-Pennsylvania semi-pro league in 1919 if the war had ended, and indicated he was a bit too old to play weekend ball. “When you’re as old as I am, you need more than Saturday and Sunday games. Unless the war ends next year, it looks as if I’m done as a pro.”

The war ended in a few months, but at Christmas, Lajoie announced his retirement from professional baseball. In 1919, the semi-pro league functioned — a vestige of the defunct Ohio-Pennsylvania minor league — and (though printed accounts are lacking) it’s believed Lajoie lent his name to the league as commissioner to help it establish itself.

CHAPTER XV
INTO RETIREMENT AND ON TO COOPERSTOWN

Just after the World War I guns went silent, the owner of the Syracuse Stars of the North Atlantic League, Ernie Landgraf, tried to lure Lajoie back to the game for more managing. Nap is said to have given two reasons for declining: “1. I hate the sound of a locomotive whistle. 2. You had a ballplayer [the name was not made public] whom you released. If he were still with you, I’d manage the Stars, but I wouldn’t release him — I’d kill him.”

Still in love with the game, he followed it closely through newspapers. Soon, he became affiliated with the Miller Tire Co., and later with the Searles Rubber Co. His business duties took him back to Woonsocket at least once that his nephew, Lionel Lajoie, recalls. Lionel also remembers his uncle returning to Woonsocket as a representative for a plumbing supply company.

Lajoie also served as a member of the Cleveland Boxing Commission. And the city’s Republicans tried to induce him to run for county sherrif. He rejected their pleas, and one reason he gave was that Honus Wagner had made the same run in the Pittsburgh area and had been defeated.

Together with his wife Myrtle, Nap made visits to Globe
Village on several occasions, usually staying with his brother Joseph but spending time socializing with his other brothers and sisters.

In the Twenties, Napoleon and Myrtle, tiring of the frigid Ohio climate, began spending their winters in Florida, chiefly at Lake Worth. The Lajoies also left their small farm where they kept a few horses in South Euclid, and moved to Mentor-on-the-Lake, still only a few miles from metropolitan Cleveland. There they lived from late Spring to early Fall. Nap took up golf rather late in life but it came to be his principal diversion — and he became good at it, shooting frequently in the 76-78 range. In Florida, he was on the golf course almost daily. He weighed only 10 pounds more than when he was playing with the Naps. Larry tried fishing, too, but he never did take a liking to it. Myrtle was an avid bridge player, and Napoleon liked to play too.

Years later he told a baseball writer: "... I guess I could have played a few more years. But all of a sudden I got so sick of trains, of bats, of fences ... tired of everything ... that I quit." Once he retired, Lajoie was an infrequent spectator at Cleveland games, but it is incorrect that (as has been written) he never again set foot in the Cleveland ball park. He attended a 1920 World Series game that Stan Coveleski pitched against Brooklyn. Coveleski, who joined Cleveland two years after Nap left, hurled a five-hit, 5-1 victory that evening the series.

The game had its poignant moments for Lajoie: First, Cleveland had won a pennant much too late to be a part of it. Second, it was off Coveleski that Lajoie had made his 3,251st and final major league hit four years before when closing out his career with the Philadelphia Athletics.

On July 29, 1921, as part of Cleveland's 125th anniversary as a city, he participated in a game of Cleveland old-timers against a team of Cleveland sandlotters. Lajoie's teammates included Cy Young, Bill Bradley, Elmer Flick, and Jesse Burkett. Nap was the sole old-timer to play all nine innings. He was 46 at the time. He was two-for-five and sparingly handled five chances afield as the old timers won, 11-6.

A year later, Lajoie played a game at Mt. St. Charles in Woonsocket. Thousands jammed the field to welcome their hero and native son. Myrtle was there, as were Larry's brothers; nephews Ted, Waldo, J. Adonat, Aldo and Lionel; nieces Rena, Edwina, Ella and Lillian. To this day, the survivors relish with pride and delight their memories of that day in 1922.

The Yankee team of 1926 fascinated him, and he saw it several times. Years later, he went to Cleveland's first night game and saw Bobby Feller pitch. Nap was impressed. "He's almost as fast as Walter Johnson," Lajoie exulted.

After his retirement from his job with the rubber firms, Nap and Myrtle enjoyed a life of comfort and leisure. He had made far more money from baseball than most players. He was frugal. He'd invested well (despite passing up that Coca-Cola stock). He had barnstormed. He had had sidelines that enhanced his income.

From 1906 to 1908, for example, Nap had teamed up with a Cleveland sportswriter named M.A. Bobrick to incorporate the American League Publishing Co. The venture had published an AL baseball guide that printed rules, teams and player statistics, and "How to" essays carrying bylines of major leaguers.

Bobrick had later described Nap as "multi-talented — a good businessman, had an analytical and systematic mind and had a mania for learning. He always believed it was never too late to learn. He had all the qualities needed to succeed in business. He was far more than a baseball player.

"He was a retiring person, of modest disposition. He sought no publicity. He had little to say. He was a good listener. Once he knew all the elements of a problem, he'd make his decision and it was always to the point. He could say 'Yes' or say 'No,' and when he said it, he meant it.

"When we worked together in publishing, he mastered shorthand and typing in less than 60 days.

"He did not make friends too easily — or at least not too quickly. He usually didn't take up with people on the first meeting. But if he took a liking to someone, he was loyal to a fault.

"He was not proud. He'd sweep the floor as unhesitatingly as he would sign a check for a carload of paper ... He'd always caution young people that they should save for a rainy day."

The journalism of Nap's playing days had told the sports world — accurately or otherwise — not only annual salaries but how much the top stars had in the bank. "King Larry" had been among the best paid in the game, so had been a favorite subject. One printed report had estimated that he made $83,000 in his first 12 years (through 1907) in the majors, and "... will, in all probability, have made as much money out of baseball as any other player in the business by the time he is ready to quit ... (He) appears to be of a careful nature and is probably well off in this world's goods ..." The stats in this story seem to have understated Nap's actual salaries over the years — then, as now, there was no unanimity in printed stories about this phase of the game.

