

Superstitions of Baseball Players

By William A. Phelon

Sporting Editor of the Chicago Journal

OLD superstitions and old ideas still cling to modern baseball, despite its all-round progressiveness. One of the firmest rooted theories of all is the idea that a man should stick to his fielding position even as the cobbler should stick to his last. If a player begins his big league career at a certain position, it seems to be considered rank judgment and actual heresy to shift him; the man who is once a shortstop is always a shortstop, while the man who comes in as an outfielder is supposed to stay in the garden till the end of his baseball days.

If the generality of managers would take a glance through the list of stars, and notice the men who have changed positions since they broke into the fast company, it might make them do a little solemn thinking. Incidentally, it might make them do some experimenting during the spring training season, and a whole lot of alterations might be made in sundry line-ups, with satisfactory results. There are probably twenty men now holding down certain positions, wedded to those jobs, and imagining that they couldn't even make a front in any other territory. Tried in a new position, they might improve immeasurably, and perfect the defensive part of their clubs in an immense degree.

Critics who argue along the lines of improvement by changing places usually point to Jimmy Collins, as a sample of a wonderful third baseman, developed from an outfielder. This is wrong, for Collins was a third baseman at school and as a back-lots player. He became a professional outfielder because there was no chance at third on the team where he first debuted, and only got a show to

return to his proper sphere at Louisville. Collins, therefore, can be left out of the argument entirely.

Here is how some of the crackerjacks have shifted jobs since they cut into good society:

Hans Wagner came in as an outfielder, and covered three or four other positions before Barney Dreyfuss found that the great German was one of the most effective shortstops that ever lived. Tommy Leach, for many seasons considered the real works at third, has been shifted only lately to the outfield, and is showing as much class in the garden as inside the diamond. Dan McGann, a first baseman for the past seven or eight years, first broke in as a second baseman, and was soon passed up, only to return and show better class at the initial corner. "Si" Seymour, as all men know, was a pitcher, and about as crazy a wild hurler as ever heaved the ball. And now, as an outfielder, look at him!

Frank Chance came in as a catcher, became a star behind the bat, then changed to first, and is there with all the needful skill. Fred Tenney's history is a duplicate to Chance's career—catcher, then first baseman, and a perfect master of the new position. Jimmy Sheckard came in as a shortstop, and was a fright. His batting saved him till he could learn outfield skill, and now he has the angles of pasture-work down to perfection. Abbaticchio, name and all, blossomed as third baseman, went to shortstop, bobbed in and out of major leagues, and finally anchored as a second baseman.

Murray, the redhaired youth who shows signs of becoming a good hitter and fast outfielder, came in as a catcher, and went to the pastures because the

Cardinals had enough mask-men already. "Clawed" Ritchey first showed in the big smoke as a shortstop, and was good, but not as good as he has shown himself to be on second. Roger Bresnahan was a pitcher, and able to twirl quite a game. He took up catching, and, after playing half a dozen other positions, stuck to the mask and mitten.

Heine Batch, who capered in the Brooklyn outfield last season, came in as a third baseman. Roy Thomas played first at college, and tried to do the same for the Quakers. After a few games, it was seen that he could bat, but was not up to big league requirements as an infielder. He went to the garden and immediately made good.

"Kitty" Bransfield first popped in with Boston, as a catcher, but did not last. He came back to the big league as a first baseman and never changed again. Jimmy Casey, who passes from the fast company this trip, was originally a catcher, and a peppery one, too.

Hugh Jennings was a catcher of some little quality, but caught onto the angles of the shortstop game with great rapidity.

J. Mugs McGraw was a shortstop when he dawned in the big league, and had some little worriment in learning third base doings. Billy Maloney was a catcher, but was passed up two or three times in that capacity. When he settled down to outfielding he proved a star. Billy Dahlen first broke in at third for Anson in 1891, and staid on third for several years after displacing the veteran Burns. He was shifted to short to give Charlie Irwin a fair chance on third, and has been a shortstop ever since.

Napoleon Lajoie was a great catcher in the little leagues. For some time after he came into the big company he was tried at different stations before resting for keeps on second. Harry Niles, now playing second fairly well, came in as an outfielder.

Oldring, Connie Mack's strong outfielder, came in as a third baseman, but was shaky on the job. Delehanty, who will cover second for Cantillon, was a third baseman for years, but nothing remarkable. The peppery shortstop, Elberfeld, first cut in as a third baseman, and was much on the useless order when holding down that bag.

Jimmy Williams was a third baseman for some seasons, and quite a good one, too, but fits just as well on second. Dave Altizer, who came in as a shortstop and was then tried in the field and on first, will play third base this season. Jiggs Donohue, the sensational first baseman of the Sox, was a catcher and a horrible frost thereat. First basing saved his bacon.

Herman Schaefer, now an excellent second baseman, covered third when the Chicago Nationals first gave him work. Bobby Wallace was a pitcher with Cleveland, and his infield skill was discovered by chance. He was a grand third baseman, but shifted to short with grace and ease. Unglaub was a catcher in his first whirl and then a third baseman.

Frank Isbell pitched for the Cubs when they first brought him into the limelight, and ran the gamut of positions before he left the Sox. Bobby Lowe came in as an outfielder, but soon developed into a fine infielder. Lee Tannehill, who plays a grand third for the Sox, was a shortstop for a single season, and was not successful. Joe Yeager, who can play a corking good infield game, was a pitcher when Hanlon had him. George Davis, an infielder of skill and craft equaled by but few, came in as a center-fielder back in 1890.

Willie Keeler, who can play right field to the king's taste, butted in as a third baseman; and was unspeakably bad in that position. Lave Cross was a catcher for many years, played five or six other positions, and finally became a great third baseman. Tom Daly, a great catcher, likewise ran up and down the scale of jobs before settling down on second. Jack Doyle was a catcher, and capered in several other places ere picking up the first baseman's glove. Tom McCreery came in as a pitcher, and grew to be some outfielder, as well as a fine batsman.

Mike Donlin came in as a pitcher, but his hitting made him a regular, and he was sent to the outfield. The story of Jesse Burkett is identically the same, and ditto of George Van Haltren.

A long list of others, heroes of the past, could be cited, showing how much more valuable they became to their clubs, and, financially, to themselves, and all from changing jobs. What's the answer?