



The Greatest Natural Batter the Game Has Ever Known

Napoleon the Unlucky

(The Man Without a Pennant Experience or a Pennant Prospect)

The Remarkable Case of Napoleon Lajoie who for 15 years
Has Been a Star on a Star Club But Has Never
Played on a Pennant Winner

By L. M. RYAN

The career of Napoleon Lajoie is one of the most extraordinary in all baseball history. For fifteen years the great Frenchman has been a star of the very first magnitude in major league circles and now at the end of seventeen years in professional baseball he is still hitting far above three hundred and fielding as brilliantly as ever. One of the most singular things in all Lajoie's career is the fact that although he has always been one of the greatest players in the game and has usually been associated with one of the strongest teams in the circuits he has never yet played on a pennant winning team.

THE fame of any baseball star grows brighter when linked with the fortunes of a pennant winning club. Mathewson was long ago crowned by the fans of the Polo Grounds as the king of them all, but his greatest glory comes not from the twelve years he has battled for the New York National Club, but rather from those spectacular contests which he has won in World's Series. Bender was long acclaimed the craftiest of American League pitchers, but his

fame rests mostly upon his marvelous feats in a struggle for the championship of the World. Frank Baker is the man who won a world's pennant. Eddie Collins is remembered as the star of another series. Hans Wagner, Ty Cobb, Mordecai Brown, Cy Young, and a host of other leading names in baseball are all linked firmly with their deeds on the diamond when they were fighting for the greatest prize in baseball.

True, the honor of taking" part in a

world's series adds lustre to the name of any star and many of the greatest stars are remembered chiefly for their work in connection with the pennant, but there is one player in organized baseball whose career has never been equalled more than once or twice and never been surpassed, who has ranked for the last fifteen years as one of the really great players of all history, who has broken many records and for all that has never yet played on a pennant winning club.

The life of Napoleon Lajoie is unquestionably one of the most remarkable ever recorded in the annals of baseball. It is frequently stated in history that no mention of any episode in any European country, however small, could be made for a full space of fifteen years without mentioning the name of Napoleon Bonaparte, so great was the influence of the French emperor and so closely associated with the affairs of every continental country. And the same may be said of this last and best of the Napoleons that for the past fifteen years his name has cut so large a figure in baseball history as to appear in every important record of the game. This career is far too wide, too varied, and too brilliant to be dealt with in so brief a space, for it is only a single feature of that career which concerns us now—its relation to pennants and world's series.

A peculiar fatality has followed Lajoie throughout his career. It has been his misfortune that while he has always been on a very strong club, usually one of the strongest, something has inevitably happened to prevent the winning of the pennant. When he startled the old National League by batting .363 on his first season with the Philadelphia Nationals, that club was a strong fighting organization, and it remained so throughout the years that he played at the Quaker city. And, when, like many another star, he cast his fortunes with the new American League and joined the club at Cleveland, he was also with one of the strongest teams in the history of the game. Year after year Cleveland developed amazing strength in every department, was strong in batting brilliant in fielding, and yet could never win. At least once it led the league both in batting and fielding only to finish third in the race. For several years Lajoie

managed the club and always had a strong team, but he seemed destined to gain a height directly in the shadow of the pennant only to see it float from the flagstaff of some rival city.

In time Lajoie became discouraged and voluntarily laid down his leadership, hoping that some other could accomplish a task where he had failed, but with no greater success. James McGuire also resigned in mid-season with a club weaker than ever. George Stovall took up the tattered standard and carried it to third place and might have carried it still further had he been allowed to continue the campaign which he had inaugurated so successfully. But the reins of government were entrusted to the hands of a man who seemed eminently fitted for the position by years of association with a winning club, and under the management of Harry Davis the old lieutenant of the world's champions, pennant hopes looked bright for Cleveland. But fortune was less kind to Davis than to his predecessors and Lajoie at the close of his fifteenth successive year in big league company finds himself on a club which is at best a second division team. This long succession of failures and defeats has been without parallel in baseball.

The great Frenchman voiced his disappointment on his last trip to New York during the series which was so disastrous to the Cleveland hopes. The air was full of rumors of the coming World's Series, and the pennant was the universal topic of conversation. "Of course," said Lajoie, "I was disappointed during the years that I was manager of Cleveland not to win a pennant for that city, and in the fifteen years that I have played major league baseball, it was also a disappointment to me not to have a chance to compete in those important games. As it is, I shall be one of the ninety odd million spectators of what the winners in the two leagues do to each other in October.