In an article headlined "Lajoie and Croesus," Sporting Life went beyond Lajoie's "gross" earnings and said Nap had "25,000 cold metallic simoleons stowed away in various safe places where they could be rounded up if any wolves come pawing at the Napoleonic latchstring."

"Larry did not draw a cent of his salary [in 1905]. His checks were made out to his employer, Charles W. Somers, who borrows the money off Lajoie, using it in his coal business, and pays the Naps' manager six per cent instead of the four he would get from a bank." The story claimed Nap had saved more than two-thirds of the approximate $30,000 he was paid in the four years from 1902-1905, inclusive.
In his retirement years, Lajoie was once quoted as saying his highest pay was while managing the Naps: $11,000. In 1910, the average annual working wage in the U.S. was $525.

Lajoie had always been “out for the stuff,” but he was also known as a generous man and a soft touch. He had formed a close friendship with Bill Bernhard, the Phils pitcher who was on the 1901-02 California barnstorming tour with him — and with whom he had jumped from the NL Phils to the brand new A’s of Connie Mack. After he bowed out of the majors in 1907, Bernhard managed Nashville and umpired in the Southern League, and when a Nashville bank failed, a story appeared that he had lost all his money.

“A few days later I received in the mail a check for $500 from Lajoie,” Bernhard said. “It was a loan that Nap wanted to make to me until I recovered from my difficulties. I sent the check right back to him and thanked him and explained that I wasn’t broke by any means. How many ballplayers would have done what he did? He was a square man and a good friend.”

Lionel Lajoie says his uncle’s “generosity could have made him a poor man. His wife Myrtle held the pursestrings. She was a very able and intelligent woman.”

In mid-1935, plans for a Baseball Hall of Fame were announced, with its dedication to be tied into a baseball centennial observance in 1939 in Cooperstown, putative “birthplace of baseball.”

The first Hall election was held in 1936. Five giants of the game corralled the necessary 75% of the baseball writers’ votes: Ty Cobb, 222; Ruth and Wagner 215 each; Christy Mathewson 205; and Walter Johnson 189. Finishing sixth, and thus out of the money, was the stocky, graying gentleman at Mentor-on-the-Lake who read with interest the vote results. He trailed with 146, having split the second basemen’s vote with Eddie Collins and Rogers Hornsby.

In the 1937 voting, only three ex-players received the necessary vote total. Lajoie, with 168, topped Tris Speaker (165) and Cy Young (153).

In June of 1939, Lajoie drove the few hundred miles from Mentor to Cooperstown for what he later would describe as the proudest day of his life.

There on the stand — in what may have been the most emotional and nostalgic day baseball ever knew — the Big Frenchman, who had started off as a kid sweeping up the cardroom of a mill, received his honors along with the Bambino, the bowlegged Pennsylvania Dutchman, the long-armed fastballer from Kansas, the patriarch from East Brookfield, Mass., the Grey Eagle from Hubbard, Texas, Old Pete from the Nebraska cornfields, the former Michigan University student who twice hit over .400; the Columbia University graduate whom Nap himself succeeded as a Philadelphia keystone; and the “Cyclone” from Ohio who won more major league games than anyone else who ever lived or ever will.

Ken Smith, former New York sports writer and once the executive director of the Hall of Fame, admirably caught the spirit of that first Induction Day in his “Baseball’s Hall of Fame” (1952, Grosset & Dunlap). Smith, in part:

“Napoleon Lajoie, personification of playing grace during his prolonged heyday, said with a smile at breakfast in the Cooper Inn: ‘I never had such fun meeting my old opponents.’ . . . Eddie Collins was seen talking to Lajoie, Charlie Gehringer and Billy Herman, and Casey Stengel commented: ‘Since when did you see four second basemen as good as those fellows in one spot?’ . . .”

Nap followed Mack, Wagner and Johnson in the induction rite: “. . . (Lajoie) stepped forth with the graceful stride of an athlete though he had turned 60 . . .”

Said Nap: “If you are having as good a time as I am, you are having the time of your life.”

Shortly after the Cooperstown induction, Lionel Lajoie and his wife Doris visited Larry and Myrtle, who were moving into a smaller home in Mentor. Lionel recalls:

“Napoleon had accumulated a ton of baseball mementos — bats, balls, pictures, watches, medals — you name it. He had spread out everything on the tables, chairs and on the floors of two rooms.

‘Lionel,’ he said, ‘any of this you want, take it. It’s yours.’ But Doris and I had no room for it back in Woonsocket. I thanked him, but had to decline.

“‘He gave a few things to the Hall of Fame. The rest was eventually carted off to the dump. When I think of it now . . .’"
In 1943, Larry and Myrtle Lajoie finally made the permanent move to Florida. Their base of operations during the nearly two decades they had been wintering there was Lake Worth, on the eastern coast only a good fungo wallop from Palm Beach. They set up there — briefly, as it would turn out. In the spring of 1944, they bought another home in Daytona Beach, a couple of hundred miles to the north and still on the East Coast. They set up there — briefly, as it would turn out. In the spring of 1944, they bought another home in Daytona Beach, a couple of hundred miles to the north and still on the East Coast. The Lajoies lived there for four years, but it was a large home and maintaining it became more and more of a burden for the couple, so they sold the house and bought a smaller one in Holly Hill, only a few miles to the north. Their new dwelling was at 188 Daytona Avenue. That would be Napoleon's and Myrtle's final address.

Lajoie's journey from Mentor-on-the-Lake to Coopers-town in mid-1939, to be inducted into the Hall of Fame, had probably been his only non-Ohio public appearance in twenty years. His diffidence and self-imposed isolation were in no way linked to bitterness toward any individuals or resentment at the monetary rewards that lesser players in later eras were getting. He simply wasn't a spotlight seeker.

