

Zach Wheat, Most Graceful of Outfielders

What a Heritage of Indian
Blood Has Done for
Zach Wheat

At first blush he seems out of place in a New York number. But isn't Wheat a part, and a large part, of Brooklyn? Zach is an outfielder of renown and a direful slugger. But what stamps him as a past master of the craft is the easy finish of his work. What Lajoie was to infielders Zach Wheat is to outfielders, the finest mechanical craftsman of them all.

AMONG the athletic heroes of all time none fills a higher place than the North American Indian. The ancient Greeks made of athletic skill an art. The modern trend has developed it into an exact science. But to the Indian it was life itself.

With his crude ideas of civilization, the early chiefs of the New World forests left ordinary tasks to the women of the tribe. The men concerned themselves solely with the excitements of the chase and the grimmer excitements of war. Danger was the soul of both employments, for with his rude weapons he was at best an indifferent match for the bears and wolves and bisons which swarmed in the vast forests or roamed in countless thousands over the boundless plains. While in war the Indian found his foe invariably a relentless, a cunning and a cruel adversary.

Photo by International Film Service.

Zach Wheat

It was these perils which surrounded him which made athletic skill to the Indian a vital necessity. Keeness of eye, speed of foot and strength of arm were the very vital elements of his existence. The only life insurance that he knew was the ability to strike hard and to retreat swiftly. Hence the unvarying athletic prowess of the modern Indian inherited from hundreds of generations of athletic forebears.

The Indian kept no records of his feats of strength or hardihood. Old-time records are lost beyond recall. But the modern Indian has left an indelible

Zach Wheat in Miniature

His name is Zachary Davis Wheat.

He was born at Hamilton, Missouri, twenty-nine years ago.

He is of Indian descent, 5 feet 10 inches in height and weighs 165 pounds.

He has always played the outfield.

His batting in the minors was weak, but as a major leaguer he has always been a terrific slugger.

In five out of the eight years he has been with Brooklyn he has hit over three hundred.

He considers last season his best.

He is the most easy and graceful outfielder on the diamond.

He is married and resides in the winter on his extensive farm at Polo, Missouri.

impression on all modern athletic records far out of proportion to his numbers.

We have no need to recall the amazing feats of Thorpe on the football gridiron or the track; the brilliant pitching of Bender, or the slugging of Chief Meyers. We are more immediately concerned with another descendant of the original American, Zack Wheat.

The famous Brooklyn outfielder has a liberal portion of Indian blood in his veins. And it is this inheritance from the days when a sure eye and a steady hand and well-trained muscles meant all the difference between life and death itself that has given Wheat his marvelous athletic ability as a ballplayer.

Tris Speaker may be the greatest outfielder in the world. We have no wish to rob the Texan of his well-won honors. But Zach Wheat is the easiest, most graceful of outfielders with no close rivals. It is one of the sights of the diamond to see the great Brooklyn star with his long easy stride speeding like an arrow across the outfield, and without a perceptible effort, spearing the ball with his gloved hand. Other outfielders may cover as much ground, or be as sure on the catch. But none can equal Wheat in the finished skill which fairly glitters in his work.

Nor is Wheat merely a showy player. He never exposes his talents for the applause of the grand stand. He is the most easy and graceful of fielders because it is natural for him to be so. The lithe muscles, the panther-like motions

of the Indian are his by divine right. But he is much more than a brilliant outfielder. He is a substantial one on every important count. His throwing arm is exceptionally good. He is fleet of foot on the base paths, and he is one of the most dreaded and murderous sluggers in the National League.

Wheat was born in Hamilton, Mo., twenty-nine years ago. His father named him Zachary Davis after two famous men, Zachary Taylor and Jefferson Davis. Coming from a state where Southern sympathies were pronounced in the great Civil War, he satisfied both factions by naming his offspring after a chief executive of the United States and also after the only president of the ill-starred Confederacy.

Young Zachary Davis grew up with an uneventful youth until such time as he secured employment with the baseball club at Enterprise, Kans., in 1906. The averages he compiled with this thriving burg have been lost. The next year, however, found him at Fort Worth, in Texas, and the next at Shreveport, La. At the latter city Wheat did very well, but showed no unusual abilities as a batter.

