

June 9, 2005

Almost a champion — Windham High's 1908 baseball team

In June 1908, 97 years ago, Windham High School had a crack baseball team.

The team was one of four competing in the eastern division of the interscholastic

league with the best playing record. These four high schools met in a championship playoff in New London on June 8 and much to the delight of Windham High School's traveling fans, the Thread City team defeated Westerly High School and New London's Bulkeley High School to clinch the interscholastic league's eastern championship.

The news of the victory quickly reached Willimantic and when the trolley car carrying the jubilant players reached Thread City square, a large, enthusiastic crowd met it. A "cheering mob" of "rooters" escorted the players up Main Street, where the cheers from those lining the sidewalks could probably be heard on the Windham Center Green.

Amid a loud and colorful fireworks display, the players walked the city streets to assemble and cheer outside the teachers' homes "welling themselves hoarse at each place."

Windham High School's historic victory meant that they had now qualified to play in the state final against Hartford Public High



Tom Beardsley

School, the western division winners, at New Haven's Yale Field on June 20, 1908.

The game created a great deal of local interest and with school banners flying and school cheers ringing, several hundred fans caught the morning train on the day to support their local team in the grand state final. A correspondent noted that there were many young ladies in the group.

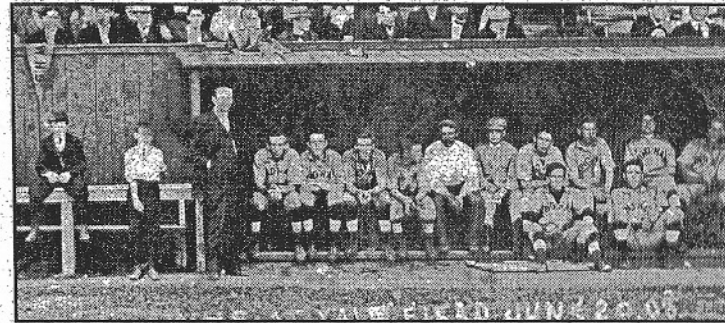
Despite the enthusiasm surrounding the grand final, controversy shrouded the event. The game should have commenced at 3 p.m. on Yale Field, but on the day, the Yale authorities informed the officials from Windham and

Hartford that the varsity team needed the diamond for practice.

Harvard University had thrashed the Yale nine the previous day and Yale's manager "Tad" Jones ordered his players to take part in an afternoon of hard practice on Yale Field. Accordingly, Yale University ordered the high school championship teams to compete for the title in the stadium at 10:30 a.m.

However, the Hartford team refused to play at this earlier time, so the high school teams agreed to play the final on the freshmen diamond next to Yale Field at 2 p.m. To their horror, the Hartford and Windham officials discovered that this diamond had no stands, so there was no room for the spectators from both cities who came to cheer on their teams.

The frustrated high school officials made a fresh appeal to the disgruntled Yale varsity team manager and he grumpily agreed to vacate Yale Field before 3:30 p.m. so the final could take place.



The Windham High School baseball team and its followers pictured at Yale Field on June 20, 1908.

At last, the eagerly awaited game commenced. The followers from Windham crowded the stand, their numbers swelled by the members of Yale's Windham High School Club, which consisted of Yale undergraduates from the Thread City.

One from the Windham contingent, Dwight Jordan, had a large megaphone and he loudly cheered on the Windham nine, who consisted of Moriarty, Burns, I. Manley, Foran, McShea, Thompson, F. Manley, Leonard, Kelley and substitute Frost.

To the great disappointment of the large contingent, this was not to be Windham's day. Hartford played well and defeated the Thread City nine by a score of 11-0.

Pat McShea supplied the picture accompanying this article. It depicts the Windham High School players just prior to their defeat in the final. His father, John (Jack) McShea, is the player at the far left. He later married

into Willimantic's well-known baseball family, the Meikles.

Moreover, McShea was first cousin to the mother of the famous opera singer Eileen Farrell.

McShea recalled that Farrell often came to sing in the family's parlor. McShea was keen to know if the report on the game mentioned whether his father had pitched in the game, but the correspondent noted that Arthur Kelley and Bill Thompson were the only "twirlers" for the Willimantic team that day.

The *Chronicle* report looks beyond the school's poor performance and blames the poor arrangements, hot sun and fast outfield for the heavy defeat.

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