He was circumspect in his comments about the game's new cast of performers, and praised them and their talents. New York writer Dan Daniel cornered him during one spring training in the late 1920's, and Nap told him the Yankees rated with the greatest clubs ever. "Comparisons are difficult. We didn't have the lively ball to hit; we all didn't swing from the end of the handle. In my d

power wasn't demanded from the top to the bottom of the lineup — outfielders, catcher, first baseman. Now it's top to bottom. I don't want to take anything away from the Yankees, but it's hard to compare."

Larry once picked his own all-star team:
C — Jimmy Archer, Marty Bergen.
1b — Hal Chase.
2b — Bobby Lowe.
3b — Bill Bradley.
ss — Honus Wagner.
Lf — Ed Delahanty
Cf — Ty Cobb.
Rf — Babe Ruth.

All were contemporaries, and Larry knew their talents well. Three were teammates — Delehanty, Joss and Bradley. However, he knew Babe Ruth only as a pitcher (1914-16) and apparently assigned him an outfield berth on the premise that such an "oldtimer" lineup could stand a little more power.

The Daytona-Holly Hill area was fertile spring training territory. In 1957, Nap visited "Indianville," the Indians' Daytona Beach training site (where one of the playing fields bore his name). It was declared "Nap Lajoie Day" and before more than 3,000 fans, he threw out the first ball in the exhibition game against the Giants.

Larry's niece, Lillian (Lajoie) Lamoureux, who, with her husband Del was living with the Lajoies at the time, remembers how that day came about:

"My Uncle Larry was a quiet, humble man. Never any fanfare with him. He never wanted anything made of him. "One time during spring training, when the Cleveland Indians trained in Daytona, the phone rang here in our Holly Hill home. Uncle Larry answered and talked for a while, and after he hung up he told me it was Tris Speaker who had called. The Cleveland officials wanted Larry to go to a game — they were going to honor him. But he declined.

"'Larry, why not?' I said to him. 'They want to honor you. They love you. Why not accept and go out there and enjoy it? You're feeling well now. We'll all go and have a good time.' Wouldn't you know — just a couple of weeks before I had pressured him into getting a new gray suit and new hat. He looked handsome — still tall and straight at 62.

"So he had me call Mr. Speaker back and to say he accepted with pleasure.

"They advertised about Larry and a good crowd was there. After the game, there was a party at Indianville [the Cleveland training complex]. Everybody had a great time. Then, about 7 that evening, my husband Del and I had another party for him at the Ridgewood Hotel. We rounded up as many old friends as we could, and had dinner. There were about 80 there.

"When we got home that night, he was tired — but so happy! We talked about that game and the parties for weeks afterwards."

Writers covering the various teams would find their way to Daytona Beach or Holly Hill and ask the friendly, big-boned, pipe-smoking, graying man if he'd make time for an interview. He always did. And fans in major league cities would soon be reading about Larry Lajoie... and the older ones who once saw him play would regale their juniors about his vicious line drives and the consummate ease with which he'd gobble up grounders to his left or
right — it made no difference. Chances are they'd get around to using the word "graceful." Everyone else did.

Lajoie kept in touch with baseball via the daily box-scores in newspapers, and he would occasionally attend a Daytona Beach Islander game (Class D), "It's too long a trip to go to a major league game." In these later years, he wore glasses. Even when he reached 80, he loved to putter around in his yard and care for the garden, cut the grass, and polish the car (not the '10 Chalmers!). On his 81st birthday (media reported it as his 80th) he received more than a hundred telegrams and cards, and countless phone calls. Friends and neighbors dropped in all day to say "Many more!"

"It makes a fellow feel good to know he hasn't been forgotten entirely," Larry said.

Just after World War II, when wealthy Jorge Pasquel, Mexican League president, and his four brothers were using their pesos to entice players in the states to desert (and getting some takers), writers sought out Lajoie for comment, since he qualified as the "first big deserter" in the NL-AL confrontation in 1900-01.

Baseball had outlawed the players who jumped in the mid-Forties, and Lajoie said he "has no sympathy for them."

It was a strange opinion to hold in view of what he himself had done in similar circumstances almost half a century before. "Yes, I looked at things differently in 1900," he conceded. "There was only one league. It was more of a sweatshop then. I jumped to the American [then regarded as an outlaw organization] because the salary limit in the National was $2,400 a season. Connie Mack, through an agent, offered me $6,000.

"There is nothing out of the way with the reserve clause, if baseball had a strong committee to decide if a man is worth more money when he claims he is underpaid.

"You always have to have laws in baseball. If it weren't for these laws, including the reserve clause, old Jake Ruppert would have had all the best players in the world playing for the New York Yankees. Money didn't mean anything to him.

"If those fellows who went to Mexico had planned right, they would have had the Mexicans put the money in escrow for them in this country to insure their future.

"I'm guessing, but I don't think those players are going to win . . . A half dozen players who didn't have enough sense to protect themselves are not going to be allowed to disrupt a national game as big as baseball.

"That case of mine helped decide the fate of the American League. If they had beaten us in the courts outside of Pennsylvania, I don't believe there would have been a rival league to the National. No one would have been able to successfully challenge the National. That's what I think, anyway.

"With the players in the old days, it was a case of take it or leave it. The owners had it all their own way. Today the players are getting lots more money. I can't think of anything better a man can do than play baseball for a living. Travel first class, eat best food, live in best hotels, money is good and, as they say, you can't beat the hours."

One day in 1957, Nap played host to a visitor: Tyrus Raymond Cobb. They sat for half a day on the Lajoie breezeway. How tragic that their words were not preserved forever on a tape recorder! "Two of the game's giants — both would be dead within four years — who thrilled literally millions by their storied diamond deeds, seated there quietly, the passing traffic on Daytona Avenue blissfully unaware of their presence, swapping tales of games of long ago that were seared into their memories forever.

