

# Richard Wesley Burnett: A Texas Leaguer Revolts

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In 1948, Richard Wesley Burnett, a wealthy Texas oilman who had owned low-level minor league teams since the 1930s, purchased the Dallas franchise in the Texas League, and began a tumultuous eight year campaign to bring outstanding baseball to the Dallas area. It was fairly clear that Burnett also would seek to bring major league ball to the Dallas area as soon as a major league team went up for sale, or when expansion franchises became available. Burnett was a wealthy man, but he was not a dilettante. He was genuinely interested in minor league baseball. He reshaped the Dallas club (which he renamed the Eagles), turned it into a winning franchise, refurbished the Dallas ballpark, won the Dixie Series, integrated the Texas League, and performed a number of amazing feats as an aggressive, progressive minor league owner. He eventually became annoyed by the cavalier manner the major league owners displayed when they dealt with the minor league owners, and, as a consequence, Burnett became a leading advocate for reform in baseball's business practices.

While Burnett was offended by the high-handed tactics practised by the major league owners when they dealt with the minor leagues, he was also concerned by what he called "chain-store baseball." Burnett viewed the growing farm systems of the major league teams as a mortal threat to the entrepreneurs who made their careers in minor league baseball. He was alarmed by the abrupt decline in attendance at minor league games which began in the early 1950s, and he felt that unchecked broadcasting of major league games hurt the minor leagues as they struggled to survive during increasingly difficult times. If privately owned minor league teams were to survive. Burnett believed the time for action had arrived by the early 1950s. So he began what amounted to a sat of a crusade to save minor league baseball.

This paper chronicles Burnett's concerns and his actions to mitigate the plight of minor league baseball in the 1950s. In 1953-54, Burnett led a polite revolt against major league baseball and tried to recast the agreement that governed baseball and which gave the majors such a forceful position in the relationship with the embattled minor leagues. All the while Burnett was agitating for reform he realized he could not totally alienate the owners of the major league franchise. go Burnett had to walk a tightrope. He did so with great skill. Even though Burnett's crusade eventually failed, he identified many of the ills of baseball in the 1950s, and proposed some reasonable solutions. Burnett was a fascinating character who attempted to bring a reasonable voice into the dispute between the majors and the minors as baseball floundered about in the 1950s. The paper focuses on (1) Burnett as a progressive minor league owner and his achievements, and (2) the effort he led in trying to modify the relationship between major league and minor league baseball. It is based in the *Dallas Morning News*, *Dallas Times Herald*, *Fort Worth Star Telegram*, *The Sporting News*, and upon conversations with Burnett's widow (who is a mentally-alert 92 year-old), and his younger daughter who served as a driving form in the business end of Burnett's Dallas Eagles.