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FLEITZ, DAVID L. *Louis Sockalexis: The First Cleveland Indian*. Jefferson N.C.: McFarland & Company Publishers, 2002. Photographs, appendices, notes, bibliography, index. Pp. 229. \$28.50 pb.

History, including sports history, is sometimes cruel. Numerous are the individuals who, despite outstanding careers, are remembered for one negative event or set of circumstances. Casual fans are likely to remember Bill Buckner for one fielding blunder, or Jackie Smith for one dropped pass, rather than the admirable careers of each. Louis Sockalexis, a Native American of the Penobscot tribe and major league player for the Cleveland Spiders of early baseball's National League, falls into a slightly different category. David L. Fleitz's *Louis Sockalexis: The First Cleveland Indian* addresses the myths, controversies, and realities that surround the career of the Penobscot.

The most enduring inaccuracy related to the career of Sockalexis centered around one homerun and its aftermath. Legend has it that on his first trip to the Polo Grounds Sockalexis hit a home run to win the game for the Cleveland Spiders. Various renditions of this fable include the home run was hit during his first major league at bat, the home run was a grand slam and one of two round trippers Sockalexis hit in the game, and that the home run ended the game. Fleitz points out the inaccuracies in each of these myths. At the time of the home run in question, June 16, 1897, Sockalexis was into his second month with the Cleveland nine. The home run was the only homerun Sockalexis hit that day, it was hit in the first inning, and since Sockalexis batted third in the line-up, it could not have been a grand slam.

Perhaps a more controversial and widely stated myth relates to the events that were to have occurred in the hours following the Polo Grounds home run. According to folklore, the Cleveland players were so elated with the victory that they carried the young Sockalexis off the diamond on their shoulders and to the nearest pub. It was here, legend has it, that Louis was first exposed to alcohol. Fleitz recounts events in Louis' past that make this myth impossible. The *South Bend Tribune* reported that Sockalexis, "loaded up on Old Oscar McGroggins and wandered about in search of entertainment" (p. 42). This and reports of other frolics at local water holes clearly establish the fact the Sockalexis drank alcohol regularly long before his days in Cleveland.

Although many aspects of the life of Louis Sockalexis have been exaggerated or fabricated to the level of urban legend, one part of the story is undeniable—he was indeed an outstanding athlete. In baseball, Sockalexis ended his collegiate career with a .441 batting average in fifty games. In the field, it was widely held that Louis had the best throwing arm in collegiate baseball. One legendary throw was measured by Harvard professors to have sailed 414 feet. In professional baseball his career average was .313 in ninety-four games. In addition to his prowess at the plate, newspaper accounts from the time attest to Louis' speed in the outfield and extraordinary throwing arm. Louis was also a leader on the Holy Cross football, wrestling and track teams.

Unfortunately, another myth concerning the life of Louis Sockalexis is true. His affinity for alcohol ultimately ended his baseball career. On numerous occasions, Sockalexis promised that he would leave the "fire-water" (p. 153) alone and regain his athletic prowess. Each attempt at sobriety failed. Fleitz makes a convincing argument that his newfound fame was ultimately the blame for his destruction. A popular figure with Cleveland fans, drinks were frequently bought for Louis, and he was asked to join in the revelry of the nightlife. Sockalexis was evidently too nice to say no.

Another controversy related to the Native American right fielder is the nickname "Indians." The addition of Sockalexis to the Cleveland club caused both excitement and curiosity. The *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, on March 19, 1897, enthusiastically announced, "The Great Sockalexis is here." Sportswriters were so taken by the sight of the copper-skinned, athletic Indian in the Cleveland outfield that they soon began to refer to Louis as the "Cleveland Indian" and on March 20, the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* first used the name, "Cleveland Indians" to describe manager Tebeaus' nine. The name was solidified just a week later when the *Sporting News* featured an article entitled, "They're Indians Now" (p. 60).

The name Indians was, much like the career of Louis Sockalexis, short-lived. After the disastrous end to the 1897 season, Cleveland newspapers wasted no time distancing the team from the Sockalexis and the Indian name. Most papers covering Cleveland baseball reverted to the old Spiders nickname.

The Spiders franchise folded after the 1899 season, however, a new American League team landed in Cleveland the following year. In an attempt to distance themselves from the Spiders of old, the name Blues and later Broncos were used. These names did not catch the imagination of the fans, and as they had done with Sockalexis, the writers named the team in honor of the new star in town Napoleon Lajoie. The Naps were competitive for several years in Cleveland, reaching their peak in 1908 when they lost the pennant to Detroit by a mere half game. However, by 1914, the team was in the cellar again, and Lajoie was released to his former team, the Athletics.

With Lajoie gone from the Cleveland nine, team owner Charles Somers asked Cleveland sports writers to find a new nickname for the team. Soliciting names from readers, the *Cleveland Press* was said to have received fifty-seven names to be considered. In the end, the memory of Louis Sockalexis remained engraved in the hearts of Cleveland sports fans and writers, and the name "Indians" was selected. The *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, on January 15, 1915, linked the Sockalexis to the new name.

As David Fleitz's work accurately points out, the career of Louis Sockalexis is a study in lost potential. Those who witnessed his efforts in his prime echo the remarks of Ed McKean, a teammate who stated unequivocally, "[H]e had more natural ability than any other player, I have seen, past or present" (p. 170).

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