Nap later gave a capsule of what they had talked about: Addie Joss' 1908 perfect 1-0 game against Chicago and Ed Walsh — nothing to do with Cobb except its impact on the pennant race, which Detroit won on the final day (Nap could recite that game's highlights from memory, and how its sole run scored on a wild pitch.) . . . the way Ty ran the bases . . . "my .339 lifetime batting average." Ify asked Nap about his biggest day, and the money-minded Woonsocket ex-millhand picked June 4, 1912 when Cleveland fans and the club gave him the floral horseshoe with 1,009 silver dollars strung among the flowers. "If you don't think that was dough," Lajoie said, "look back at the prices in those days." But the day also meant that he had the respect and appreciation of the city's sports fans for his 10-year effort in behalf of the team.

Nap once advocated legalizing the spitball again. "Let them throw whatever they want. They wouldn't change pitchers so often and it would shorten the length of games. But I'm all for the modern players — they're great!"

Lajoie's declining days in Holly Hill were contented ones — he had frequent visitors, some of them media members, others connected or formerly connected with the game; and he'd go on a visit to other old friends or associates.

Dave Fultz, the Brown University luminary who was a Lajoie teammate on both Philadelphia teams and later was an attorney and top football official, was by now confined to a wheelchair in Lake Helen, near Deland. Mrs. Fultz called Nap and asked if he would go over and spend a day. He did — "We had a great time talking over the old days." Grover Hartley, a journeyman catcher who was living in Daytona Beach, dropped in for a chat. Syd Keener, then director of the Hall of Fame, dropped in after a visit to Big Ed Walsh, living in Pompano Beach. Walsh had health problems and heavy medical expenses, and Nap hoped to attend an International League benefit game (between the Miami Marlins and the Buffalo Bisons), but he fell, broke his arm and his physicians advised him not to go.

Mrs. Lajoie died of cancer in 1954. Nap himself was in fair health, but didn't want to be alone. His five brothers and two sisters had all died, and his nieces and nephews were, in the main, in Rhode Island. In Myrtle's last months, Lajoie's nieces, Lillian Lamoureux and Ella...
Adam went down to Florida and helped make life easier for her and Larry. After Myrtle's death, Lillian and her husband Dolor (Del) liquidated their furniture business in Lincoln, R.I., and moved in permanently with Uncle Dolor (Del) liquidated their furniture business in Lincoln, R.I., and moved in permanently with Uncle Napoleon.

"They're worth their weight in gold," Nap told a visitor. "They take care of me like they would a baby. I'm mighty lucky to have them with me." Del is a great Ted Williams rooter, and he and Nap would sit on the screened breezeway and talk baseball by the hour. Lillian, at first not a baseball fan, gradually became one, in part of necessity.

Fall River never forgot Napoleon Lajoie — and never ceased to be proud that he launched his pro career from that city's Bedford Street Grounds. Fall River sports reporter Frank McGrath always visited him when in Florida on vacation or to cover spring training. Lajoie would always ask that his best wishes be transmitted to old friends he knew from his brief Fall River stay, and always inquired about Artie Butler, former major leaguer who was at various times a teammate of Honus Wagner, Miller Huggins and Rogers Hornsby. When he died a few years ago, Butler was the oldest living ex-major leaguer. Lajoie was an admirer of Stan Musial — for deportment as much as for his abilities — "a great fellow, quiet, attends to his work and minds his own business. He's a credit to the game."

Though a rare visitor to spring training games, Lajoie loved to go to Little League games, and watch the kids. He served as honorary president of the Daytona area Little League. One evening, in the Summer of 1958 when he was nearing 84, someone spotted him standing alone behind the left-field fence, "delighting in watching the kids play ball," as the story read. A Little League official approached him.

"Mr. Lajoie, would you mind if we introduced you over the public address system?"

"No, no — please," Lajoie replied. "Let some of the younger men take the bows."

Nap felt that he had had his years on center stage, and that he should now stay in the background. He made very few public appearances. Holly Hill knew him as a mild-mannered, gracious and kind neighbor.

In 1958 Lajoie was invited to the celebration of Stan Musial's 3000th base hit. Musial was the 8th to join the 3000 Hit Club. Nap had to decline for health reasons. (After Lajoie in 1914 joined Cap Anson and Honus Wagner at the 3,000-hit plateau, Eddie Collins, Tris Speaker, Ty Cobb and Paul Waner all preceded Musial in "joining the club.")

Nap watched the 1958 Yankees-Milwaukee World Series on television, and when Milwaukee batters couldn't deliver the hit that might have clinched the series, Nap called to niece Lillian Lamoureux: "Bring out a bat from the bedroom, and put it on the TV set. I guess I'll have to pinch hit."

In late January 1959, Napoleon Lajoie was stricken with pneumonia, and was taken from his home at 188 Daytona Ave., in Holly Hill, to Halifax Hospital in Daytona Beach.

He seemingly was on the road to recovery and was scheduled for early discharge when on Thursday, Feb. 5, he suffered a relapse.

At 9 o'clock on Saturday morning, Feb. 7, 1959, he died. His niece, Lillian Lamoureux, was at his bedside.

The next night at the Baggett-McIntosh chapel, a Rosary was recited by friends and neighbors paying their last respects.

On Monday morning, a solemn high requiem Mass was celebrated in St. Paul's Church, with Rt. Rev. Msgr. William J. Mullaly as chief celebrant. About 100 attended to pay final tribute. Little League players served as honorary pallbearers.

Burial was in Cedar Hill cemetery in Daytona Beach.

The Cleveland Plain Dealer carried this editorial on Feb. 9, 1959:

"The great and graceful Napoleon Lajoie is dead at 83 . . . and it is fitting that he should be remembered in a special way in this city . . . On his first game in Cleveland uniform in June 1902, ten thousand turned out. Three days later, he drew the city's largest weekday crowd up to that time, nearly 13,000 . . . The team became the 'Naps' the next year . . . As a playing manager, he just missed doing what the recently-departed Tris Speaker did in 1920, and Lou Boudreau did in 1948: The Naps lost out to Detroit in the 1908 pennant race by half a game . . .

