

ROGER BRESNAHAN, THE HERO OF THE BRIDGEPORT WRECK AND A GLIMPSE OF THE SHATTERED COACHES OF THE FATED FEDERAL EXPRESS. THIS IS A WONDERFUL INSTANCE OF THE CHARMED LIFE OF THE NATIONAL BALL PLAYER WHO ESCAPED DESTRUCTION IN A MIRACULOUS MANNER TO PLAY THE ROLE OF HEROIC LIFE SAVER AMIDST A SCENE OF TRAGIC DESOLATION AND INSCRIBE HIS NAME FOREVER IN THE MEMORY OF A GRATEFUL NATION

## The Heroes of the Bridgeport Wreck

*Roger Bresnahan and His Gallant Associates the Central Figures  
in a National Tragedy*

By F. C. Lane

THE recent terrible disaster at Bridgeport sent a thrill of horror throughout the length and breadth of the land, a horror which swelled hourly as fresh names were added to the list of victims. It was one of those dreadful episodes which mark the bungling progress of transportation towards its ultimate goal of safety. It was an awful inexcusable blunder which the defaulting engineer cancelled to the best of his poor ability, with the supreme payment of his life. It was an episode intensely dramatic, thrilling, wonderful, in which, against the dark background of tragedy, played upon by weird lights of freaky luck, or fate or destiny, stood out

in bold relief one dominant figure, Roger Bresnahan, sustained by the full strength of an heroic band of men, the St. Louis club of National League ball players.

Through the long wait before help could arrive and while the other passengers who were uninjured were almost useless, this little band worked on quietly, resolutely, beating back the waves of fire and death which strove so fiercely to engulf the remaining fragments of the wreck. And then when help did come at last, knowing that they had snatched many lives from destruction, grimy, ragged and weary, they proceeded on their way quietly, unobtrusively, as if

they had done nothing worthy of note.

It was an inspiring picture of leadership, energy and trained efficiency fighting indomitably with sudden disaster and conquering in the struggle.

With the miraculous escape of the entire St. Louis baseball team still fresh in our memories we may well ask, is there such a thing as luck? What is luck? What power is it that removes some from danger while others dash headlong to destruction? It is a mystery we may never know.

However, this we do know. The Federal express left Washington en route for Boston on the night of July 11th, its eight cars loaded with human freight. We know that at Philadelphia the St. Louis ball team entered the two sleepers numbered 3 and 4 at that time, also that after the Jersey City ferry was crossed the train was carelessly recoupled and these two sleepers made up the rear of the train. How this particular mistake should be made on this particular night may only be explained by fate, and fate or destiny or whatever we may call that power which presides over our fortunes, has no confidantes.

In the still grey of this sultry morning when the first beams of the coming light were glowing in the East this express was fairly tearing into the city of Bridgeport, as though sure of a clear track. Orders had been given to detach a car for the United States Fish Commission. The speed of the train was fifty miles when it should have been fifteen to take a switch. Someone blundered. Perhaps the engineer, but his lips are sealed.

The monster engine unable to take a new path in defiance of all natural laws plunged over the embankment at Fairfield crossing, thirty feet below, followed by five cars, to be transfigured into a glowing heap of scrap iron and splinters.

The rear cars of the train were the scene of an indolent wakening. Unable to sleep because of the oppressive heat, many members of the St. Louis ball club occupying these cars, were languidly preparing to rise. Suddenly there was a violent grinding of emergency brakes, so quick and sharp that many were thrown from their berths. This was fol-

lowed by a series of sharp bumps. All waited breathlessly for the seemingly inevitable crash.

To quote Roger Bresnahan: "See-camp shot from the berth just above me.

" 'We have struck something,' said he.

" 'No, we have not struck it yet,' I replied, 'we are still moving.' Then after two or three sharp jolts the car stopped.

" 'We are all right,' someone in the car said. Then I heard McIver say, 'We are not all right. For God's sake look out ahead.' "

Clad in pajamas and shoeless, under the leadership of Manager Bresnahan the players piled from their cars and down the steep embankment, intent only upon the relief of the wounded and dying who had been their companions on the fated train. The horror of the scene which lay exposed to them beggars description. The pitifully gruesome sights and agonized moans arising from the wreckage were such as unhinge nerves of steel. But not so this band of ball players, trained to the pink of physical condition, accustomed to size up situations instantly, and able to work with machine-like harmony and efficiency under a recognized leader.

Despite the fact that the ground was strewn with glowing coals from the wrecked engine and littered by tangled wires, many of which still carried a death-dealing current, the men from St. Louis, arming themselves with axes, saws and bars from the emergency boxes entered upon the work of rescue.

The sights that met their gaze as they plunged among the wreckage were terrible, but there was no time for pause when the needs of suffering humanity were calling upon them from all sides. Axes were wielded with a force that bit deep into entangling beams; saws opened up gaps in the sides of the wrecked cars, while willing and able hands strained away at the encumbering wreckage, allowing the slightly injured to escape and those seriously hurt to be removed. Struggling in this chaos of screeching steam, glowing coals, smoking timbers, and with the groans of the suffering all about them, they continued to work long after aid had arrived from nearby towns,

and until they were ready to drop from exhaustion.

