

**Baseball Champions of Colorado:  
The Leadville Blues of 1882  
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“Attention, please. Attention, please! Today’s lineup for the Leadville Blues: Newell-left field, Blake-first base . . .” — the fans scattered in the stands listened halfheartedly as the announcer droned on, trying to be heard over the noise of the crowd. Summer had come to Leadville, as much summer as ever comes to a town 10,152 feet high in the heart of the Rocky Mountains, and summer in 1882 meant baseball. The locals had come out to root their boys on to a win and they would not be disappointed. The Blues were playing the Bonanza Whites from the upstart mining camp over in the San Luis valley, a team, its hometown newspaper recklessly boasted, that would administer a “terrible” drubbing to the Blues. The Blues, representatives of Colorado’s and the nation’s number one silver mining town, were accustomed to such challenges. Alas for the Whites, the boast was empty and the Blues won 47-0,



**Probable site of the Leadville Blues’ ballpark. No photograph of it is known to exist. (credit: Ned Blair).**

a “galling defeat,” pointedly remarked the *Leadville Daily Herald*.

They are all gone now — George Newell, the “excellent fielder and peerless runner,” and Butch Blake, “one of Denver’s best players,” imported like the rest of the team to meld the Blues into a championship club. Bonanza, which never lived up to its boosters’ expectations, has passed the way of most mining camps, only a shadow of yesteryear. Leadville lives on, its fame relying more on the past than the present. And the Blues, despite an amazing season in 1882, have quietly faded from memory.

In the 1880s baseball was emerging as the “national game,” as Americans began a love affair with it that would last several generations. The National League had completed six seasons, but the real strength of the sport lay at the local level, where a team such as the Blues epitomized local enthusiasm and involvement. And Americans with more leisure time than ever before played baseball on sandlots, indeed, on almost any available space, and readily attended more professional games to root for their favorites. A national baseball craze was seizing the country, and Leadville was caught up in it, although by no means was the Leadville of 1882 a typical American community.

Almost exactly five years before, a few settlers had come to this yet unnamed site, enticed by a rumor of silver deposits.



Leadville in 1882 was a sprawling mining town, of which only a part is shown here. (credit: Denver Public Library, Western History Department).

Such fantastically rich deposits were uncovered that the few quickly became a horde, and the 1880 census takers found 14,820 people in town; other sources claimed even higher totals. Leadville urbanized virtually overnight to emerge the second largest town in the state, behind Denver, and the major silver producer in the United States, with \$14,000,000 in silver, lead, and gold mined in 1880. Even Nevada's far-famed Comstock could not match the new 'silver queen.' Brash, confident Leadville stood unsurpassed at the top of the mining world. An opera house, gas company, telephones, a business district to rival Denver's, railroads fighting for its business, and a red-light district that was the envy of the mining world proved Leadville's maturity. Thousands — and for a lucky few, millions — could be made in mining, either by actual working or by speculating in stocks. "And all roads lead to Leadville," wrote author and artist Mary Halleck Foote, herself on the way there with her mining engineer husband; "everybody was going there."<sup>1</sup>

Destined for even greater heights, Leadville nevertheless suffered some misfortune in 1880, despite a record production performance. Two of its best known mines failed, carrying with them many eastern investors who, swept away by the anticipation of potential profits, had invested in an industry about which they knew very little. Suddenly investment slowed drastically and Leadville mining stocks no longer glistened as market favorites. In between these two failures a labor strike checked mining until it was finally settled in the owners' favor after the Colorado National Guard was called in.<sup>2</sup> Old-time friendliness and confidence sagged and Leadville lost that spirit and dash which separate a young, bustling mining community from one slipping into middle age. For the residents of Leadville these events raised serious questions that needed to be resolved if the community and mining were to survive at the previous pace.

The next few years saw a concerted effort to reverse the image left by the 1880 disasters. Leadville, its supporters proclaimed, was still the best, still the place to invest, still the growing mining town. In a whirlwind of activity Leadville exhibited rich ore samples, published glowing mining reports, and promoted whatever it could to convince nonbelievers.

<sup>1</sup>Mary Halleck Foote to Helena Gilder, May 12, 1879, James D. Hague Collection, Henry Huntington Library. Mary Halleck Foote wrote several novels about her Leadville experiences, and her life was semi-fictionally portrayed in the Pulitzer prize winning *Angle of Repose*.

<sup>2</sup>For the mining situation in general see Rodman Paul, *Mining Frontiers of the Far West* and William Greever, *The Bonanza West*. For Leadville see Duane A. Smith, *Horace Tabor: His Life and the Legend*.

Up to this point Leadville had never thought seriously about its baseball fortunes, the game had been played more for fun than anything else. It was hard to be serious about baseball at that elevation and with such a short season. In the spring of 1882 local leaders, hoping to enhance the town's image, took it upon themselves to develop a championship team instantly. This was not to be just an ordinary team but one the likes of which had not been seen before in Colorado.

Baseball was popular in mining camps; a winning team, or one that could at least whip the nearby "nines," bolstered the community's ego and strengthened its self-esteem — not to mention the money that might be won on a successful team. The gambling potential of the sport appealed to many nineteenth-century spectators and team backers. Baseball mirrored mining and mining society; excitement, new opportunity, and expectation were a big part of each. As one mine owner commented, "you can not tell [what lies] beyond the end of a pick in a mine" ; similarly, any team might prove to be a winner on a given day, one never knew. Baseball also evidenced a mining community's growth beyond the raw, frontier stage, as they became more attractive to those critically important outside investors and settlers, particularly families. Few mining camps planned always to remain simply that; they desired to mature into a settled town with a permanency mining alone did not promise.

