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— HISTORY —

Willimantic Colts baseball games raised passions

Part three of seven

The Willimantic Colts baseball games certainly raised passions. On Aug. 22, 1903, Windham Field was packed to the seams to see the game with unbeaten Manchester, managed by the extrovert Frank Aspinall, a favorite target of abuse for Windham Field's regulars.

Aspinall was booed and cat-called from the bleachers every time he made one of his colorful gesticulations.

The *Chronicle* sportswriter noted that, "the Manchesters are a nice playing team but everybody is disgusted with the tactics of their manager who continually runs onto the diamond and kicks up piles of dust.

"His knowledge of baseball is

shorter than the History of the Snakes in Ireland, and that is there were no snakes."

An estimated crowd of 5,000 packed the bleachers and grandstand.

People were up in trees and sat atop the boundary fence to see the Willimantic Colts win a highly controversial game 2-1. The atmosphere was electric as the teams took to the field.

Manchester took the lead in the second inning and local hero, Willimantic-born Arthur Nichols who played for the St. Louis Cardinals in the National League, tied the game in the third with a giant hit, which placed the ball on Main Street.

At the top of the eighth, Wallace of Manchester hit the ball out of

the park onto Tingley Street for what appeared to be the game-winning home run but a vague ground rule stated that because the right field fence was so short, hits over it should only count as two bases.

The umpire upheld this rule. Aspinall was furious and accused the umpire of cheating, but the score remained tied at 1-1.

In the bottom of the ninth, with Colts players on first and second, James Nichols hit a fly ball which was dropped.

The Colts players on base were run out, but James Nichols twisted and sidestepped around Manchester's players as they attempted to tag him out.

James Nichols reached home for a dramatic winning run. The

devastated Manchester team charged the umpire, Mr. Bowers, and pushed and punched him. The local constabulary broke into the pile of wriggling bodies to save the umpire's life.

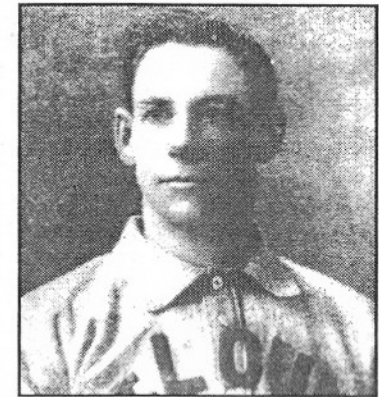
The Manchester manager and players were furious that Bowers had ignored the tagging of James Nichols, at least twice, as he ran from third to home, and they were fuming over the disallowed home run onto Tingley Street.

The Manchester management claimed that Bowers had been bribed.

There had been several large bets laid that afternoon, predicting that Willimantic would end Manchester's long unbeaten run. A special meeting of the directors of the Manchester baseball club

voted to never again play Willimantic, until their manager, Danny Dunn was removed.

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Art Nichols

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But Dunn remained in charge and contacted the Manchester team to play for a purse of \$500 on a neutral ground in Hartford with neutral umpires.

The Manchester directors organized another meeting and voted to take up Dunn's challenge. It was decided to hold the contest on the Wethersfield Avenue Park in Hartford, on Saturday, Sept. 12, 1903. Manchester's directors were reluctant to play, but changed their minds when they received a massive petition. Frank Aspinall was still furious over the "Willimantic incident" and he

"torpedoed" the Hartford showdown by demanding that manager Dunn drop his star player Art Nichols as Nichols had played professional baseball that summer with St. Louis. Dunn refused Aspinall's demand, claiming that Nichols was a Willimantic native and resident, and that the Colts were his only club. In an attempt to save the lucrative contest, Dunn offered to allow Aspinall to choose any outside professionals for the challenge game where the winning team would be awarded half the gate money, the other half being paid to settle match expenses. But Aspinall was having none of it and the game was canceled.