

Deja vu — all over again

Greedy players and owners, angry fans nothing new

ROCK HILL — Baseball fans were angry.

Their favorite sport was wracked by scandal, unscrupulous players and shady off-the-field shenanigans.

That eight-month strike last year, right? No, try a York County hardball rivalry 88 years ago.

In mid-July 1907, a trainload of Chester baseball fans unloaded in Rock Hill to cheer for the Chester team.

Among the Chester throng were some gamblers who had set up a "fix," deliberately altering a game's outcome to ensure betting success.

Naughty fans! Naughty players!

According to plan, Rock Hill's team would easily win the Tuesday game. During the game, it was to become widely known that Foster, Chester's starting pitcher, was called away and would not be able to pitch Wednesday.

This would greatly increase the odds that Rock Hill would win the Wednesday game. Bingo! Hun-

"The Chester folks are certainly sore over the game being called, as they had loaded up to carry away hundreds of dollars of Rock Hill money."

The Record, July 1907

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Nearby history

LOUISE PETTUS

dreds of dollars were wagered by Rock Hill fans that Rock Hill would win. Wednesday's game drew the largest audience in Rock Hill history. Every store in town was closed.

Sure enough, Foster was not on the mound when the Wednesday game started.

According to The Record, two automobiles had been sent to Edgemoor, south of Rock Hill, to get Foster off the train and rush him to Rock Hill. (Presumably the second car was backup insurance in case the first one broke down.) Foster arrived at the field in time to start the fifth inning.

Then, according to the newspaper, "providence took a hand and sent a pouring rain." The umpire, H.S. Baird of Darlington, was highly respected in the state. Rock Hill's team, expecting trouble, had paid him \$45 (a very high sum at the time) to umpire the two games with Chester.

Both sides agreed on one point: After the game started at 5:15 p.m.,

Chester used delaying tactics until its pitcher arrived, and then Rock Hill did the same while praying that the ominous rain clouds would burst before Chester got too far ahead.

Chester led 4-0 through four innings. In the fifth inning, Rock Hill had a man on first base, two out and two strikes on the batter.

Then it started pouring rain. People around the field began searching for shelter, and rules allowed a game to be called under that circumstance.

Still, the umpire did not call the game until the batter fouled a pitch beyond first base, ending the inning. Baird wrote The State newspaper that he was personally "wet to the skin" and added that a Chester fan directed foul language at him and followed him to his hotel.

Naughty fan!

Because it was a called game, all

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bets were off. Because the game had lasted more than three innings, no gate money was returned. (Tickets were 25 cents.)

Greedy owner!

The Record (which always put baseball games on the front page) reported, "The Chester folks are certainly sore over the game being called, as they had loaded up to carry away hundreds of dollars of Rock Hill money."

The Chester folk were miserable — they hadn't won the game, had lost their money and had to ride home in wet clothes. But most of them were not gamblers and were not in on the gambling scheme.

On the gambling, The Record editorialized: "The time has come to call a halt. It is not a matter of town against town, playing their own boys as they used to for the

fun that is in it, but it has simply gotten down to a gambling scheme and the ones that can hire the best professional players and soak the other crowd, why that is what they are going to do. Neither team playing here this week was any representative of either Rock Hill or Chester."

The paper proposed a game between Rock Hill and Chester in which the teams were composed only of local players. Elsewhere in the paper were stories about bidding wars across the state for the services of professional baseball players.

And within a few days the Rock Hill Base Ball Association was sponsoring a carnival at the baseball field to raise money to hire star players for the next season.

Some things haven't changed in nearly a century.

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Baseball scandal had Rock Hill up in arms