"Cleveland is beholden to Napoleon Lajoie in a special way. In the first year of the American League, Cleveland's Blues finished seventh; early in the 1902 season, they were last. Attendance sank. There were rumors the franchise would be transferred to Cincinnati or Pittsburgh. (Shades of 1957 and 1958!) Then came Lajoie, and team stability. As much as anyone in the early 1900's, Napoleon Lajoie was responsible for making this a big league city. May his memory and example set some of the present-day Indians afire."

In 1964, according to a Cooperstown paper of Aug. 26, 1964, a gold-topped cane made of ebony was given to the Hall of Fame Museum. It was the one given to Lajoie by his friends at that Woonsocket testimonial in 1900. It was one of his most treasured mementos.
Accepting 1893 — the year the 6-by-4 pitcher’s “box” was pushed back to 60½ feet from the previous 50 — as the beginning of “modern baseball,” a strong case can be made that Napoleon Lajoie merits the title of “Modern Baseball’s First Super Star.” The baseball scriveners of the day tagged him “King Larry” and “the King of the Diamond” — and the sobriquets were no exercise in journalistic hyperbole. Unanimously, he gets the accolade of “The American League’s First Super Star.”

All his baseball life, articles appeared with the theme: “Who’s greater — Lajoie or Wagner?” It was a good question, for they were dominant figures, for the most part in rival leagues, and almost in identical time frames: Lajoie from 1896 to 1916, and Wagner from 1897 to 1917.

In lifetime batting average, Lajoie wins, .339 to .329.
In lifetime fielding average, Lajoie wins, .966 to .946 (Lajoie made fewer errors, 509 to Wagner’s 799).

Wagner wins in batting titles — eight to three — though it’s closer than it appears. Paul MacFarlane has shown that Lajoie was the actual winner of the 1910 “Chalmers” batting race. Also, in 1906, Lajoie lost the title to George Stone, .358 to .355. In three of the eight seasons when Honus led his league, Nap hit for a higher average than Wagner without leading the league; and in a fourth season, Nap equaled Honus’ league-leading average (.355 in 1903), but no cigar.

Wagner hit .350 or higher four times. Nap hit .350 or higher 10 times.

In seven of the eight seasons in which Wagner led the league (the exception was his .381 in 1900), his averages ranged from .355 to .334. In six seasons, Lajoie failed to win batting titles with averages of .384, .376, .365, .361, .355 and .368. In addition, he hit a league-leading .378 (or .366, depending on what book you believe) in 1902 but it wasn’t recognized because he was in only 87 games due to the court injunction squabble.

Lajoie’s career high was .422. Wagner’s career high was .381.

Larry could not only hit with the best of them, he hit off the best of them. Here are his lifetime stats in batting against some of the top-flight moundsmen of his day:
Against Joe McGinnity, he went 23-for-45, a .511 average.
Clark Griffith, 36-for-88 ..................... .409
Cy Young, 78-for-206 ........................ 379
Eddie Plank, 49-for-136 ..................... .360
Amos Rusie, 9-for-25 ........................ .360
Rube Waddell, 49-for-140 ................... .350
Eddie Cicotte, 47-for-138 ................... .341
Jack Coombs, 33-for-97 ..................... .340
Kid Nichols, 19-for-56 ........................ .339
Ed Walsh, 53-for-166 ........................ .319
Joe Wood, 14-for-45 ........................ .311
Jack Chesbro, 40-for-129 ................... .310
Bill Dinneen, 63-for-206 .................... .306
Walter Johnson, 40-for-137 ................ .292
Chief Bender, 37-for-136 ................... .272

In his fading years, Lajoie had problems with the offerings of a couple of newcomers:
Babe Ruth, 5-for-27 ......................... .185
Ernie Shore, 6-for-39 ....................... .154

Lajoie was the third player ever to reach the 3,000-hit plateau. He did it late in the 1914 season (Wagner had achieved the goal earlier in the same season. Pop Anson was the first ever, but most of his 1876-1897 career was in the “pre-modern” era). Selected highlights:

• Lajoie batted .300 or more against all 21 clubs that were opponents from 1896 through 1916. (His favorite foe was Baltimore: In two seasons against them, he hit .513.)
• Lajoie put together 33 hitting streaks ranging from 10 to 32 games. His longest — 32 games — was from April 25 to July 14, 1900. Boston’s Bill Dinneen ended the streak.
• Lajoie’s best single day was in St. Louis on May 10, 1897 when he hit two home runs, a double and a single in five tries — a total-based day of 11. That was a record that stood for 15 years when Ty Cobb tied it.

In 1911, Fred Lieb, baseball writer, penned this about that Wagner-Lajoie topic:
“... For years the dispute has gone on (Wagner or Lajoie?) ... It has the Cook-Peary fiasco beaten to the proverbial frazzle ... (In) the last few years, the managerial worries of the Naps have given Honus a shade on the slugging cabby, while a new American Leaguer, from Royston, Ga., has to a certain extent eclipsed Larry. He (Lajoie) is nevertheless regarded by many as the greatest natural ballplayer who has ever trodden a ball field. There surely never lived a more graceful athlete. It was in this, probably more than anything else, that he differed from the great Pittsburgh star and was affectionately spoken of for years as ‘The King of Them All.’ Honus is clumsily hung together ... Larry is as graceful as an antelope.”

The New York Press had its say: “Wagner is awkward...”
When he moves to stop a hot one, it's like a standing army mobilizing for a night march, or a naval monitor getting underway. His tread is a cross between that of the elephant and the rhinoceros. Lajoie is as smooth as the Dutchman is tempestuous. Lajoie glides toward the ball, gathers it in nonchalantly as if picking fruit . . ."