The following year he played 129 games with Mobile, Ala., and batted for but .245, when he was sent to Brooklyn. At this time Wheat was known as a great natural outfielder, and a heavy, though infrequent, hitter. In fact, his apparent lack of batting average weighed against him for in the minor leagues, players with formidable records come up to the

Zach Wheat's Baseball Record

B. P., Hamilton, Mo. Date, May 23, 1888. H., 5—10 ins. W. 165 lbs.

Year	Club	Lea.	Pos.	G.	A.B.	R.	H.	S.B.	Avg.
1906	Enterprise, Kas. a....	Kas .....		...	...	..	...	..	....
1907	Forth Worth a	Tex		6	...	..	...	..	....
1908	Shreveport	Tex	OF	92	339	49	91	17	.268
1909	Mobile b	So. L.	OF	129	460	58	113	10	.245
1909	Brooklyn	N. L.	OF	26	102	15	31	1	.304
1910	Brooklyn	N. L.	OF	156	606	78	172	16	.284
1911	Brooklyn	N. L.	OF	136	534	55	153	21	.287
1912	Brooklyn	N. L.	OF	123	453	70	138	16	.305
1913	Brooklyn	N. L.	OF	138	535	64	161	19	.301
1914	Brooklyn	N. L.	OF	145	533	66	170	20	.319
1915	Brooklyn	N. L.	OF	146	528	64	136	21	.258
1916	Brooklyn	N. L.	OF	149	568	76	177	19	.312

a No average issued.

b Sold Aug. 29 Bklyn., reported sale price \$1200.

majors, and those big averages shrink over night in the keener competition of the big circuits.

In all his minor league experience Wheat had never hit for as good as .300 in leagues where .300 hitters were fairly common. Hence, there was no great blaring of trumpets when he signed a Brooklyn contract.

But young Zachary Davis proved the exception to the well-known rule. His average not only did not shrink in the majors, but it leaped at once beyond the highest mark it had ever known. Membership in the majors must have acted like a potent tonic on his batting eye, for in the twenty-six games he played for Brooklyn he hit for .304.

Once established, Wheat's work remained at a top notch. He did not always hit .300, but he always hovered dangerously near that impressive mark and several times he went above it.

His only lean season, if it might be called so, was in 1915. Then he slumped for some unaccountable cause to .258. But the year which has just closed saw a complete revival of all his old powers, and the closing days left him with a grand average of .312.

Nor does this tell all the story. Of the 177 hits which caromed off his bat 32 were doubles, 13 triples and 9 home runs. Furthermore, his singles were seldom scratches. When Wheat connects with the ball it travels fast and far. He is a clean hitter.

Wheat's fielding is his most showy characteristic, but true to the instinct of the ballplayer he prides himself rather on his batting powers. Like all natural hitters, he carries a heavy bat which he swings from the handle. There is no chop hitting with Wheat, but a smashing swipe which, if it connects, means work for the outfielders.

The closing six weeks of the season found Wheat playing the most brilliant game of his career. He was hitting like a fiend, making impossible stops daily, playing a fast and furious game in every department. As the closing days resolved to a bitter, desperate struggle between Brooklyn and Philadelphia, Wheat began to do something that he had never done before. He began to worry. "I found," he told me, "that I couldn't sleep nights. I was thinking and dreaming and eating pennants. Things broke badly for us, and we couldn't seem to draw ahead. The strain of leading the league almost all season hadn't told on us much till that time. Then everybody began to crab and take things to heart and our work suffered.

"I know I used to get up in the middle of the night and smoke a cigar so that I could calm down a little and get some sleep. But it was a tight race to the very end.

"I believe this close finish accounted at least in part for our poor showing in the World's Series. There was a nat-

(Continued on page 104)

ZACH WHEAT

(Continued from page 51)

ural let-up or relaxation which isn't difficult to explain. We felt that we had won out and we eased up a little. And the time was so short we never got going again."

Wheat is a dark-browed, dark-haired silent man of the easy-going type. No manager and no umpire ever had any trouble with him. Playing baseball is his sole occupation and his sole interest in the summer months. He isn't in the least temperamental or excitable, but a steady, sturdy, brilliant ballplayer of the best possible type.

In the winter Wheat resides with his family on his extensive farm at Polo, Mo. Here he is a practical farmer who likes his craft.

Stock raising is his specialty, and some of his mules have found their way to the battlefields of Europe. "Tough-bitted customers, those mules," says Wheat. "I have an idea that shrapnel would bounce off their hides like rain drops off a duck's back, and they would thrive where an ordinary animal would die. But I suppose if one of those forty-two centimeter shells struck one of those mules it might budge him a little. Any way I never speculate on what becomes of my stock. There is no sentiment in business. I have two professions, I am a ballplayer in the summer and a farmer in winter. And I try to be successful at both."

If Wheat is as good a farmer as he is a ballplayer, which he doubtless is, he will be rich some day.
