

“Speedy on the Sacks and Dangerous in Pitchers” : The 1901 Milwaukee Brewers

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That 1901 was a seminal year in baseball history can scarcely be disputed. The newly-founded American League burst upon the sporting scene and proved itself to be worthy competition for the older, established National League. Among the charter members of the Junior Circuit were the Milwaukee Brewers. Although the original Milwaukee Brewers existed for only that one season - the franchise was transferred to St. Louis the next year - it featured several well known players and was involved in a number of noteworthy games and events.

This paper will focus upon the following topics: (1) the entrance of the Milwaukee franchise into the new league, and particularly the series of meetings and negotiations between President Ban Johnson and Brewer magnate Matt Killilea. (2) the efforts by the Brewers to secure the services of Boston's Hugh Duffy as their field manager. (3) some of the interesting players on the team, such as future Hall-Of-Famer Duffy, who did indeed manage the club and also played centerfield, hitting .308; Norwegian-born first baseman "Big John" Anderson, who ranked second in the league in both doubles and basehits, and led the first sackers in fielding; Virgil Garvin, the "elongated twirler", one of several National League stars who jumped to the new league that year. Garvin, in fact, had made the mistake of signing contracts with both the Brewers and the New York Giants, and the circumstances and outcome of this dual signing will be explored in some detail in the paper.

Despite the presence of skilled and experienced players like Duffy, Anderson, Garvin and others, the team fared poorly both on the field and at the gate, finishing last in the standings with a record of 48-89, and next to last in attendance, attracting only 139,034 paying customers. The attendance figure unfortunately bore out the prediction made in November of 1900 by Cub's President James Hart; "I was located in that city (Milwaukee) several years and know it to be good only for Sunday crowds, and then only providing the team is a winning aggregation." The season may well have been epitomized by the April 3 opener in Detroit, a game in which the Brewers led 13-4 heading into the ninth inning, only to see Detroit rally for 10 runs and win by a 14-13 score.

The paper will conclude with summary of the season and a brief statement about the circumstances resulting in the move to St. Louis.