

A Blind Pitcher

Al Pardee and How He Made Good Under the Greatest Handicap a Slabman Can Suffer

I HAVE heard of ball players laboring under physical handicaps," says Tom Clarke, the Cincinnati catcher, "and of the cleverness with which they disguised their infirmities alike from managers and fans. Deafmutes, of course, like Hoy and Taylor, didn't try to help their misfortune, but made good impressively just the same. The one man, though, who had the toughest handicap of all, in my opinion, was Al Pardee, a pitcher, who worked in almost all the leagues in the country, and wound up his career in the Eastern. Pardee pitched his final season in the Eastern League when practically blind, and I don't think any other man ever played ball against such odds as that.

Pardee's eyes failed him early in the spring. He didn't dare to put on any glasses, as that, of course, would have given away his trouble to the management, and Al wanted to draw his pay as long as possible. The players soon got wise, but they were good fellows. They liked Pardee, and they all respected his wife, who was a big, strong girl, and such a wild fan that she used to thrash her husband any time a game was lost through his personal fault in pitching or fielding. So Pardee went on through the season, a blind man, just able to make out moving shapes, and seeing the players as gray blurs upon the scenery.

The manner in which Pardee made good was interesting as well as clever. He had pitched for many years, and, of course, could time the plays almost instinctively, while his ears helped him all along the way. The plate, to Pardee, was a white blot, and the batter, standing beside it, a gray shape, that was all. Pardee would locate himself upon the slab and whizz them in. He was a powerful man, and had all his speed, while he could throw a good assortment of

curves. Never, so some of the players told me, was Pardee's control any better than during that blind season. He could not make out any signals from his catcher, and had to use his own judgment as to the batsmen, and his judgment proved reliable right along.

Pardee had never been a dazzling fielder, and so nobody thought it strange when he seemed to be shirking grounders, and letting the infielders scramble after them. Al never came up to the plate to back up the catcher, never mingled in an infield run-down where the ball was passed around from base to base, and never covered first on a grounder to the first baseman, unless, on a specially bright day, he could make out the play well enough to step over and take the ball. At the bat it was easy for him. Nobody expects a pitcher to bat well anyhow, and so he could stand up, swing his stick in the air, take his three strikes, and go back to the bench. The hostile pitchers, too, were considerate of him. Knowing his infirmity, they bent the ball way out so as never to hit him, and he struck out, or accidentally hit easy grounders. One game, incredible as it may seem, Pardee made four hits. Just swung his bat at nothing and four times the ball bounded off the stick into fair territory for safe singles.

The blind pitcher got by nearly a whole season before he was finally spotted, and then the management, if I was told correctly, gave him his pay for the rest of the unfinished campaign. Pardee hastened to get himself fitted for a pair of glasses, and when he got the spectacles on, so he said, it seemed as if he was coming out of a long dream and entering upon a new and wonderful world. His was a strange case, and I doubt if baseball annals can show its equal."