

# The Old Town Baseball Team

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Looking back into the past reminds of the time when baseball, the great American game, was a very important part of life in small towns. Each community which had a large enough population was able to field a town team from among its young men who had been developing diamond talent from their early grammar school days of playing "one-o'-cat." There was almost universal participation in the national pastime and some very good baseball players developed in small towns like Bryte. About a half century ago, a good town team came into being in Bryte. It brought the town recognition and respect as a baseball town in the Sacramento-Yolo metropolitan area and even farther afield.

In the earlier days prior to my involvement as a player the Bryte town team contended in various leagues of respectable caliber. I recall a Rural League which crossed county lines and, more clearly, the Orange League which included Bryte, Orangevale, Fair Oaks, perhaps Folsom, and other small towns. Each had its own field, very crude compared with today's modern facilities, usually on a piece of unused land which was worked by the locals into some semblance of a baseball diamond. Bryte's first diamond was just north of Tony Sanchez' service station (about where the Hide & Seek is now). Across the highway was the old shingle covered railway station of the Sacramento Northern Railway right next to the Reed Avenue underpass.

Converting the unused plot of land into a baseball diamond was a community project with townspeople in addition to the baseball players themselves pitching in to do the job. Some brought horsedrawn equipment such as Fresno scrapers, mowing machines, and harrows to level off high spots, shorten the tall grass in the outfield, and condition the dirt infield. Others brought hand garden tools such as shovels, hoes, rakes, picks, mattocks, and the like to further refine the condition of the field. Some brought carpenter tools to put up the chicken wire backstop and build the rough players' benches.

The job of converting the field into a rough but serviceable baseball diamond was quite a chore and it didn't end up as field big leaguers would be willing to play on day after day. Left field was down in a long swale which extended diagonally into outer center field. Right field was on higher ground bordered by Hobson Avenue on both sides of which were dropoffs into sharply graded drainage ditches. The right fielder had to do a real acrobatic job of running across the rocky road to go after long balls driven into his territory. He had to watch his step pretty carefully.

The baseball game was always a gala Sunday event and a lot of the townspeople as well as visiting baseball fans made up a pretty good crowd of spectators. There were no bleachers so most of them just stood about along the sidelines or reclined on the green grass (in the Spring). Some brought folding chairs or boxes or just leaned against their cars. The spectators rounded out the concept of baseball as both an athletic contest and a pleasurable social event. There is much more to be told of the succeeding years than space now permits and I'll adjourn to a later article to accommodate the telling of it. Until then, play ball! And may all your fielding plays be errorless and your hits for extra bases!