In hindsight, Lajoie, it can accurately be said, made two erroneous judgments that kept his brilliant career from being even more brilliant:

1. He accepted appointment as manager of Cleveland too early (1904). He was only 29 when he finished the '04 season as de facto manager and stayed for four more full years and three-quarters of another. Except for one season, he was over .300, but one has to wonder what he would have hit had he not been carrying the worrisome managerial burdens.

2. He probably stayed too long in the majors. He was obviously past his prime in his final year (1914) with Cleveland, and the next two with Connie Mack.

"Might have been" don't count in baseball, but expunge the final three seasons from Lajoie's career record, and his lifetime batting average soars from a shining .339 to a blinding .3515, a 12-point increase. (Do the same for Honus Wagner — ignore the final four seasons when he was between ages 40 and 43, and below .300 — and his .329 lifetime mark also soars by 12 points — to .341.)

Wagner's managerial service was confined to five games — in between the firing of one skipper in 1917 and the hiring of another. In this regard, maybe Honus was a "smarter" player than Nap!

Lajoie missed the equivalent of almost two full seasons, through injuries, and because of the 1902 injunction squabble when he didn't swing a bat in anger from after the opening game until June 4. Chiefly, these injury-related absences were in 1899, 1900, 1905 and 1911, all seasons that he would finish with excellent batting averages. Whether his career BA would have been even more illustrious will never be known for sure, but certainly his total of base hits, doubles, stolen bases and slugging average would have been.

An intriguing thought: If Pittsburgh had bought Lajoie — instead of trying to save money by waiting to sign him in the draft — and Wagner would have been the Pirate double-play combination from 1897 to 1916 or so!

And speaking of "might have been": If Boston had not turned Lajoie down as too expensive, or a poor prospect as a hitter, he'd have been on pennant winners in 1897 and 1898. And assuming he would still have jumped to the American League and joined Connie Mack (doubtful), he'd have been on pennant winners in 1902, 1905, 1910, 1911, 1913, and 1914. Or, still fantasizing, suppose he had jumped from the Boston Nationals to Boston in the American League: on pennant winners in 1903, 1904, 1912, 1915, and 1916. Assume he had stayed with Boston in the NL: 1914.

Comparisons of ball players are a favorite fuel for stoking Hot Stove League fires, and Cy Young — long into retirement — was asked to compare Lajoie and Eddie Collins. Young saw more of Lajoie than of Collins and this was his assessment:

"I can't compare them. Lajoie was one of the most rugged hitters I ever faced. He'd take your leg off with a line drive . . . Collins was a 'cutie,' punching hits here and there . . . In the field, Lajoie was smooth, Collins was jackrabbity. But Lajoie was the Babe Ruth of our day. There's a story that the day after he endorsed a certain brand of chewing tobacco (day after ad appeared) half the kids in the country were sick from chewing . . . They followed him around, just as they hung after Ruth. He had color. He was great, old Nap."

Nap ruled the roost from 1901 to 1910, and he was knocking on the door of greatness from 1897 to 1900. Publishers sought his name for guides and books on how to play baseball. Soft drink manufacturers sought his endorsement.

Connie Mack was plainly delighted with his successful second signing of Lajoie, and a bit sensitive toward the criticism he was hearing about his prize catch. "The fans are wrong," he said, "who say that Larry, when he makes an error, is loafing on the ball, that if he had hustled, he'd have had it. Such criticism is unjust. He's like Bill Dahlen (former National League shortstop with four teams): He plays so naturally and so easily it looks like lack of effort . . . Larry's reach is so long and he's fast as lightning, and to throw to at second base he is ideal. All the catchers who've played with him say he is the easiest man to throw to in the game today. High, low, wide — he is sure of everything. His arm is as good as any. Combine all this with his batting powers and there isn't a ball player in the business that compares, with him . . ."

After Lajoie's outstanding 1901 season, Sporting Life commented in an October story: " . . . Lajoie was a wonder at second base, but at (shortstop) his work was simply phenomenal. The big fellow excels no matter where he is played."

(Lajoie filled in at shortstop a dozen games in 1901.)
In his twilight years, Larry Lajoie sent at least one baseball writer into poetic rhapsody to capture the stature and greatness of the Woonsocket-born Frenchman. Here, from the May 1915 *Baseball Magazine* is W.H. Hoeffer's tribute:

**THE GREAT LAJOIE**

HO! all ye fans, ye rooting clans, come let your voices ring.
All homage pay to Lajoie, the mighty keystone King.
For years his mitt corralled the hit that came in piping hot.
He swung a mace with kingly grace, the Slamming King of Swat.
In battle's art Nap Bonaparte was once a peerless gay.
He walloped foes right on the nose, and smote them hip and thigh.
With lusty clout he knocked 'em out; he banged and biffed and slew,
'till t'other bunch uncorked the punch that won at Waterloo.
But tho' we've learned that Boney earned quite some renown and fame,
he never swung his wagon tongue and copped a baseball game.
While all the crowd were howling loud, he never dug his cleats
and with his ash poled out a smash against the bleacher seats.
When any chaps compare these Naps, each peerless in his day,
of course each man who is a fan will pull for Lajoie.
He'll pull for one they say is done, who, by his skill and grace,
has ruled with cheers, for nineteen years, the realm of second base.
Whose stops and throws and mighty blows have thrilled the howling mob;
Whose mighty wing and rifle fling were always on the job.
It may be true that Larry's through, he may be going back;
But if you think he's on the blink, just talk to Connie Mack.
His great career may end next year, but if it does or not, all homage pay to Lajoie, the Keystone King of Swat.
APPENDIX A

NINE MISSING HITS:
THE .422 BATTING AVERAGE,
AND THE BATTERING IT TOOK

One of the most glittering stats of Napoleon Lajoie’s career was an American League record when he posted it, and some 86-plus years later it’s still a record.

In 1901, the first year the American League played, he hit .422. Or so it was decided when the stats were announced after season’s end — 229 hits in 543 at bats. And so the record stood.

