

The 1919 Pacific Coast League Fixing Scandal: The "Black Sox" Had Nothing on Babe Borton

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Although it would be almost a year before the press and general public became aware of the "Black Sox Scandal," the fixing of the World Series overshadowed other similar chicanery in the major and minor leagues during the 1919 season. Some baseball historians have presented in detail the main players, gamblers, and a detailed accounting of the now infamous fixing of the fall classic, but the machinations of the "Black Sox Scandal" were unfolding at the same time as the events related to the 1919 Pacific Coast League (PCL) fixing of the pennant race were being investigated, and the tampering of the 1919 PCL pennant race has been virtually ignored.

This paper examines the 1919 Pacific Coast league Fixing Scandal and the instrumental role of Babe Borton in the manipulation of an entire pennant race. It reveals that fixing of games was endemic in the PCL and in some instances several players on various teams had conspired to "fix" or "throw games" with the full knowledge of management.

Evidence documenting events during the 1919 PCL scandal were obtained from selected primary sources (i.e., personal and professional correspondence of PCL President William McCarthy, testimony presented to the Los Angeles County Grand Jury), and secondary sources (newspapers, *The Sporting News* and other books written on the history of the PCL and baseball).

At any other time in baseball history, the selling of the PCL pennant race of 1919 would have been front page news nationwide. The league was a virtual third major league at the time since no team in the American or National Leagues was situated west of St. Louis. Like the "Black Sox Scandal," the fixing of the pennant race was a secret kept tightly locked in the confines of the locker room until an innocent player could no longer withstand the accusatory jibes flung at him throughout the 1920 season.

When the scandal became public, Vernon first baseman Babe Borton shocked the baseball world by revealing that the entire Vernon team which had won the 1919 PCL pennant had created a pool to raise money to pay off players of opposing teams to either "lay down" or not play well in games against Vernon and that several players on other teams had in fact accepted bribes to throw games. Seattle gambler Nate Raymond was apparently the money man in the plot. During the 1920 season hotel registers in PCL cities had revealed that he had followed the Vernon team from city to city continuing to bribe players as he had successfully done the year before. In August

of 1920, Raymond had confided in Seattle first baseman Rod Murphy, who he had offered a \$3,000 bribe, that during the previous year he had gambled on fixed PCL games and won \$50,000.

As in the "Black Sox Scandal," the criminal justice system appeared to be incapable of successfully prosecuting the guilty parties. California laws did not contain any statutes which addressed the fixing of games. The only penalty incurred by the main culprits was that they were expelled from the league.

The PCL scandal of 1919 further reinforces the institutionalized or pervasive problem of illegal gambling which had been part of professional baseball since its formal inception in 1876. Since owners were in many cases known gamblers and associates of known big-time gamblers their reluctance in ameliorating this problem is understandable. It also shows clearly that the "Black Sox Scandal," was only the tip of the iceberg; that more fixing had taken place in baseball than has been officially reported by baseball historians.