

Ty Cobb's National League Rival

Davis Robertson, a Grand Outfielder, a Great Slugger, and a Meteor on the Bases.

By F. C. LANE



Photo by International Film Service

DAVIS ROBERTSON

**He is the fastest man in the National League
and one of its greatest sluggers.**

They say he is the fastest man in the game on the sprint from home plate to first base. Certainly he has no superior if indeed he has a rival. Nor is he merely a baseball greyhound. He is a remarkable all-round outfielder and a potential .350 hitter. No wonder they compare him to Ty Cobb!

EVERY year when good National League rooters make up their all-star teams they go merrily around the infield and through the battery positions putting in favorite names. But when they come to the outfield they pause. No partisan spirit, no National League bias is quite strong enough to ignore the brilliant record of Ty Cobb and Tris Speaker, not to say Joe Jackson of the rival Ban Johnson circuit. Between these redoubtable champions and the best the National League has to offer a wide gulf seems to yawn. And this gulf, National League scouts have sought for years to bridge and sought in vain.

The stars of the American League outfield are in a class by themselves. Occasionally some rabid National Leaguer will erase Joe Jackson's name from the list and insert another from the best of the National ranks. But for years no one even among the most audacious has been hardy enough to dispute the claims of the great Texan and the still greater Georgian.

Occasionally a young phenom is unearthed from the bushes who is heralded

DAVIS ROBERTSON IN MINIATURE

His name is Davis Robertson.

He is 25 years old, 6 feet tall and weighs 175 pounds.

He is reputed to be the fastest man in the major leagues.

He was a star college athlete at baseball, football, basketball and on the track.

He studied medicine, including veterinary surgery.

He was originally a pitcher, but broke his shoulder playing football and lost his old-time control.

He is a great all-round outfielder and a powerful batter.

He is unmarried and resides in the winter at Norfolk, Virginia.

as a second Cobb. He hits .350 for a few weeks, runs bases pretty well and then slumps to join the great majority of the "merely good." But Davis Robertson, of the New York Giants, who was one of these phenoms, stood the fierce glare of publicity longer than most and has made sure his claim to an uncommon ability.

They say he is the fastest man in the game in going from home plate to first base. Almost every club has one of these fastest men. St. Louis has two in the persons of Bert Shotten and George Sisler, and then there is Jake Daubert and Harry Hooper, and Max Carey and several others, not to speak of the direful Cobb himself. It would be a great advantage to have these speed kings compete for the first honors in this interesting little event on one field under like conditions with competent timekeepers. But whoever is best there is scant margin between him and his nearest competitors. And certainly Robertson is entitled to at least as much respect as any of the others. Nor does this claim rest on mere idle surmise. Ty Cobb was timed in the sprint to first some years ago when he was presumably even faster than he is today. Robertson, also timed, clipped one-fifth of a second off Ty's record. But we don't know what the conditions were or who were the timers in either case, so the evidence rests on a rather slender foundation.

Whether or not he is the fastest man on the diamond, Robertson is certainly a sprinter of the very first rank. But

he doesn't credit all his success in beating out the throw to first to his speed alone. "A good deal is in the start," he says. "Of course left-handers have a big advantage, as they are nearer first base than right-handed batters when they start. Also the swing itself brings them directly into their stride. But the good sprinter to first has already started for the bag by the time he meets the ball. He has got the jump on the fielders, and it needs fast work all round to catch him at the bag. But like all other good things, this quick start has its drawbacks. It tends to make the batter 'pull' his swing somewhat, and led to my becoming what is known as a right-field hitter. For when the left-handed batter drives the ball to right field it means that he has swung a fraction of a second sooner than he would have done had he driven the ball to center or left field."

It was this tendency also which caused Robertson's big slump in batting the latter half of 1916. All the forepart of the season he was hitting at a tremendous clip. But he was a right-field hitter, and the outfielders began to play for this known weakness. McGraw endeavored to coach Robertson against this tendency, which resulted from his impatience to get a flying start to first base. The result was a noticeable decline in batting power which was to be expected. For the batter who tries to alter his style necessarily becomes ragged in the process until such time as he has mastered the required improvements in his style. There is little doubt

DAVIS ROBERTSON'S BASEBALL RECORD

B. P., Year	Portsmouth, Va. Club	Date, Sept. 25, Lea.	1891. Pos.	H., 6—0 ins. G.	W., 175 lbs. A.B.	R. H.	S.B.Avg. S.B.Avg.
1910	A. & M. College .....			...	...	..	..
1911	A. & M. College .....			...	...	..	..
1911	Elizabeth City a	Tide Water ...		...	...	..	..
1912	New York b	N. L. ....		...	...	..	..
1913	New York c	N. L. ....		...	...	..	..
1913	Mobile	So. L.	OF	135	519	85	174 .335
1914	New York	N. L.	OF	82	256	25	68 .266
1915	New York	N. L.	OF	141	544	72	160 .294
1916	New York	N. L.	OF	150	587	88	180 .307

a No average issued (Outlaw ball),

b No average.

c Optional Apr. 17, recalled Aug. 20.

that Robertson will succeed in accomplishing this. And if he does there is every reason to suppose that his mid-season mark of .350 was not above his average gait.