A few years later, though, one record book, while crediting him with the same .422 average, listed him with 220 hits in the same number of at bats. Some arithmetical artisan with time on his hands decided to divide 543 into 220 — and when he came up with .405, he rushed to the sidewalks screaming “Error! Error!” With no more research than that, the record books were altered in 1918, and the Lajoie .422 was slimmed down to .405. (In the first edition of the Macmillan Baseball Encyclopedia he was credited with .426.)

The easy-going Frenchman sat silent through the commotion. “He knew that for a long time but never said anything,” says his niece Lillian Lamoureux. “He just figured it didn’t matter. A reporter was here [at Lajoie’s Florida home] one day; he had a lot of papers that proved there had been an error. Uncle Larry just laughed, and said something like, ‘I knew what I did. What difference does it make?’

It dawned on no one, apparently, to do more than a little long-division before snipping nine hits and 17 points from Nap’s batting achievements. But in 1953 John Tattersall of Baltimore, an inveterate fan, collector of records and statistics and researcher, had his doubts about the revision, and he began a day-by-day check of the boxscores of the ’01 season as printed in newspapers in three different cities: Philadelphia, Baltimore and Boston. He came up with proof that “King Larry” had indeed made 229 safe hits in 1901 — and that the “220” that appeared in the book the first researcher was using was, plain and simple, a printer’s error. The “9” had been read and set as a “0.” No one except Tattersall had previously thought of that possibility.

So in 1954, the .422 was restored.

Those nine hits that were mistakenly removed from Lajoie’s record also had an effect on calculating when he reached 3,000. His real 3,000th hit came on September 17, 1914, but the baseball world waited for his two-hit game on September 27 to celebrate the feat.

APPENDIX B

THAT ‘39 PHOTO
TAKEN AT COOPERSTOWN

And now — about that photograph: There they were, the 10 of them, moments after the first Hall of Fame ceremonies were ended, lined up for the photograph that would perpetuate on celluloid one of baseball’s most poignant moments.

Four sat on chairs in the front row. Six stood behind them. The 11th was late, missing both the ceremonies and the photograph.

There were a manager, three pitchers, four infielders and three outfielders. Their ages ranged from 77 to 44, their birth years from 1862 to 1895. The oldest had started in baseball in 1886, when the American Association was the rival loop, the top sluggers were Cap Anson and King Kelly, the glamour pitchers included Tim Keefe and Old Hoss Radbourne, and a base on balls was seven “unfair” pitches.

Two of them played parts of their careers when the pitching distance was 45 feet. Most of the hitters spent a good part of their careers hitting the “dead” ball.

They were a microcosm of America, these ten. Most
came from small towns and poor families and had once held menial jobs, typical of the industrial-agricultural economy into which they were born. Four came from comfortable if not affluent families. Three of these went to college, and two graduated. The third signed after two years. The fourth could have gone to college but turned pro as a young man though warned by a disappointed father not to come home a failure.

Who were these ten?

The first one at the left in the front row was one of the college men. He was so good at baseball that he played a few major league games while still enrolled at Columbia. He played summer ball to help pay his college expenses.

Next is a Baltimore incorrigible, who spent many years in an industrial school and had grown up around (and worked in) a barroom, owned by his father.

Then, a tall, lean Bay Stater who toiled as a shoe-maker in a factory before casting his lot as a pro player. Next to him is an Ohioan, who worked on the family farm.

Go to the back row:

A long-armed, ham-handed ex-steel worker from Pennsylvania.

A dyspeptic-looking Nebraskan who had worked as a telephone company lineman.

The third one in is a Texan, an amateur bronco-buster, who completed two years of college before going into baseball.

Next is a rugged-visaged Rhode Island native, who came from a large immigrant Canadian family, and began work at age 10 as a sweeper in a mill cardroom; later, he became a hack driver, a trade he left when his pro baseball tryout was a success.

Then the second college graduate, an Ohio native, whose natural talents enabled him to go from college campus directly to the majors.

And 'way over on the right, a gentlemanly Kansas native who had earned his early living digging holes for telephone poles.

No. 11, absent, was a high-strung Georgian who came from a family of comfortable means, able to send their son to college, but he was obsessed with baseball — and set out to earn a livelihood from it.

The pitchers in the photo typified the game's early years when scores were low and home runs not in vogue.

The hitters — with an exception — played when .300 was a low average, and .400 a not uncommon attainment. This changed, and it was the "Babe" of this historic class who changed it by swinging for the fences and popularizing the home run. His bat prowess brought the hopped-up ball to the game, and changed it forever.

The 11 inductees were actually among 26 of the game's most prominent figures honored that mid-June day in 1939. In the aggregate, they comprised the persons who helped shape baseball from its earliest post-Civil War days through its evolutionary period into the 1890's. The pioneers were dead, as was Christy Mathewson, who had succumbed to tuberculosis in 1925. The 11 still living were either "out in the real world" or were managing, coaching or in the front offices of baseball.

The sounds of their diamond battles were long since stilled. Their personal vendettas were past, and perhaps in retrospect seemed terribly inconsequential. The pitchers who had tried to foil the hitters . . . the hitters who had sought to make losers of the pitchers . . . the fielders who had striven mightily to rob the hitters — on this day in Cooperstown, they fraternized, and laughed together, and wished each other well, thoroughly enjoying the end of a long separation that the often ephemeral life of baseball imposes on its practitioners.

In varying degrees, the baseball life of almost every one of the 10 who posed for the photo that day — plus the absent 11th — impacted on the lives of the others. Napoleon Lajoie — he's the player in the back row, third from the right, who was pushing a broom in a mill at age 10, and swinging a bat in the major leagues at age 21 — serves as a good example. The devoted researcher could uncover similar situations vis-a-vis any of the others. How did Lajoie's career tie in with the careers of the others?