Baseball was, then, an institution of society, an extended representative of the community. Much could be said for playing the game well, but winning was the important civic question. Thus Bonanza, which had had such high hopes, feared the score might reflect its position relative to Leadville, in this case with a great deal of accuracy. The bigger and wealthier mining communities simply recruited and imported better players to supplement the hometown boys. While the upstarts might win a few, the odds were against them, like those they faced when trying to attract outside financiers and developers. Leadville worried little about such matters before the early eighties. There had been no need — now there was. Leadville responded predictably and the Leadville Blues were born. No team would be better, the championship of Colorado must be theirs.

The baseball season opened quietly in April, 1882, with the scheduling of a game between two local nines on Sunday the 16th, a game solely for fun and enjoyment. For much of the month baseball found itself crowded out of the local news by the arrival of the original sunflower child, the Irish poet and

novelist Oscar Wilde, who bemused Leadvillites during a short stay.

Not until the twenty-seventh was an organizational meeting held for the team that became the Blues. The "Leadville Base Ball and Athletic Association" submitted grandiose plans, including a bicycle and running track "to give the Leadville flyers" a place "for good solid practice." The preamble to the Association's constitution stated its purpose: to encourage legitimate sporting activities and provide facilities "for physical exercise and attainment of skill in ball playing and other athletic sports." It planned to provide a ten-acre ground with a baseball field in the center. Reality scuttled such dreams in favor of a more realistic goal, the development of a "first class" team.

From the start the major goal was a team that would make the nines of Denver, Pueblo, and Colorado Springs "watch out." The *Herald* crowed, "One thing is certain, Leadville will have a nine they may well be proud of, the members of which will try hard to win the state championship and fly the whip pennant in the cloud city."<sup>3</sup>

The men behind the Association were some of Leadville's young bloods — lawyers, bankers, mine owners, merchants, and saloon keepers — men mostly in their twenties and thirties. They adopted a constitution and other regulations, manned the various committees, served as directors, paid the "annual membership fee of \$12," and collected other funds to underwrite the cost of the team. Despite their prestige as founding fathers and sustainers, if any of them hoped actually to play on the team, they were doomed to disappointment.

Obviously, "outside" players were going to be relied upon to produce the high-caliber team envisioned. While Leadville offered some fine home talent, the Association desired a championship team and felt it was necessary to go out and find one. To secure such players meant hiring professionals, a fact of life the Association did not blanch over, although individual salaries were never publicly discussed. Considering the quality of player acquired and the distance lured, the salaries must have been attractive.<sup>4</sup> After Leadville defeated an Omaha, Nebraska team

<sup>3</sup>*Leadville Daily Herald*, April 23, 1882. See also issues of April 13, 27, Mar 4 and 6, 1882.

<sup>4</sup>Dave Foutz, two years later in 1884, was paid \$1,600 to pitch for the St. Louis Browns from late July through the remainder of the season. *Leadville Daily Herald*, July 27, 1884. David Voigt reported a \$1,000 minimum salary agreement in 1882 for several leagues. David Voigt, *American Baseball* (Norman: University of Oklahoma, 1966), vol. 1, p. 127. On Foutz's purchase and sale see pp. 141 and 145. In contrast the Leadville miner received \$3-\$4 per day and the common laborer less.

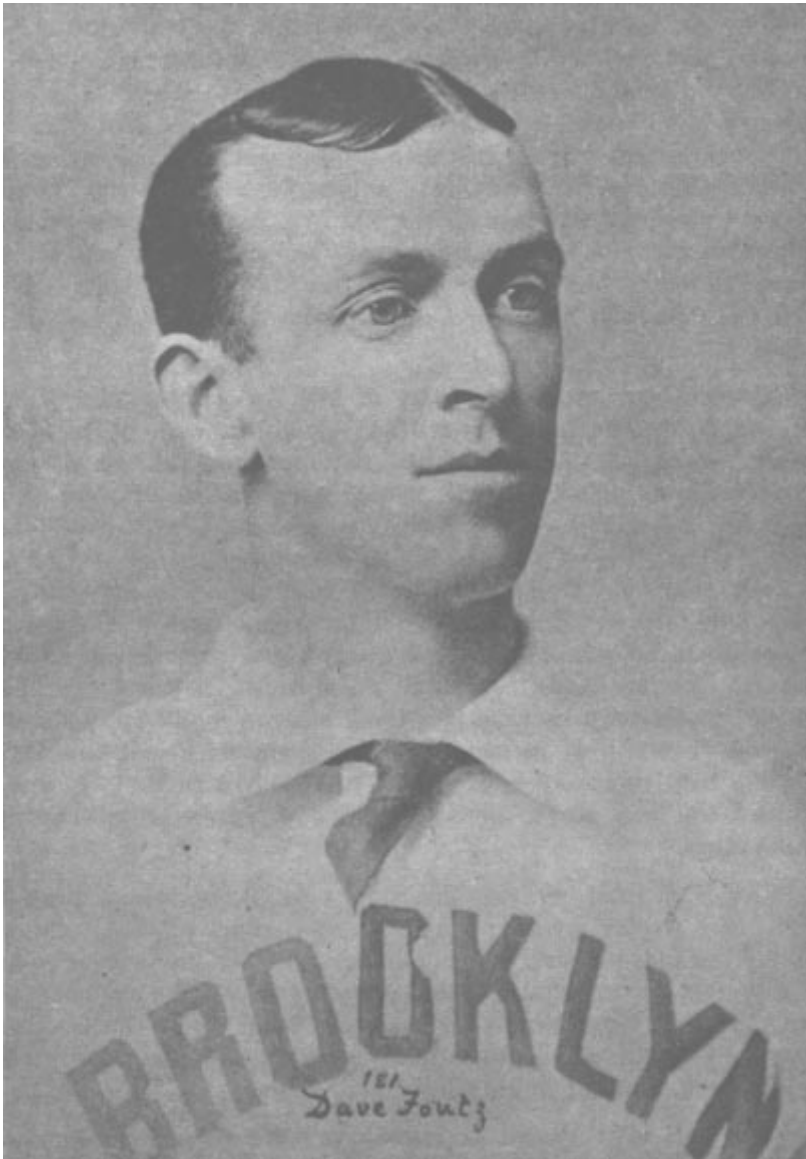
16-0, the *Omaha Daily Bee*, August 16, wondered “if the Blues can handle the pick and shovel as well as they can the bat?” That was never an issue; the players were brought to Leadville for one reason only.

