

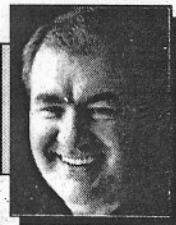
## History

# Local baseball hero's life ends in tragedy

During the next few weeks, we will be going back a century to take an in-depth look at the history of Willimantic's forgotten professional baseball team, the Colts.

They fielded many outstanding players, particularly five local brothers — Art, Jack, Joe, Jimmy and Alfred (Meikle) Nichols. Several Colts' players found fame in the national leagues. Danny P. Dunn, the city's legendary mayor, managed the Colts. The majority of players were locals of Irish descent. Two of the most well known were Mike Healy and Jake O'Rourke. The former's life ended in tragedy. The latter became a central figure in the city's Democratic Party.

Michael J. Healy was a highly talented pitcher, fielder and batsman. He was born in Waterville, Ireland, on Sept. 29, 1875. The Healys came to the city in 1884 to work employment in the local thread mills. Young Healy did not follow his parents into the mills. He found employment on the local railroads as a yardman.



Tom  
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Mike was known as "Homerun Healy" for his uncanny ability of hitting winners late in the game. Danny Dunn spotted him at school, and in 1901 was one of Dunn's first recruits for the newly formed Willimantic Colts. He was also a popular member of the "Monties" fire company.

Healy's baseballing performances became legendary. The Colts defeated top professional teams from Manchester, Rockville, New London, Meriden and New Haven, thanks to Healy's all-around abilities.

When he was married at St. Joseph Church in April 1903, it was considered that Healy was the Thread City's greatest celebrity. His bride was Julia Cosgrove, and the couple

resided at 23 Lewiston Ave. Healy's continued achievements on the diamond during the summer of 1903 attracted major league scouts to the city.

On April 9, 1904, looking forward to a new season with Dunn's Colts, Healy was working as a switchman in the local railroad yards. At 9:45 p.m. he was in Dunn's cigar shop on Railroad Street discussing the pair's favorite sport when he was called out to assist in assembling an eastbound freight train. A push engine was brought up to the Milk Street railroad crossing to help the train over Hampton Hill. Healy was tragically crushed to death between the engine and a wagon as he examined a faulty coupling. He was crushed just above the hips. His lower ribs were all broken and he received such serious internal injuries that he died within 20 minutes.

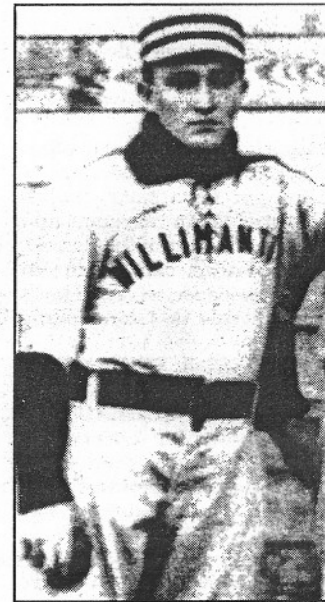
Healy's funeral at St. Joseph Church was considered to be the largest ever held there. The procession from Lewiston Avenue was headed by Mayor Oscar O. Tanner, and the

Ancient Order of Hibernians with President Thomas J. Kelly and Vice President Danny Dunn in the lead. Montgomery Hose Fire Chief James Donahue and the entire company in full uniform, plus delegations followed them from Alert Hose, Excelsior Hook and the Ladder and Hilltop companies. The hundreds of floral tributes included wreaths from the major baseball associations across the state.

A solemn High Mass was sung by the Rev. J.J. Gleeson. Grace Vanderman sang "Ava Maria" and John Collins sang "Land on High."

Gleeson's emotional address to the mourners caused many to leave the church in tears. "He was a quiet, unassuming young man who used the power given to him by God for the advantage of his family and wife and the good name of old Windham."

Mike Healy was laid to rest in St. Joseph's Cemetery. The opening game of the Willimantic Colts 1904 baseball season included a minute's silence for



Pitcher Mike Healy poses with Danny Dunn's Willimantic Colts team prior to the opening of the 1901 baseball season.

their lost hero.

Next week: The Willimantic Colts captain, John "Jake" O'Rourke.

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