First row:

EDDIE COLLINS, the Columbia University grad from Millerton and Tarrytown, NY: He came along in 1908 when Lajoie was a 13-year veteran, accepted as the premier second baseman in the game. Collins gradually took over that title, as Lajoie's skills slowly eroded. When Collins was sold from Philadelphia to Chicago, giving Connie Mack badly needed revenue, Mack brought Lajoie from Cleveland back to Philadelphia to fill the void Collins' departure had left, and help Mack put a new lineup in the field.

BABE RUTH, the Baltimore barroom hand and "alumnus" of a reform school: [Ruth] debuted in mid-1914 at age 19 as a Boston pitcher, and the fourth batter he faced was 39-year-old Lajoie (though it's possible Ruth never heard of him). Lajoie would soon terminate his 21-year career; Ruth was launching his, and it would endure for 22 years. In their encounters from 1914 through 1916, Lajoie was five-for-27 against Ruth.

CONNIE MACK, the East Brookfield, Mass., shoemaker: A major factor in Lajoie's life, Mack in 1901 induced Lajoie to desert the National League for the American. In the ensuing reserve clause controversy, he arranged for Lajoie to join the Cleveland club (and thus give the AL the most celebrated star of that period). When Lajoie was close to the end, Mack brought him back to Philadelphia to play out the string in the majors. A lifelong friendship existed between the two.

CY YOUNG, the farmhand from Gilmore, Ohio. He preceded Lajoie into the National League by seven years, but both jumped to the American after the 1900 season, and faced each other often until they became teammates in 1909 (when Lajoie was managing Cleveland). Young
remained there until early 1911. Lajoie hit Young well when they were on opposing teams — 78 hits in 206 tries, for a .379 average.

Back row:

HONUS WAGNER, the Pennsylvania coal miner from Carnegie. Seven months older than Lajoie, he reached the majors a year after Lajoie did. They were National League rivals for four years until Lajoie went to the AL. Their careers paralleled each other for two decades, and a favorite topic of sports writers was: Who is greater — Lajoie or Wagner?

Beyond question, Wagner is a serious contender for the title that this book confers on Lajoie.

GROVER CLEVELAND ALEXANDER, the St. Paul, Nebraska, lineman. Their careers never overlapped. Alexander joined Lajoie's first big league team — the National League Phils — in 1911, more than a decade after Nap had cast his lot with the AL.

TRIS SPEAKER, the bronco buster from Hubbard City, Texas. He and Lajoie were American League rivals from 1908-1916 when Speaker outfielded for Boston and Cleveland, and Larry played second and first base for Cleveland and Philadelphia. Speaker became manager of Cleveland in 1919, and the following season gave Cleveland the pennant that Lajoie, as player and manager over a 13-year span, was unable to achieve.

GEORGE SISLER, the Ohioan who graduated from the University of Michigan and went directly to the St. Louis Browns in 1915, the year Lajoie went to Philadelphia for his final two seasons in the majors. Interaction between the two was limited to their roles as opponents in 1915-16.

WALTER JOHNSON, the native of Humboldt, Kansas, who was signed when pitching semi-pro ball for a phone company team in Idaho. For a decade (1907-1916) Lajoie's and Johnson's paths crossed on American League diamonds. In 1907, Johnson was a 19-year-old rookie and Lajoie a 32-year-old veteran in his 12th year in the majors. Lifetime, Lajoie went 46-for-137 off Johnson, a batting average of .292.

The absentee (due to tardy arrival):

TY COBB (No. 11), the brash, intense native of Narrows, Georgia, eleven years Lajoie's junior, came to the majors with Detroit as a 19-year-old in 1905 when Lajoie, aged 30, was midway through his career. Cobb would soon push Lajoie into the background, relatively, and would soon be the game's dominant figure even more emphatically than Lajoie was in his own first decade. Their rivalry peaked in 1910 when the pair staged one of the closest batting-title races ever. It held the national sports spotlight through much of 1910 when the Chalmers auto company was offering a new touring car to the batting leaders in both leagues. It took the American League secretary two months to officially say who won — Cobb, by a point, he announced — but three-quarters of a century later, there's substantial doubt about the real result. In 1908, Cobb's bat had helped Detroit win the pennant — a setback that Cleveland Manager Lajoie grieved over for the rest of his life. Cobb's career lasted for 12 seasons after Lajoie dropped out of the majors. Though Cobb visited Lajoie in Holly Hill, Florida, long after both had retired, there was no great warmth between them. Lajoie felt he had won the bat title in 1910. In personality, he was the antithesis of Cobb — reserved and reticent while Cobb was distrustful, quarrelsome and pugnacious.
NAPOLEON (LARRY) LAJOIE

Born September 5, 1875, at Woonsocket, R.I.
Died February 7, 1959, at Daytona Beach, Fla.
Height, 6.01. Weight, 195.

Threw and batted righthanded.

Had seven bunt singles and one triple in eight times at bat in doubleheader on October 9, 1910, against St. Louis.

Had four home runs in two consecutive games, August 9, second game (2), August 10, first game (2), against Washington, 1901.

Manager Cleveland Americans, 1905 until resignation in midseason, 1909; manager, Toronto, International League, 1917; manager, Indianapolis, American Association, 1918. Highest batting average in American League history, .422, in 1901.

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American League Totals: 1899–1918 1899 7502 1084 2524 515 100 50 286 .336 .5523 .5524 390 .966
National League Totals: 1899–1918 486 2088 422 728 137 64 32 100 .349 .2411 .1072 119 .967
Major League Totals: 1899–1918 2475 9590 1506 3252 652 164 82 396 .339 7934 6596 509 .966

* Jumped to Philadelphia A.L., but Philadelphia N.L. club got injunction against his playing for Athletics and he joined Cleveland in June, 1902.


* Led League

NOTE: League President Ban Johnson declared Ty Cobb batting champion in 1910 with a .385 average, beating Lajoie’s .384. Recent research has resulted in the revision of Lajoie’s average to .383 and Cobb’s to .382.

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