Harry Keily, the man designated as manager, set out to recruit the best players. Civil War veteran Keily, previously an actor and “dramatic manager,” proved to be a hardworking organizer and a “thorough base ballist in theory,” even though limited to the status of non-playing manager by his “rotundity.” From the first he sounded like a manager, predicting the Blues would certainly win the championship if he secured the nine he hoped for. This proved enough for the enthusiastic *Herald*, which cheered “Hurrah for the Cloud City.”

In the following weeks the paper delighted in chronicling the players’ arrivals, becoming more and more convinced that an extremely strong club was being assembled. By the end of May, Keily had his nucleus. James (Dick) Phelan, the “natural born player” who had played in the east and midwest, would be at second. Never using a glove, Phelan claimed he could handle the ball better with his bare hands. The third baseman, Harry Kessler, had played for Cincinnati in 1876-77 and for the Brooklyn Atlantics. “The well known professional,” Jake Knowdell was the catcher. Knowdell caught briefly for Milwaukee in the National League and for other teams, including the Atlantics. Gomer Price, an outfielder and “change” pitcher, signed on. “Old” Gomer was also a veteran of the eastern teams. Joe Tumatly, the “old St. Louis player,” and Al Webster split the shortstop duties and also played in the outfield. Art Hull, a “fine change catcher,” played center field and occasionally the infield, and Dick Orth, “the little fellow” who covered a “heap of ground,” second, short, and the outfield.

Keily was not finished. In June, Dave Foutz arrived.<sup>5</sup> Along with Knowdell, Foutz became the key to the success of the Blues. He was the Blues’ principal pitcher, “a paralyzer and make no mistake,” and sometimes outfielder, noted as a fast runner. With a few additions and deletions during the season, these were the Leadville Blues, a nine made up of “paid men, most

<sup>5</sup>Information on these men was found in the *Leadville Daily Herald*, May 17 and 27, 1882; *Omaha Daily Bee*, Aug. 25, 1882; *Denver Tribune*, July 3, 1882, and records in the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum, Cooperstown, New York. for Keily see *Omaha Republican*, Aug. 25, 1882, *Omaha Daily Bee*, Aug. 24-25, 1882, and the *Herald Democrat* (Leadville), April 28, 1967. Probably none of the players used gloves, which were generally shunned until the 1890s. Voigt, *American Baseball*, I, P. 86.



**The Blues' best player, Dave Foute as he appeared when playing for and managing Brooklyn, 1888-1896. Known as a "quiet" gentleman and earnest player," Foutz won 41 games for the St. Louis Browns in 1888. (credit: National Baseball Hall of Fame).**

of them old professionals from the crack clubs of the eastern league.”<sup>6</sup>

Keily lost no time in organizing the team, and the Association worked like beavers to prepare a field and raise money. No ordinary diamond would serve for such a nine; a level spot was selected and cleared, a grandstand erected, with a dressing room underneath, and a fence installed around the field. The grandstand seated 400, with auxiliary stands for another 600. Leadville was going first class all the way. A benefit concert at the Tabor Opera House raised some of the money, the rest came from subscriptions and dues. After fancy uniforms were ordered from the Spalding Company, the Leadville Blues were ready to take the field.

Such enthusiasm on the part of the Association and Keily proved infectious, and Leadvillites caught a case of baseball fever. In April the *Herald* had remonstrated that only “disinterestedness of its citizens” would prevent the winning of a pennant. The editor need not have fretted. By May 27 the paper stated, “Leadville has got the base ball fever so bad at present that one of the nine cannot catch a baby falling out of a second story window without yelling ‘Judgment.’ ” The paper devoted special columns to the team and invited everyone to the games. Ladies were especially encouraged, because “perfect order” would be preserved and the Blues were “all gentlemanly players,” who “will reflect credit on themselves and the community they represent both on and off the ball field.”<sup>7</sup> In July, in fact, the team had a special “ladies day” game, an interesting innovation.

With loyal local backing, the Blues opened the season, despite some late winter weather which dumped snow on Leadville on June 1. Cold, blustery winds chilled spectator and player alike throughout June, but the Blues persevered, wondering perhaps why they had come to this mountainous town where the weather seemed determined to prove that Leadville had nine months of winter and three of mighty late fall.

Keily had his boys out practicing in spite of the weather and the fact that their “stadium” would not be completely ready until July. In May and June the Blues played ten games against

<sup>6</sup>Denver Tribune, July 3, 1882. Several players had been on the Live Oaks of Lynn, Mass. and the Brooklyn Atlantics, both strong minor league teams. Albert Spaulding, *America's National Game* (New York: American Sports Publishing Company, 1912), pp. 225 and 239.

<sup>7</sup>Material for this section was found in the *Leadville Daily Herald*, May-June, 1882. The July 4 issue describes the ball park, which was located below the Grant Smelter.

the “Picked Nine,” the best players of Leadville. The outcome was predictable, nine victories for the Blues, who averaged 19.5 runs per game. As his players arrived, Keily worked them into the lineup; by the end of June all was ready.