In the years that I was manager at Cleveland I worked hard to win, of course every manager does that. It is a great drag on a player who also has to serve as manager. At least, I think it is for the average man. Some great players have been great managers, too, like

Frank Chance and Fred Clarke, for instance, but in my opinion, the work of the average man will suffer somewhere if he has the entire responsibility of the club resting upon his shoulders as well as taking part in the game every day as a player. My work suffered a good deal according to the records during those years when I was manager, and, as it seemed to improve after I was through, I suppose it is safe to say that the worries of managing had something to do with it.

"I believe I have always been a consistent .300 hitter or better according to the records, and twice when I was manager my average fell below that mark. Since I have batted as well as I ever did since I ceased to be manager, I believe it is safe to say that the double burden of work accounted for the falling off from my standard.

"As I have never yet taken part in a World's Series contest, it is not for me to say anything on a subject in which I could be accused of lacking experience, but from my observation, it seems to me that the strongest factor in a brief series of this kind is the pitching squad. Fielding, of course, is very important but the fielding average of the pennant winning club in a World's Series has never been particularly brilliant. The men are keyed up to too high a pitch to work at their best, and generally a number of errors are made. Base running has never been very important either, while the decisive factors have been batting and pitching, with pitching the more important of the two.

"Walter Johnson is a player, who, like myself, has never been a member of a winning club. I was in hopes this year if Cleveland could not win, to see Washington do so, for I should like to see Walter Johnson pitching in a World's Series game. In my opinion, there is not a twirler in either league who is his equal. If I had the vote of the Chalmers Commission to give, I would give it unhesitatingly to Walter Johnson as the most valuable player in the American League. Of course, Johnson might not loom up so brilliantly in a World's Series as he does in an ordinary game. Ty Cobb has never done himself justice in a World's Series. But I think Johnson



The Most Graceful of All Fielders

would, and I would certainly travel some ways to see him pitch. And with Johnson in the box, the best club in the world would have hard work to win."

Lajoie, as he says, has never yet taken part in a World's Series, and at present it does not look as if he ever will. True, the great second baseman has still years left ahead of him, for age has not dimmed his batting eye nor impaired his matchless fielding grace. Lajoie will always be a wonderful batter so long as he

can step up to the plate. But Cleveland has a long ways to go to reach the pennant and it will take her years to do so.

Lajoie's team-mates have the most unbounded admiration for the Frenchman's abilities as a batter and fielder. Joe Jackson when he was running Ty Cobb such a close second last year continually asserted that he didn't fear Cobb as much as he did Lajoie. "The Frenchman is the man to watch," said Joe, "he is the greatest natural batter in the world."

Veau Gregg, the great Cleveland pitcher, also said: "You can't beat the Frenchman. He will always be an awful slugger as long as he is able to stand up to the plate. His eye is as good now as it ever was. He takes the best possible care of himself, and he should last for years yet. He is very particular about his eyesight. No one ever saw him read in the evening. He won't do it because he is afraid it will strain his eyes. And he isn't only great as a batter. No one ever handled second base like Lajoie, and I don't think anyone ever will."

John Evers is the mainspring of the Chicago infield, and the craftiest second baseman in the National League. Larry Doyle is a brilliant base runner and a very heavy batter. Sweeney of the Boston Nationals has this year without a question cinched his claim on greatness. Eddie Collins was the star of the 1910 World's Series, and a wonderful fielder and base runner. But at the end of fifteen years in major league company, every year a model example of all around brilliancy, Lajoie is still undoubtedly the greatest drawing card the second base position has ever known. In 1908 Lajoie

accepted 988 chances at second base, the greatest number ever handled by a major league second baseman in one season. In 1905 he recorded a fielding average of 991 at second base, a record wholly unexampled in baseball. There are many brilliant ground coverers, many sure fielders, but no man ever yet handled the difficult drives which fall to the right of the second sack with the beautiful precision and finished ease of Lajoie. As a batter Lajoie has never had a superior. Many claim he has never had an equal.

In 1904 Lajoie made fifty-two base hits, a high-water mark for doubles in the majors. In 1910, he broke this record by piling up fifty-one doubles. Lajoie also holds the record for three base hits with a total of forty-three made in 1903.

"My best year," says Lajoie, "was in 1901 when I batted for .422."

This is the highwater mark in batting since the beginning of the century, and will probably stand for many years to come.

True, Lajoie has never taken part in a World's Series, and it looks more than doubtful at this writing if he ever will take part. But he needs none of the glory that comes to the man who competes successfully in this most important of all contests. His fame rests too securely on a lifetime of unexampled success. And those more fortunate players who have gained for themselves lasting glory by their work in these greatest of games, can never surpass, if indeed they can equal, the wonderful record of Napoleon Lajoie in his fifteen years' service with a pennantless club.

