

— HISTORY —

# The Willimantic Colts: jinxed or just untalented?

*Part seven of seven*

The Willimantic Colts expensively recruited players fell to defeat after defeat as the 1906 season got underway. It was particularly hard to swallow an 11-3 beating on Windham Field by Manchester.

The next day a local sports-writer wrote that, "even the beams in the grandstand and boards in the bleachers groaned yesterday afternoon." After a severe tongue lashing from their manager, Shaun Sullivan, the Colts performed much better the following week in Manchester, but unluckily fell 9-8.

The *Chronicle's* ubiquitous sports writer believed the Colts

were jinxed. He recounted how the number 23 had haunted the team.

The Willimantic team boarded the 11:23 a.m. train for Manchester, covering 23 miles. Once in that city, they waited for 23 minutes to catch a trolley car to the grounds.

The trolley car was number 23 and the conductor collected 23 fares on the trip. On the grounds there were 23 players and subs in uniform, and a Manchester player,

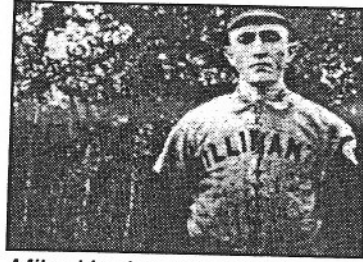


Tom Beardsley

Breck, celebrated his 23rd year in baseball by hitting a home run into the garden of 23 Flower Street, and on the way home the Colts party had to wait 23 minutes for the train back to Willimantic!

The directors of the Willimantic Colts organized an emergency meeting. Their existing financial problems were compounded by falling attendance at Windham Field, and by the expensive contract system which tied the current players to the club for the whole season.

These players, recruited by manager Sullivan, were not producing the goods, so the directors released them and announced that they would revert to the old sys-



Mike Healey, pictured here in 1903, was representative of the great spirit engendered in the semi-professional Willimantic Colts.

Only one of Sullivan's recruits, Doherty, was retained to play in a game against Rockville the following Saturday. Two days after Sullivan, Doherty and seven newly hired players had defeated Rockville, Sullivan and Doherty left town and signed for the Rockville club.

The Willimantic Colts found it impossible to hire any players, as their ex-manager Shawn Sullivan had warned all Connecticut ball players to steer wide of Willimantic because the directors, and not a manager, ruled the team.

Willimantic's next opponent, Manchester, demanded that the

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Colts should send nothing less than a first class team to that city. Only local players could be recruited, so the Colt directors met and decided to wind up the association for the season.

The failure was blamed on the poor attendance at Windham field, the bad weather, bad performances from Sullivan's recruits and the "consequent disruption of the team through loss of members which has financially embarrassed the treasury and practically placed the team out of playing commission at the present."

Two weeks after the demise of the Willimantic Colts, a writer who signed himself "Workingman" mailed a letter to the *Chronicle*. He was a local mill worker and complained that the summer in Willimantic was even duller now without a baseball team.

He complained of nothing to do in the evenings or on Saturdays after work, save for sitting on his front steps, smoking a pipe. Willimantic's residents fled the city at weekends looking for excitement.

The trains were crowded, but

the city's working men had the price to go but not the time, while other workers had the time but not the price, so they were doomed to spend their non-working hours in Willimantic, with not even a baseball game to visit.

Hundreds traveled down to Norwich on the trolley to watch that team's games in the state league. "Workingman" urged that the Colts ex-manager, Mayor Dunn, should arrange a baseball game against one of the state's leading sides. "Get up some kind of celebration so that for once there will be something happening in Willimantic."

Professional baseball returned to Willimantic for one season, in 1910, when the reconstituted Colts won the Trolley Car league. Shortly afterwards, baseball was taken over by American Thread, which offered top jobs in the mill, year round, to star players.

The decline had set in once the Colts local players took up higher rewards elsewhere.

Baseball has returned to Willimantic, however, in the form of the Thread City Tides who play in the New England Collegiate Baseball League with wooden bats, just like the old days.