Local enthusiasm mounted with each game. The *Herald* bragged on May 27, “No such material was ever in Colorado before.” On June 7 it trumpeted, “The Leadville nine is a good one, and will uphold the honor of this city against any club between Chicago and San Francisco.” To provide stronger competition Keily had Foutz pitch for the Picked Nine and Price for the Blues; still the scores mounted. Then came a stunning ten-inning, 15-14 defeat, for which the reporter blamed the “miserable” support given Price, who pitched well. Foutz returned to the mound for the Blues in the last two games and was backed by “excellent batting and fielding.”<sup>8</sup>

The Association and Keily meanwhile tried to line up other games, without much success. Denver and Colorado Springs nines sent back “evasive and indefinite” answers. Finally a meeting in Colorado Springs resolved the impasse by organizing a state baseball league, which limited membership to clubs with enclosed grounds. This meant, at the moment, the Blues, Colorado Springs Reds, and Denver Browns. According to the original agreement, they would play a series of twelve games against each other for the state championship. Other games were permitted, if they did not interfere with the pennant schedule.

After some discussion regarding where the first series’ game would be played, the Blues took to the road for a July 1 meeting with the Reds. A “terrific” downpour halted action in the sixth inning with the score 7-7. The Blues traveled on to Denver, unable to schedule a rematch because of prior commitments. Jealousy existed openly between Colorado’s capital city and its major mining town, intensifying their baseball rivalry. Denver, about to open a National Mining and Industrial Exposition, scheduled the game on the Browns’ new field at the Exposition grounds. The Blues left little for the Denverites to cheer about, scoring seven runs in the first inning on their way to a resounding 30-5 victory. The *Denver Tribune* moaned, “Base ball isn’t very much of a game, anyhow.” Returning to Leadville for the Fourth, the Blues downed the Reds 8-1. Bets were

<sup>8</sup>Reports of the games are found in the *Leadville Daily Herald*, May 16, 23, 30, June 7, 9, 13, 16, 20, 27, and 30, 1882.

heavy and the stands packed; "The Leadvillians gave the boys from the aesthetic city such a drubbing that they will never forget it as long as they are in existence."

The rest of July proved just as successful for the Blues. Some of the games were mismatches, including the Bonanza rout and a 42-1 drubbing of previously undefeated Buena Vista. As the month ended, the Blues were back on the road; defeating the Reds and Browns on their home fields. The Browns and Blues bickered back and forth about scheduling, the former accusing the latter of "playing fast and loose with the other nines." The *Herald* jumped to its favorite's defense, stating the Blues would play Denver "any time." The *Denver Tribune*, under the sharp editorial pen of Eugene Field (not yet nationally renowned as a poet), returned comment for comment. The Longmont Utes seemed to be just the team to "tackle the Blues" and take the "conceit out of the vainglorious thumpers of the carbonate camp." Denver could not play the game for "sour shuck," according to the *Tribune*. "There is an inexpressible longing," the paper went on to say, "experienced in this locality to see the stuffing knocked out of the Leadville amateurs." Hardly amateurs! Following Leadville's July 30 defeat of the Browns, the *Tribune* groused, "Owing to the fact that the Leadville Blues are mostly professionals and regularly paid players, they should be expected to be the champions of the State. The Browns are all co-operative workers, regulation amateurs." Sour grapes or not, the paper praised Leadville for "liberally" supporting the national game and raked Denver's parsimonious patronage. A year later the *Tribune* was still smarting over the rough handling Denver received from the Blues. Field hoped that no team would be organized that season "to be pounded to death by every scrub and dunghill nine in the country."<sup>9</sup> Having convincingly defeated both the Red and Browns, the Blues were ready to challenge a new nine on the block. Much store and money were placed on the powers of the Longmont Utes.

Foutz, even with a sore arm, was too much for the Utes, pitching the Blues to an 8-2 victory. After the Browns reneged on playing another game, causing extra days' expenses in Denver, the Blues returned to Leadville. The Browns did show up for a two-game series on August 6-7, probably wishing they

<sup>9</sup>*Denver Tribune*, July 10 and 31, 1882 and May 13, 1883. *Leadville Daily Herald*, July, 1882. For information on the state baseball league see *Denver Tribune*, June 26, 1882 and the *Leadville Daily Herald*, June 27, 1882.

had stayed home when the Blues won easily. The Utes were the next to appear in Leadville, playing five games in the course of a week. The *Herald* promised that “the Blues are taking all the scalps they run across,” and would send them back to “their happy hunting grounds minus scalps, war paint and feathers.”

Much to Leadvillites’ horror, the Utes handed the Blues a 4-1 setback, limiting this previously hard-hitting club to three hits. Keily promptly reassured fans that the “best in the country get the same medicine.” Ugly rumors circulated around Leadville regarding the possibility that some players had thrown the game. Why? To get a big crowd for the next day and rake in plenty of gate money. When Longmont lost the second game, the *Tribune* in Denver promptly accused the Utes of throwing it. The third game attracted nearly 1,000 fans. A band playing “popular airs” entertained before the game and the Blues sent the faithful home happy with a 16-2 victory. According to the *Tribune*, a \$1,000 side bet rested on the outcome. The last two games proved anti-climactic, the Blues winning both and even lending Foutz to the Utes to pitch.<sup>10</sup>

The hint of a thrown game clouded an otherwise successful home stand. Though never proven, the rumor was enough to besmirch a sport already tainted on the national level with scandals, and one that attracted far too much interest solely for betting purposes.<sup>11</sup> Keily and the *Herald* had firmly stated that the Blues had been organized for the “advancement of the national game in Colorado” and to win the state championship, not “for any gambling speculations.”<sup>12</sup> Now the rumor would linger to shadow the Blues. On a brighter note, the Colorado championship was theirs. Having bested the Browns and Reds in championship play, and the upstart Utes, the Blues could find no nines remaining to challenge. The pennant flew over Leadville. According to the *Herald* July 27, Albert Spalding, “the only base ball authority in the world,” expressed the opinion that “Leadville is the second city to Chicago for base ball.” Even if they did not actually say it, proud Leadvillites were convinced of the sentiment’s truth. The Leadville Blues now set out to prove that very fact; they were going east to display their talents.

