Baseball began early in Acadiana

T. Paul LeBlanc’s pitching brought pro ball to Lafayette

Excerpted and condensed from: A Community and Its Baseball Team, The Evangeline League's Lafayette White Sox 1934-1938, by Doug Taylor, USL Graduate Student

Baseball has a long history in Acadiana. As early as the 1890s, teams such as the Pilette Sluggers, the Lafayette Independents, and the Iron Men of Baseball competed locally. Baton Rouge, Lake Charles, Opelousas and Alexandria all had been members of the Cotton States League off and on since 1897.

Local railroad workers organized a team which claimed area baseball superiority for much of the 1920s, and by the 1930s there were a handful of semipro teams, such as the Lafayette Cubs, Giants, Greyhounds, Brown’s, Mouton Switch Braves, and other teams in Youngsville, Milton, Rayne, Parks and Arnaudville. These played pickup games among themselves, and some of them sometimes competed in organized semipro leagues, such as the Louisiana League.

Some older residents remember baseball greats such as Mel Ott and Oyster Joe Marsterson through Depression-era Lafayette and attempting to pick up some money in contests against local clubs. Lafayette’s semipro teams, however, charged modest admission fees and thus made little money.

Pee-Wee Girouard, a local star during the 1930s, claimed, “we weren't making anything, we just wanted to play. Every once in a while you’d charge a little, but it was to pay an official or buy equipment or get gas.” Only local players, such as pitcher Johnny Johns, blessed with unusual skills, could expect real remuneration, particularly outside of Lafayette. He remembered in an interview:

“We'd put together a team and play towns in the area with the winner taking 60 percent, but that only amounted to a few dollars for forces with local athletes Morgan Rodemacher and Herbert Schilling to form the Lafayette Baseball Association Inc. The group secured the use of a baseball field site across the street from the municipal swimming pool along the Breaux Bridge highway from prominent Lafayette sports enthusiast Dr. E.L. Girard. Lafayette would get a professional baseball team, the White Sox.

By opening day April 15, workers had completed a grandstand which would seat 600 spectators as well as bleachers which could hold a few hundred on each side. Wooden, 20-foot-high, double-decked fence placed 273 feet down the right field line, 300 feet down the left field, and 375 feet from home plate to center enclose the new park.

In February 1933, Lafayette businessman Fern Boustany joined Berwick gave me $35 a game. When I was pitching for Berwick, I beat Franklin, so Franklin gave me $50 plus board to pitch for them... That’s where Johnny Nee, a scout for the Yankees, found me...

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T. Paul LeBlanc became the keynote of the White Sox pitching staff. When he pitched, people packed the stands, and the Sox usually won. In mid-September, the Baton Rouge Senators, recent winners of the Cotton States League and Little Dixie championships, came to Lafayette. T. Paul shut out Baton Rouge 4-0. Ten days later the White Sox played Franklin to settle a claim for semipro superiority.

“Half the town of Franklin took the train to Lafayette,” Johnny Johns remembered. But it didn't help. T. Paul mastered the Franklin lineup and Lafayette won 4-2.

But the pinnacle of this amazing season came the following Saturday, on September 30, when the White Sox management arranged a game with the New Orleans Pelicans. The Pelicans operated in the Class A Southern Association as a top farm club for the Cleveland Indians. Under their manager Larry Gilbert, they had just won the Southern Association pennant and had just beaten San Antonio, the Texas League winner.

T. Paul treated the huge crowd to one of his greatest performances.

Schilling, who'd played ball in Shreveport, would remember in a later interview, "About the fourth inning, Larry Gilbert walked over to me and said, You know, I don't think we can beat this boy LeBlanc.

LeBlanc's superb control and