



Photo by International Film Service

Al Walters, the coming catcher

NUMEROUS reports had sifted up from the training camp of the Yankees, anent the doings of certain recruits during the nipping days of March. Gedeon and Alexander, Aragon and Markle were boomed to the skies by enthusiastic sporting men. No phrases were too extravagant to paint the virtues of Bill Donovan's youngsters; no feats were too difficult for them to perform.

The Live Wire of American League Cat- chers

Al Walters, the Yankees' Great Young Backstop, Who Looks Like the Niftiest Catcher on the Circuit.

By J. C. KOFOED

A catcher is burly of limb and slow of foot. At least he is in all the illustrations and he goes by the familiar name of "Ice Wagon." But Young Walters refuses to play the characteristic role. He is scrappy and covers ground like a short stop. It's a real treat to see him back up first base. And he's got the push and ambition of Ty Cobb.

Yet in all the clutter of words that breezed from the Southland on the Western Union wires little was said of a young catcher named Walters. The newspapermen knew he had come from the Texas League, but that was about all they did know concerning him. He was one of those unimportant ones who are labeled "among those present."

Then, of a sudden, New York began to be flooded with reports of the new maskman. He, who had formerly been ignored, now received the most adulation. The sporting writers declared (with their usual extravagance) that he would equal Schalk himself. Naturally,

these reports from the front were taken with a grain of salt. Nobody believes training camp fodder, anyway, so when the Yankees started on their northward trek, the name of Walters was forgotten in the metropolis.

I had heard a lot of favorable talk about Al during the time he was out-guessing the basestealers of the Texas League. Naturally, I was anxious to see how he shaped up in fast company. So, when the Yankees came to Philadelphia I followed the youngster's actions more closely than the game itself.

It required just one contest to prove beyond the shadow of a doubt what sort of a player was this young backstop. With Witt on third and Walsh on second, the Athletics attempted a double steal. Walters bluffed a throw to the keystone sack, and then calmly proceeded to pick "Dutch" off third with a perfect throw. He showed excellent ability in judging high fouls, and in touching runners at the plate. His speed put to shame the average heavy-footed maskman—and, oh, how that boy could hit!

A .260 batting figure may not herald a Cobbesque ability to the man who is not a student of the game. To one who looks under the surface there are different indications.

In the first place, Walters, who is a right-handed batter, stands up to the plate, and slams the right-handers and southpaws with equal vigor. A natural hitter will learn to face Alexander as calmly as Hiram Slowball. That is just what Walters does. But there is a system of defense that cuts down many hits that would be labeled safe in the bushes. That explains, in great part, the .36 point drop between his Waco average and the one he made in New York.

Last year Nunamaker—a hard, conscientious worker—batted far above his normal gait, while Walter Alexander failed to come up to expectations in any department. Nunamaker is a veteran, handicapped by slowness of foot, and Alexander is not gifted with Walters' natural talent. From present indications Al should become the Yankees' first-string backstop next year, and in 1918 will be recognized as one of the greatest maskmen in either league. This is a prophecy. See if it doesn't come true!

Walters is one of the numerous California native sons who have graced the big leagues with their splendid talents, and have been drawn to New York as inevitably as filings to the magnet—"Prince Hal" Chase, the Peerless Leader, Chance, Wolter, dozens of them.

He was born in San Francisco, and is not yet twenty-three years of age. His boyhood was not vastly different from that of the average player who graduates into the big league. At first the lots of San Francisco were his stamping grounds, and he starred in the "scrub" games that always develop there. Thence he rose to the dignity of a real team, and augmented his earnings among the semi-pros.

Al was only eighteen when he signed his first contract with Saskatoon, of the Western Canada League. To the blase followers of a major league team this may seem like a small achievement. To Walters it meant the opening wedge to Fame. He was overjoyed, and carried with him to Canada a superabundance of confidence—a knowledge, not merely a belief, that he was going to succeed.

There was a maskman named Duggan holding the position of first-string catcher on the Saskatoon nine, but after the first two weeks the first catcher's name was Walters. There was only one backstop in the league who showed general superiority over the California boy, and that was Jack Roche, who was purchased by the Cardinals. Since then, however, Walters has developed to a far greater extent than Roche.

The Canadian season was divided into two parts; Saskatoon winning the pennant in the opening tilt, Moose Jaw in the latter. In the post-season play-off Moose Jaw had the lead four games to two when the series broke up in a free-for-all fight.

In spite of his disappointment at Saskatoon's failure to carry off all the honors, Walters could be nothing else but satisfied at his own showing. It was remarkable for a lad of his age.

His record in 1914 was even better than it had promised to be. He batted .311, and his work behind the bat and on the bases was so brilliant that he attracted universal attention. Waco, of the Texas League, purchased his release

at the close of the western Canadian season—a purchase that marked his first step upward in the baseball world. Instead of being a Class D player he had assumed the comparative importance of a Class B reservist.

It may be luck, and it may be—something else, but during his three years in the minors, Walters has always played on a winning team. Saskatoon won the first half of the title during Al's opening year, and was dominant among Western Canadian teams in 1914. Waco romped to a Texas League pennant by

six full- games after signing Walters, and for the second consecutive year Al proved himself his league's best catcher.

That is all that can be written about the young Californian's minor league experience. He has had phenomenal success for a boy of his years. In 1916 he proved himself one of the real live wires of the American League.

Remember that prophecy I made awhile back.

In another year or two Al Walters will be one of the best catchers in fast company.



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