

The Man Who Could Not Win

Leon Ames and His Extraordinary Career—A Pitcher of Rare Skill, He Seemed Dogged by Misfortune

BY J. C. KOFOED

Leon Ames was for years known as the most unlucky pitcher in baseball. He was superstitious, like his fellow players, but in his case there seemed to be some uncanny misfortune which dogged his footsteps. Though he was reputed to have the widest breaking curve in the game, and more all-round stuff than nine pitchers out of ten, he was never a consistent winner, though a hard worker. His crowning piece of hard luck was when he pitched nine innings of no-hit baseball and lost out in extra innings.

THE professional ball player in the aggregate is a clean living and quick thinking your man. Taken also in the aggregate he is the most superstitious being on the face of the earth—barring only the old Southern mammy and the professional gambler.

Take George Stallings, for instance. He is a well read, widely travelled man; a graduate of the Virginia Military Institute, and for two years a student of medicine at the College of Physicians and Surgeons. Yes, there isn't an old negro on his big plantation who is more, superstitious than the fighting leader of the Braves.

Some years ago they called Leon Ames "the man who could not win." McGraw's red-haired right-hander pitcher pitched excellent ball every time he entered the box, yet the "jinx" had fixed its baleful gaze on him, and victory seemed impossible. On one occasion Ames pitched nine hitless-runless innings, only to be charged with a defeat in the thirteenth.

On another occasion he had his rivals beaten until the last inning, when McGraw was thoughtless enough to utter that forbidden bromide, "Pitch hard, now, kid, there's only three more to get." And Leon went out, and was hammered off the hill before he could retire a single man.

The pitcher is superstitious, and it was McGraw's remark and not the other team that really beat him. Being superstitious, it was fitting that superstition

should finally pull him out of the rut and forfeit his title of "the man who could not win."

He had tried rabbit's feet, horseshoes, four-leaf clovers and every variety of "jinx killer" that the big league knows, but to no avail. He continued to pitch brilliantly and lose consistently.

Then one day in Boston a package containing a most atrocious necktie was delivered to Red. With it was a note from an actress, instructing him to wear the tie with his regular clothes and under his uniform when he pitched. She said that if he did his losing streak would be broken.

Despite the fact that the cravat looked like a lost election bet or a bad case of scarlet fever, Ames was reckless enough to try anything—particularly as his actress friend assured him that it was twenty times more powerful than the left hind foot of a rabbit.

The Giants were beginning their Western trip, and Leon immediately became the pitching sensation. His twirling was even better than usual, and the eagle of victory perched on his banner in every game he pitched. He came back to New York with the necktie frayed like the end of a rope, but with eight or ten victories to his credit.

Ames wore that tie until there was only a fragment of it left, and when it had finally gone to that bourne from which no traveller returns, he met a cross-eyed man, and was hammered out of the box on his very next trip to the mound.

Fogel. A new manager in the person of Scrappy John McGraw, of Baltimore, had been installed, and his first move was to clean house. Twenty-six of Fogel's crop were dropped, Mathewson, McGinnity, Cronin, Miller, Taylor, Bowerman, Bresnahan, McGann, Lauder, Davis, Van Haltren and Browne being retained as a nucleus for a new team. Pitchers Ames and Bartley, Catcher Warner, Infielder Gilbert and Outfielder Mertes were signed. Then the club began to forge upward.

Ames had little opportunity to prove his worth that year, but he won two games and was undefeated when October rolled around. Having seen what the red-haired young Ohioan could do, McGraw began to use him more regularly, and soon Leon was taking his turn with Mathewson, McGinnity and Taylor.

A recent popular song says, "Someone put the jinx on me!" That song must have been written for Leon Ames. In 1914, with Cincinnati, he won fifteen and lost twenty-three games, a defeat record unexcelled by any man in either league. Yet he allowed less earned runs than seventy-four other major league pitchers, ranking ahead of such stars as Tyler, Mathewson, Marquard, Faber, Plank, Russel, Dubuc and others. He pitched a thirteen-inning shut-out against Boston, and failed to be bracketed with a win because his team-mates could not wield their bats effectively.

There probably has never been a worse hitter in the history of organized baseball

than Leon Ames, though that does not matter greatly. During his entire career his average seldom rose above .150, and oftentimes—sad to tell—fell below the .100 mark. As a fielder there was no denying his worth. Tall and spry, he knocks down many a crack that is labelled for a hit.

Ames was with the Giants from 1903 until the race of 1913 was partly run. His work had been consistent, though not particularly brilliant in that year. Doubtless, McGraw thought that his veteran twirler had won all the games he could for New York, so he arranged a deal with Manager Tinker, of the Reds, whereby Ames was sent to Cincinnati.

The tall right-hander was the iron man of the staff until this year.

Then Miller Huggins, the midget manager of the Cardinals, stepped in and secured Ames' services by straight purchase. He believed that there were many good games left in the veteran's arm, and he guessed right. After being driven from the box by his old team-mates, the Giants, Ames came through with a splendid victory over the Braves, and followed that by pulverizing the Cubs.

Of course he cannot last more than a season or two now. Nature is inexorable, and sixteen years of professional ball inevitably take the snap from a man's muscles. But he has made a record of which he may justly be proud. For he pitched great ball, and did the very best that was in him, even in the days they called him "the man who could not win."

LEON K. AMES

Year.	Club	League.	G.	I.P.	W.	L.	Pct.	S.O.	B.B.	H.
1903	N. Y.	N. L.	2		2	0	.1000			
1904	N. Y.	N. L.	16	132	4	6	.400			
1905	N. Y.	N. L.	34	263	22	8	.733	187	105	226
1906	N. Y.	N. L.	31	213	12	10	.545	156	93	225
1907	N. Y.	N. L.	39	325	10	12	.455	146	108	295
1908	N. Y.	N. L.	18	123	7	4	.636	81	27	150
1909	N. Y.	N. L.	34	187	15	10	.600	116	81	168
1910	N. Y.	N. L.	33	190	12	11	.522	94	63	161
1911	N. Y.	N. L.	34	205	11	10	.524	118	54	170
1912	N. Y.	N. L.	33	179	11	5	.688	83	35	194
1913	N. Y., Cin.	N. L.	39	227	13	14	.481	110	78	220
1914	Cincinnati	N. L.	47	297	15	23	.394	128	94	274
1915	Cin., St. Louis	N. L.	31	171	9	7	.563	70	54	172