The Cardinals were the heroes of this awful occasion, when they responded instantly to the call of suffering and worked so indefatigably. They are not, perhaps, to be set up as heroes distinguished above others for self sacrifice, for in such a crisis when human lives are at stake, all real men will do their best. But they did respond to their utmost and when they gave all that they possessed in nerve, muscle and concerted action, they gave more than could have been offered by a vastly superior number of men taken from the ordinary walks of life.

When their work had been completed and there remained no further call for their gallant services they continued their journey to Boston. The arrival of a major league ball team into a city in such a condition as that of Roger Bresnahan and his men when they entered the Copley Square Hotel is without a precedent. Hatless, their faces and hands covered with soot and grime, clothing torn and collarless, they presented a strange contrast to the usually nattily attired team.

They felt little inclined to speak of the harrowing scenes through which they had passed so recently. Big Roger Bresnahan, whose business as a ball player and as a detective is always to keep cool, seemed greatly affected and immediately retired. "It was horrible, horrible," he said. "What effect it will have upon the nerve of my men can only be told from their future performance upon the diamond."

The various players when later interviewed described vividly scenes of the most horrible suffering, of great gameness upon the part of the sufferers, or of sights calculated to wring the heart-strings of the strongest men.

J. B. Geyer, pitcher, said, "I helped to carry out a woman who had two boards protruding from her body. Her head was split open. I heard that she died subsequently. One of the toughest sights was that of little babies crushed and mangled."

Lee Magee, utility fielder, said, "The gamest woman that I have seen was one who was pinned under the wreckage

amid terrible surroundings. Just across her shoulders was pinioned the dead body of a man. Although the blood gushed over her she kept her nerve and directed the work of the rescuers. The corpse of a woman pressed her knees. To add to the situation another woman imprisoned just above her kicked spasmodically and every time that she did so the woman below was hit in the face.

"After an hour we dug the woman out and she said, 'Get my baby. He's just in back of me.' We found the infant but it was dead. And on recognizing it by a little red stocking this woman who had showed such remarkable gameness collapsed. We had to send her to the hospital."

"Rebel" Oakes, centrefielder, said, "The cars that had fallen onto the street were piled up like a monster heap of kindlings. Men, women, and children were sticking out of the debris. Some had arms cut off. Others were minus legs. In some instances the tops of heads had been crushed. Among the passengers was a man who was returning from the funeral of his sister. He was accompanied by his wife, two children, and his brother. Only himself and one of the children had escaped. It was pitiful to hear him calling aloud for his wife and children as he dashed about the wreck searching for them. A few moments before he had found the dead body of his brother."

The St. Louis baseball team deserves all possible credit for their heroic part in this terrible disaster. Their work upon the diamond this year has shown them to be an aggregation of men who though young in years compared to their rivals, have, despite a most discouraging start, displayed reliance and confidence in their own ability. That "I will" determination which spells success in all things has been present with them, as is shown by their record of 44 games won and 33 lost, since the beginning of the season.

Starting the season under all possible handicaps, without a chance apparently to rise above seventh place in the race for the pennant, they have played a consistently successful game which has constantly forged them ahead of several apparently stronger combinations to a

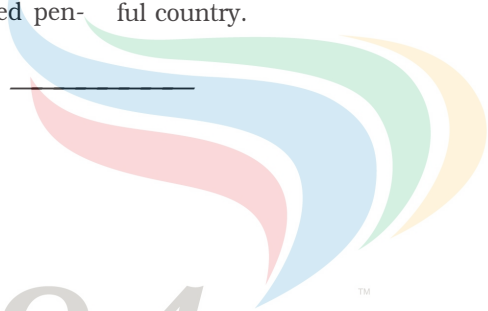
place where they threaten the leaders. This remarkable reversal of form has been the wonder of the present race and stamps the St. Louis crowd as the gamiest and scrappiest club in the National League.

As they continue on in their uphill fight the best wishes of the united fans of the country are with them that they may not have suffered any reversal in effectiveness by their recent harrowing experience.

Their work in the games immediately after the disaster has showed that they are still the same nervy crowd, fighting, always fighting. They will keep on fighting through the long gruelling race just the same, and we may be sure they will stretch every nerve for the coveted pen-

nant, but they cannot work harder or give more than they gave to the unfortunate sufferers in the wreck of the Federal express.

The nation loves gameness in sport. The St. Louis team had endeared themselves to the public by their brilliant struggles for the pennant in the face of tremendous obstacles. They needed no additional evidence of that spirit which dominated them and made them feared and respected on every diamond in the National League. But the work they did at the Bridgeport wreck has raised them forever above the mere plane of celebrity in the sporting world to a secure eminence in the memory of a grateful country.



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