<sup>10</sup>*Leadville Daily Herald*, Aug. 10-20, 1882. *Denver Tribune*, Aug. 14-16, 1882. *Rocky Mountain News* (Denver), Aug. 6, 1882.

<sup>11</sup>Spalding discusses the baseball scandals of the 1870s, which included throwing games and the influence of gamblers. One reason the National League was formed in 1876 was to stop this type of activity, yet in both 1877 and 1882 players were expelled for gambling and collusion with gamblers. Spalding, *America’s National Game*, pp. 189-90, 226 and 239.

<sup>12</sup>*Leadville Herald*, July 20, 1882.

The Blues had provided the home folks with many thrills over the past six weeks and the five dollars invested in a season ticket (it cost 50¢ for a grandstand seat and 25¢ for general admission) would have been well spent. The team had shown flashes of power: Newell hit two home runs in one game, and the “model second baseman,” Phelan, a homer and triple in another. Basically, however, they punched out singles and doubles. With their high run totals, four- and five-hit individual performances were not uncommon; four players had six-hit games, and Tumatly seven in one game. Solid fielding, even spectacular on occasion, marked the Blues’ progress, and the battery of Foutz and Knowdell, which “worked together like a charm,” garnered steady praise. Foutz was so effective that occasionally the outfielder had nothing to do but look at the scenery, which was magnificent from Leadville’s outfield.

The Blues had been talking about an eastern trip for some time; now in mid-August they departed, strengthening the team with the addition of Jack Lavin, previously with the Longmont Utes. Lavin had defeated the Blues in the first game and even the *Herald* had admitted then that “Jack is a dandy.” Controversy ensued, particularly with the aggrieved Utes, who promptly accused Lavin of throwing games in favor of the Blues. “Stealing” players was not unusual; the *National League* had only recently moved to put a stop to the practice of visiting a town and taking the best players for the professional team. The press was aroused by the fact that Lavin had been guilty “of things in the east without doubt reprehensible,” but allowed that he had already “suffered” the costs. No one bothered to specify what he had done. The faithful *Herald* defended his team-jumping; Lavin, it concluded, left the Utes because of disgust over their playing. The paper wished its boys well, “Go in, boys, our hearts are with you.”<sup>13</sup>

The Blues breezed east, winning two games easily against the Hastings, Nebraska Reds; Omaha was their destination. Despite the Blues’ role as state champions, the *Denver Tribune* could not rally to their cause: “It is sincerely and fondly hoped they will miss their way home.” Some attempt was made on the part of “certain parties” to demean the Blues, causing Keily to write an open letter to the *Omaha Daily Bee*, August 24:

<sup>13</sup>*Leadville Daily Herald*, Aug. 24, 26, and 27, 1882. *Fort Collins Courier*, Sept. 2, 1882, agreed with the *Herald* on why Lavin left. Spalding, *America’s National Game*, p. 231-33, discusses the signing of players. A check of the *New York Times*, Jan., 1876-June, 1882, failed to find any mention of Jack Lavin. There is some confusion about Lavin’s first name; it also appeared as Jake.

It is my opinion Colorado has some of the best players today outside of the league [the National League] . . . . We come from the youngest state in the union; we represent the most cosmopolitan and hospitable city on the face of the globe, and we will take pleasure in playing any club in the United States with that warm, brotherly feeling that should exist in the bravest of all gentlemanly ball players.

Keily put the Blues up at the newly redecorated Canfield House and set about to drum up enthusiasm for the coming games. The “famous” Blues were reported to have lost only once in 33 games, just a slight exaggeration of their 26-2-1 record.

In the opening game the “carbonate base ballists” came and conquered, defeating the Burlington and Missouri 16-0 behind “bewilder” Foutz. Lavin received mighty praise for hitting two triples and was editorially nicknamed “Jumbo” for such power; the Blues totaled nineteen hits in the rout. The *Bee’s* reporter bemoaned, “Oh! Why didn’t we bet on the Blues?” Next, the Blues opened a four-game series against Council Bluffs. On a sweltering Saturday afternoon the Bluffs handed the Blues a 7-4 defeat, even though Phelan got a hit when “a long ball to left field . . . went over a buggy being driven across the field.” A 9-8 defeat followed, the Bluffs scoring the winning run in the ninth; Leadvillites were dumbfounded by such a turn of events. The blame could be placed, they consoled each other, on the fact that the Bluffs had strengthened their team with players from Chicago. Somehow that seemed different from adding Lavin. Some concern was expressed about these losses, “the reputation of the Blues for honest playing should be kept above suspicion.”

The third game proved even more disastrous when the Bluffs, playing at home, scored six runs in the ninth to win 8-4. Foul, cried the *Herald* — the umpire did them in. The *Omaha Daily Republican* reporter agreed: “in the ninth inning, although the Leadvilles got the side out fairly and squarely by a double play, the umpire, who is a stockholder in the Council Bluffs club, declared the men safe.” A “damnable robbery,” the *Herald* shouted, “the respectable people and the editors of all papers all join in universal condemnation of the umpire.” Even before the game, the umpire matter had caused “quite a little flurry of excitement.” The Blues “kicked,” requesting a neutral man. The Bluffs insisted on having their choice at least once in three games and refused to play unless given their “rights.” Betting

had been heavy and the Bluffs had “big money up.”<sup>14</sup> From all indications it appeared that the Blues had just cause for complaint, but there was no recourse. Omaha had also bet heavily on the Blues, so Leadville did not endure its frustration alone.

