

Tyrus Cobb and the Augusta Incident of 1907

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Tyrus R. Cobb, the Georgia Peach, in his first full year in Detroit, 1906, antagonized most of his teammates. He was a southerner on a team consisting predominantly of northerners. During spring training in March 1907, Cobb became involved in an altercation with the black groundskeeper and his wife on the playing field before the start of a game. C. Schmidt, the only other southerner on the team, in attempting to break up the fracas, got into a fight with Cobb. H. Jennings, the Detroit manager, broke up the fight which took place in view of the fans in the Augusta ball park.

The racial situation was particularly tense in Augusta at that time. The Augusta Herald and the Augusta Chronicle were carrying stories about the 1906 racial riots in Brownsville, Texas and particularly Atlanta, Georgia. The local press was also carrying the demagogic pronouncements of Georgia politicians justifying the disfranchisement of blacks in Georgia. During the rest of the training period in Georgia, Schmidt did not play and at times had to hide in his hotel room. When the Detroit baseball club left Georgia, Schmidt had to sneak on the train while Cobb was accompanied to the station by an admiring crowd. Cobb, the darling of the Augusta fans, inflamed the local sentiments against his teammates, and made things difficult for Jennings. Jennings tried to trade Cobb, though he was opposed by the general manager, Frank Navin. Not one was prepared to give a player of merit for the pugnacious Georgia boy.

After the team left Georgia, Schmidt got his revenge by badly beating up Cobb. Jennings managed to bring some measure of harmony to the team which, mainly through the efforts of Cobb, won the American league pennant of 1907. But Cobb continued to get into scraps with his teammates as well as with blacks. Jennings, to minimize problems, did not use Augusta again as a training base. Cobb, however, in 1922, in his second year as manager of Detroit, made Augusta the Detroit training base.