Such a batting mark would place Robertson right alongside of the American League big three, for there is no other important particular in which his work suffers by comparison.

His speed has already been commented upon. His rangy height and quickness of foot give him the ability to cover a great amount of ground. He is naturally a good fielder, and his throwing arm is unusually strong. Yes, if any outfielder is slated to challenge the big three next season, the Giant star looks like the man. He has all the inherent class.

Davis Robertson was born in Portsmouth, Virginia, twenty-five years ago. It is reasonable to suppose that he was named after Jefferson Davis, but the point is in doubt. At any rate, he came from the far side of Mason and Dixon's line, which should make him a good outfielder as all the other leading lights of the suburban districts hail from that region.

Having been graduated from the public schools of the locality, young Robertson went to North Carolina Tech., where he took up the study of veterinary surgery. His father was interested in stock raising, and Robertson himself shared this interest. But as the fields of learning broadened out before him he sought to combine the attributes of a "Horse and Human" specialist and took

up the course of general medicine at Wake Forest Medical College, also in North Carolina.

Robertson did not complete this latter course, for baseball cut into his career. But he expects to become a full-fledged doctor before he is through, and last winter got himself admitted to a hospital as an interne.

Of his rank as a student we don't profess to know, but there never was any doubt of his rank as an athlete. In fact, one year he practically covered the field and represented his college in four distinct departments: Football, baseball, basketball and the track.

On the track his specialties were the one-hundred-yard dash, the high hurdles and the broad jump. In the latter event he cleared over twenty feet on numerous occasions. At the sprint he was once timed in 10 seconds flat, but he admits he had the wind at his back. On several other occasions, however he was caught on the dot at 10 and 1-5 seconds.

But with all his unusual abilities in track athletics, Robertson preferred those sports where a genuine contest was in evidence. He liked basketball, enjoyed baseball, and doted on football. And it was the latter sport which changed the whole tenor of his career.

At that time he was a pitcher, and a remarkably good one. McGraw signed him for the Giants through the representation of one of his scouts in the full belief that he was a rising young south-paw. With an eye to business the Giant manager looked with a skeptical eye on

the lure of football. He couldn't quite overcome the youthful enthusiasm of a gridiron star which was firmly implanted in Robertson's whole nature. But he did extract from him a verbal promise to limit his activities in the sport of pig skin and sprained ankles. McGraw, in short, made him promise to take part in not more than three football games, and went away hoping for the best. But the worst proved to be his allotted portion.

It was the second game of the season for young Robertson, and his ability as a halfback were counted upon to offset the prestige of Bucknell College. This little college will be remembered by baseball fans as the institution where Christy Mathewson won a reputation as one of the greatest football players of the time. The game was fast and furious. Robertson got involved in a mass formation and was extracted from the pile of mingled linesmen and backs with a damaged shoulder. He had the shoulder strapped up and went back into the game. But he was speedily put out of commission with another damaged shoulder, and as that exhausted his supply of shoulders, he quit.

Later it came to light that both shoulders were broken, although he didn't realize it in the heat of battle.

These useful portions of his anatomy mended themselves in due course of time after the prescribed course of nature. But with that mending process vanished all his old skill as a pitcher. Somehow or other he could no longer control the ball as he had been accustomed to do, and in short was obliged to give up all idea of continuing his career on the hurling mound. It was a bitter disappointment to Robertson and also to McGraw, who had counted not a little on his brilliant recruit. But like many other seeming misfortunes perhaps it was after all a benefit in disguise. For good pitchers are rather numerous, while outfielders who can hit for .350 are as rare as Speakers, Jacksons and Cobbs.

McGraw has had many good outfielders. He connived for years to get Bob Bescher, then leading baserunner of the league. He had Red Murray, whose throwing arm was worthy of Speaker at his best. He had Snodgrass, a fast and brilliant performer. And he has tried out many others. But his present outfield is, no doubt, the best that has ever represented the Giants. Burns, Kauff and Robertson combine in one way and another every talent which an outfielder should possess.

Burns is great in every way, Kauff is marvelously fast, and a slugger of unknown potentialities. But Robertson seems destined to beat Ambitious Bennie in the race with Ty Cobb, which the star of the Federal League set himself to accomplish. At any rate, Robertson is as fast as Cobb, has as good a throwing arm and is naturally as good a fielder. He hasn't shown Cobb's restless ambition as yet, and no doubt this deficiency is his chief fault. If he had the invincible determination to excel all rivals which has ever dominated the Georgjan, he could accomplish wonders. As things are he seems destined to hit better than he has ever hit before, and to increase in all round proficiency as a fielder and baserunner. How much he will improve depends upon himself.

Robertson has resided for the past five years at Norfolk, Va. He keeps his trim six feet of bone and muscle at the requisite weight of 180 pounds by frequent excursions into the hills in search of quail. He isn't married, and as no other profession save that of baseball breaks into his long vacation, he is able to devote considerable time to his future career of medicine. Dr. Robertson to be, may yet become a famous physician. But notoriety greater than that of any doctor will be his, if through a proper development of his amazing talents he becomes the first National League outfielder who successfully rivals Speaker, Cobb & Co.