A fourth game was scheduled, but the Bluffs declined to play, claiming they could not make money and had no pitcher. In a letter to the Omaha papers, Keily called them “untrustworthy, unreliable and anything but gentlemanly ballplayers.” Such bombast perchance improved the Blues’ morale, though it failed to bring the Bluffs out to play. Manager Keily offered to bet \$1,000 to \$10,000 that the Blues could beat the Bluffs in two games out of three when they returned to Omaha from other scheduled games.<sup>15</sup> There would be no further games between the two, however; the Bluffs refused to rise to the challenge.

The series had shown the vicissitudes of baseball in 1882, most markedly in the realm of umpiring. The Blues continued their tour, although never with quite the same spirit again. On August 31 the *Herald* editorially summarized: “The Council Bluffs nine with their umpire as tenth man are apparently invincible.” The Blues had been “home towned,” not an unusual occurrence. They threatened several times to quit because of the “unfair” umpiring, finally continuing the game out of respect for the ladies present, and for the same reason refusing to “lick the umpire.”

On they went to Leavenworth, where they defeated the Reds, Lavin again providing the power with a double and triple. Local teams of the 1330s showed a singular lack of originality in naming themselves, this being the third different Reds team played. The Blues were no doubt pleased to be in Leavenworth on the thirty-first; two inches of snow fell on Leadville that day. The next stop was Kansas City, to face yet another Red team, which mastered the Colorado champions in two games. Poor fielding and a Kansas City pitcher who struck out 23 batters in the series proved to be the Blues’ undoing. Local fans thought the “Leadville boys were playing off” in order to draw a large second-game crowd, but the *Kansas City Times* absolved them of the charge; after all, the Reds did win both games. Umpiring continued as a sore point; Knowdell was especially pointed out for “finding fault,” along with several

<sup>14</sup>*Omaha Daily Bee*, Aug. 26-30, 1882. *Omaha Daily Republican*, Aug. 26-30, 1882. *Leadville Daily Herald*, Aug. 27-30 and Sept. 3, 1882. *Fort Collins Courier*, Sept. 2, 1882.

<sup>15</sup>*Omaha Daily Bee*, Aug. 30, 1882. *Omaha Daily Republican*, Aug. 31, 1882.

other Blues who “sustained a reputation as kickers of the first class.” The Blues had no one to blame but themselves — all accounts mentioned their poor fielding. Two weeks on the road, with nearly continuous playing, were taking their toll.<sup>16</sup> Some prestige was redeemed when the Blues downed Leavenworth again and the Weeping Water, Nebraska nine.

	Games								
	Played	AB.	R.	B.H.	T.B.	Pct.	P.O.	A.	E.
Price, r.f. and p.	13	54	12	21	22	.388	8	25	1
Foutz, c.f. and p.	13	54	18	20	27	.370	23	74	3
Lavine, l.f. and p.	13	60	13	19	34	.318	12	7	3
Phelan, 2d b.	13	54	11	17	22	.314	25	21	6
Knowdell, r.f. and c.	13	56	16	17	21	.293	70	15	7
Kessler, 3d b.	13	53	11	12	17	.226	22	15	11
Blake, 1st b. and s.s.	13	60	15	13	15	.216	96	4	12
Ortb, s.s. and c.	5	20	8	6	7	.300	5	14	8
Tumalty, cf. and s.s.	11	42	10	9	10	.214	4	6	9
Newell, s.s and c.f.	6	27	2	6	6	.222	2	4	8

(Credit: Leadville Daily Herald, Sept. 26, 1882)

#### Individual statistics from the Blues eastern tour August 21 - September 14, 1882

Upon returning to Omaha, Gomer Price defected to the B&Ms; Price pitched against his “old comrades,” who hit him hard and won 14-2. Keily hoped to schedule games with the strong local Union Pacific nine, but they refused to come to terms. The Blues then turned homeward, Keily thanking everyone for the treatment shown his team. Though Omaha papers predicted several other players would stay behind, none did. Again Hastings fell victim to the Blues, as they had on the outward trip. The Blues came home with a tour record of eight wins and five losses.<sup>17</sup>

The Blues harvested some unnecessary local criticism when they failed to play the Fort Collins team, which they had promised to do on September 14. Keily’s boys were promptly branded “ungentlemanly” by indignant Fort Collins fans.<sup>18</sup> The tour, which had started on such a high point, ended on this sour note. Colorado’s champions obviously were in need of rest.

Thirteen games in nineteen days constituted a grueling schedule; except for one week in Omaha, it called for almost

<sup>16</sup>Kansas City Times, Sept 2-3, 1882. Leadville Daily Herald, Aug 31 Sept. 3, 1882. Leavenworth Times, Sept. 1 and 5. 1882.

<sup>17</sup>Leadville Daily Herald, Sept. 6-13, 1882. Omaha Daily Bee, Sept. 7 and 9, 1882.

<sup>18</sup>Rocky Mountain News, Sept. 15, 1882; Fort Collins Courier, Sept. 23, 1882.

continuous traveling. The Blues had met their equals; not once had they lost badly and undoubtedly had had one game “stolen” from them. The ever-loyal *Herald* claimed three games had been “unwarrantably stolen by umpires naturally partial” to the home clubs.

Umpires were convenient scapegoats for the home team’s defeat even at this early date. They were emerging as the villains of the game, and umpire-baiting was an accepted practice.<sup>19</sup> There had been little of this in Leadville — no one complains when he’s winning — but once on the road, with the losses mounting, the Blues players “kicked” as vociferously as anyone. In this they imitated the National League, where umpires were even physically attacked occasionally by players and fans.

The team returned quietly to Leadville and, according to the *Herald*, spent the next week “sleeping in blissful repose.” Meanwhile, the fans could study the averages and discuss what had transpired, while awaiting the next appearance of their nine. One change was made — Keily was replaced as manager by Will Bryan, the “fastest runner in the United States,” an attribution easily open to question, although Leadvillites did not seem to mind. Why Keily either stepped down or was removed was not touched upon by the paper.

No score was reported for a game scheduled for Sunday the twenty-fourth, one of several similar incidents during the season. Whether this game and the others were actually played is unknown. Gomer Price and his Burlington and Missouri then appeared on October 1. The Blues won the first game handily, only to have Price pitch the B&Ms to victory in the second. Behind Foutz’s “magnificent exhibition of skill,” a large Leadville crowd saw the “finest contest ever witnessed in this city,” and a Blues’ victory in the concluding game. Knowdell, Lavin, Orth, and Bryan garnered praise for their “brilliant play.” Rumors circulated that the National League champion Chicago White Stockings and other teams were going to play the Blues later in the month, then that the Blues were going to take another eastern swing. Such was not to be, the team disbanded without fanfare.<sup>20</sup> The season of ‘82 was over.

<sup>19</sup>Voigt, *American Baseball*, I. pp. 183-192, has an interesting discussion of the umpire of the 1880s and 1890s.

<sup>20</sup>*Omaha Herald*, Oct. 3, 1882. *Denver Tribune*, Oct. 3, 1882. *Leadville Daily Herald*, Sept. 22, 27 and Oct. 14, 1882. A check of the *Herald* through October and the *Rocky Mountain News* through the fourteenth failed to find any further mention of games, except for October 8, but no score was reported.

On a win/loss basis the season had been a rousing success, 34-8, with a .809 winning percentage, better than the White Stockings had done at .655. Without argument the Blues had taken the measure of all Colorado opponents, making them undisputed champions. Leadville had backed its team enthusiastically; a turnout of 1,000 for a game from a district with a population of perhaps 15,060 was outstanding. Even the ladies attended, and as far as can be ascertained complete decorum was maintained in the Leadville park.

If these were goals the organizers and promoters had hoped to achieve, then their success cannot be doubted. Unintentionally, but interestingly, the Blues' season paralleled Leadville's mining career. A spectacular start, followed by a break, then the conclusion of a solid season was exactly what happened in local mining between 1877-1890. Neither the town's mining nor baseball fortunes ever were again as glittering after 1880 and 1882 respectively.

Economically, and in the realm of investment promotion, the Blues impact cannot be determined with any certainty. The games and team members generated a small amount of business locally, less, however, than even a minor league franchise would today. The Blues did keep Leadville's name before the public, and their winning ways promoted both jealousy and a positive image. Whether this produced an impact, however small, on investors is impossible to document.

With regard to the town's image, the Blues bore the brunt of some local chauvinism while in Kansas City. "Everything is up to date in Kansas City," but the *Evening Star* delighted in picturing frontier Leadville as somewhat backward. In a mildly humorous vein they reported a fictitious Leadville game with Kokomo, a nearby camp, which took days to complete. This resulted partly from the game ball's being lost, primarily because the right fielder fell over a "precipice 200 feet high," and "the obsequies delayed matters a day and a half." The game ended in a general brawl over the type of mourning symbol that should be worn. The Kokomo visitors took to the woods, and that "is how the Leadville club got the championship."<sup>21</sup> The provincial mid-westerner might have accepted the story as gospel; no doubt it created humor at Leadville's expense. It was just the type of yarn the "sophisticated easterner" might concoct to put down the upstart Coloradans.

<sup>21</sup>*Kansas City Evening Star*, Sept. 4, 1882.

## Leadville Blues' 1882 Season

<i>Date</i>	<i>Opponents</i>	<i>Score</i>
May 14	Picked Nine	20-10
May 23	Picked Nine	21-3
May 28	Picked Nine	5-3
June 5	Picked Nine	25-5
June 8	Picked Nine	17-3
June 11	Picked Nine	22-11
June 15	Picked Nine	12-1
June 18	PICKED NINE	14-15
June 23	Picked Nine	25-10
June 29	Picked-Nine	34-9
July 1	Colorado Springs Reds	7-7 (rain called)
July 2	Denver Browns	30-5
July 4	Colorado Springs Reds	8-1
July 9	Unknowns	36-6
July 13	Cloud Nine	20-11
July 16	Buena Vista	42-1
July 27	Bonanza Whites	47-0
July 29	Colorado Springs Reds	11-2
July 30	Denver Browns	6-1
Aug. 5	Longmont Utes	8-2
Aug. 6	Denver Browns	28-3
Aug. 7	Denver Browns	19-11
Aug. 12	LONGMONT UTES	1-4
Aug. 13	Longmont Utes	10-4
Aug. 15	Longmont Utes	16-2
Aug. 17	Longmont Utes	9-6
Aug. 19	Longmont Utes	10-6
Aug. 22	Hastings Reds	14-2
Aug. 23	Hastings Reds	22-1
Aug. 25	Burlington & Missouri	16-0
Aug. 26	COUNCIL BLUFFS	4-7
Aug. 27	COUNCIL BLUFFS	8-9
Aug. 29	COUNCIL BLUFFS	4-8
Aug. 31	Leavenworth Reds	13-4
Sept. 1	KANSAS CITY REDS	3-6
Sept. 2	KANSAS CITY REDS	4-7
Sept. 4	Leavenworth Reds	6-5
Sept. 5	Weeping Water	12-2
Sept. 8	Burlington & Missouri	14-2
Sept. 11	Hastings Reds	16-9
Oct. 1	Burlington & Missouri	11-5
Oct. 2	BURLINGTON & MISSOURIS	8-12
Oct. 3	Burlington & Missouri	9-8

	<i>Games</i>	<i>Won</i>	<i>Lost</i>	<i>Tied</i>
Season Record	43	34	8	1

Teams that defeated the Blues are in caps.

Three other games were scheduled to have been played July 23, Sept. 24 and Oct. 8 for which no score was reported nor any mention of the game having been cancelled.

Baseball, of the scope described, had come to Leadville in 1882 because of community support, bolstered by several other factors that generated interest. Improved newspaper and journalistic coverage whetted enthusiasm for both national and local teams. Baseball confronted no serious competition, either professional or amateur, to crowd it from the sports column; only a few special events, such as the racing season, even came close to challenging its popularity. Interest grew naturally.

The coverage given the Blues' season by the *Leadville Daily Herald* was exceptional for a Colorado paper of that era. The action was reported, often with a box score, and occasional sporting columns added further tidbits about players and team. The reporting was factual and crisp, stumbling into the verbose and exaggerated when ordinary description proved inadequate:

O'Connor [Colorado Springs Reds], the third striker hit a hot one to Kessler, who gathered it in, sending it to Phelan at second, putting out Rockwell, Phelan throwing to Butch at first, heading off O'Connor, thereby neatly doubling them up by as sharp a bit of fielding as ever was seen on a ground ball, the play being received by tumultuous applause.

(July 6, 8-1 win)

It was a game that would reflect credit on any club in America, the fielding being particularly sharp and brilliant, while the batting was not up to the standard of the Blues, their display with the ash not being equal to their record in the past. The fight was mainly a trial of skill between the pitchers, Foutz and Lavin, and it must be acknowledged [sic] that in this contest Lavin bore off the honors.

(August 13, 4-1 loss)

The style might seem stilted today, but it provided a readable analysis, ever-loyal and seldom critical. Editorializing crept in, and the reporter could not restrain himself from gloating over the Blues' accomplishments. When compared to other contemporary accounts, the *Herald* stands head and shoulders above the rest of Colorado in 1882 and better than stories provided by the larger Omaha and Kansas City dailies. Perhaps a winning season was more conducive to quality reporting and writing.

Leadville's large urban population, including those living in the surrounding district, contained a sizeable number of dedicated baseball fans, a reservoir which was well-tapped by the Blues. And a mining town of Leadville's size and rich mines had more money to support a professional team than a typical agricultural or industrial town several times its population. One other factor enhanced baseball's appeal: of the various sporting events available at the time in Leadville, only baseball could be judged family-oriented. The Blues made a special effort to get the ladies out to the park and continually stressed the gentlemanliness of the players. Obviously, here was a sporting event which the whole family could watch for an "acceptable" afternoon's enjoyment.

The continued reference to the gentlemanliness of the Blues, and to an extent even the encouragement of women spectators, possibly was an attempt to improve baseball's image. To refined Victorians, the gambling and occasional rowdiness that sometimes surrounded the game, and the drinking habits and carousing of some well known professional players, left a bad taste. Hence it needed to be shown that baseball, Leadville-style, was above such debauchery. To many miners and Leadvillites the image was probably irrelevant; the Blues were their team to support physically and thrill or despair with vicariously. Drinking, gambling, and perchance a spree now and then were part of their lives — not to worry.

The Blues' season exhibited the virtues and flaws of the game, and to an extent those of society in 1882. The continuing presence of gambling created an unhealthy environment, as did the problems raised over umpiring. The former needed to be curtailed, the latter standardized and improved. Charges of thrown games would surface as long as gambling continued unabated, and, correspondingly, the game's integrity would remain in question. Some decision also had to be made regarding amateur and professional players. The Blues, with four past or future major-leaguers in their lineup, had no business playing some of the town teams they slaughtered. The sudden changing of players from team to team during the season needed to be stopped. Money appears to have been the major consideration, contracts being loosely drawn, if written at all. The laissez-faire attitude of Victorian America society, combined with an all-encompassing drive for wealth, which represented success, condoned such shoddy practices in the business and sports worlds.

The enthusiasm, town loyalty, determination to have the best nine, and the vicarious involvement in victory or defeat were typical nineteenth-century reactions. They promoted interest of the fans in baseball, who, whether in Leadville or Chicago, were baseball's backbone. Leadville's attitudes and expectations typified those of other towns for their nines. What lifted Leadville beyond the ordinary were money and the successful campaign to produce a winning club.

The players themselves drifted into obscurity, the Blues becoming just another team, at another time, during their gypsy baseball careers. Dick Phelan would spend two years in the major leagues without making much of a mark, and when he died in 1931, it was said of him that he "never was ordered out of the game by an umpire." The "hunkidori boy," Dave Foutz, had the most distinguished baseball career, joining St. Louis in 1884 and ending his playing days with Brooklyn in 1896, managing this team in 1893-1896. As with the Blues, he pitched (winning 41 games one season), played first base and in the outfield during his 1,135 game career.<sup>22</sup>

In another spring of another season, the Blues would be resurrected, but in 1883 they were only pale shadows of their former selves. Perhaps the organizers had accomplished all they wanted, perhaps the costs had been too high, or the results unrewarding — for whatever reasons, future Leadville Blues were like their predecessors in name only. Before long the team and its 1882 season faded into the same dusty obscurity as the individual members. But for a moment in time, the Blues had played the game, and played it well.

<sup>22</sup>Records provided by the National Baseball Hall of Fame. Official Baseball Record Book (St. Louis: Sporting News, 1976), pp. 35, 311 and 393. Leadville Daily Herald, July 27 and 29, 1884. Leadville was "justly proud" of Foutz. He hit .357 for St. Louis in 1887 and .303 for Brooklyn in 1890. In 1885-87 he was the "paralyzer" of old, with winning seasons of 33-14, 41-16, and 24-12. Foutz pitched only infrequently after 1888. Brooklyn paid St. Louis \$5,500 for him in 1888, Harry C. Palmer, et al., *Athletic Sports* (Philadelphia: Hubbard Brothers, 1889), p. 135. Foutz died in 1897 from asthma, New York Times, March 6, 1897.