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Article Summary: The Nebraska Indians baseball team played longer and more successfully than the many other American Indian professional teams of the early twentieth century. The players confronted discrimination, but their skilled performances earned the admiration of baseball fans.

### Cataloging Information:

Nebraska Indians Players and Owners: Oran A "Buck" Beltzer, Jacob Buckheart (or Buckhardt), Burnham, Ed Davis, Harold Emerson, George Green, Guy Wilder Green, Charles Guyon, George Howard Johnson, Juzicania, George Long, Nakomas, Henry A Negake, Walter M Nevitt, Thomas Reed, Bud Taylor, Daniel Tobey, White Boy, John Bull "Edward" Williams, Jesse Youngdeer, J Keeler, H Keeler, James J Caldwell

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Photographs / Images: postcard image of the Nebraska Indians Baseball Team about 1900; Flandreau, South Dakota, Indian School Baseball Team about 1910; postcard image showing Nebraska Indian Dan Tobey in a clown costume with unidentified teammates wearing native regalia about 1910; inset cartoon "Raw Meat Caused Him Intense Delight," a caricature of Juzicania, the Yaqui center fielder on the 1906 team, from the pamphlet *Fun and Frolick with an Indian Ball Team*, by Guy W Green; George Howard Johnson, 1907 Nebraska Indians player, shown pitching in the Pacific Coast League in 1917; Nebraska Indians postcard showing a non-Indian player from about 1905; 2-page view of the Oxford Indians, Oxford, Nebraska, founded by Buck Beltzer in 1908; John Olson's Cherokee Indian Baseball Team of Watervliet, Michigan; inset chart of Nebraska Indians team records 1897-1914



A postcard image of the Nebraska Indians Baseball Team about 1900. Organized by Lincoln businessman Guy W. Green in 1897, the Indians continued touring into the 1920s. NSHS RG3064:PA-8

# “A ROLE NEW TO THE RACE”

*A New History of the Nebraska Indians*

BY JEFFREY POWERS-BECK

**B**efore the Kansas City Monarchs, before the House of David, before the bloomer girl teams of the early twentieth century, the Nebraska Indians took the diamond, one of the first great barnstorming teams to leave an indelible mark on American culture. For twenty-one years, from 1897 to 1917, the team averaged over 150 games per season in almost as many towns, often drawing crowds in the thousands, from Wahoo, Nebraska, to Lexington, Kentucky, to Brooklyn, New York. After a hiatus following World War I, they played on into the 1920s, competing against college and semiprofessional teams throughout the nation.

Billed as “The Only Ones on Earth” and “the Greatest Aggregation of its Kind,” they were only one of many American Indian professional teams, but they were the longest lived and most successful such pan-Indian club. In many of their seasons for which records survive, the Indians won more than 80 percent of their games, scoring victories against talented amateur, college, and minor league teams.

Crowds assembled eagerly, hoping their local heroes would play the Indians competitively. Fans also came to be entertained, and the Indians obliged with a combination of Wild West showmanship and zany baseball antics. Most significantly, as the sports editor of the *Omaha Bee* put it in 1902: “A large crowd is expected at the park to see the Indians in a role new to the race.” As the Nebraska Indians struggled against anti-Indian prejudices, their baseball performances enabled new visions of American Indian roles.<sup>1</sup>

The Nebraska Indians team was established in June of 1897 by Guy Wilder Green, a recent graduate of the University of Nebraska Law School. Green tells the story of the team in two dime booklets he sold between 1900 and 1907, *The Nebraska Indians: A Complete History*, and *Fun and Frolick With an Indian Ball Team*. Green played outfield at the University of Iowa in 1892 and afterward for his hometown’s team, Stromsburg, Nebraska, where, in the summer of 1896, he happened to encounter the baseball team from the Genoa Indian Agricultural and Industrial School. Immediately, he recognized the profit potential of Indian ball teams:

I observed that even in Nebraska, where an Indian is not at all a novelty, a baseball organization composed of red men drew everyone who was alive. When the Indians came to Stromsburg business houses were closed and men, women and children turned out en masse to see the copper-colored performers corral the festive fly . . . I reasoned that if an Indian base ball team was a good drawing card in Nebraska, it ought to do wonders further east if properly managed. I accordingly determined to organize the Nebraska Indians.<sup>2</sup>

It is not surprising that an Indian school team served as Green’s model, since Genoa, Flandreau (South Dakota), Santee (Nebraska), and Haskell (Kansas) Indian school teams played in Nebraska throughout the 1890s. In fact, through 1910 Haskell Institute played schedules of up to fifty games, sometimes hiring players and making tidy profits for its athletic program from midsummer games.

In early June of 1897 Green organized his new club very hurriedly. The young lawyer had no more than raised his glass to serve as toastmaster for the annual Nebraska Law School banquet on June 9, when he launched out on a trip to recruit a dozen ball players. The Genoa Industrial and Agricultural School, the Santee Normal School, and the nearby Omaha and Winnebago reservations were Green’s starting points, along with his contacts at the University of Nebraska in Lincoln. The *Nebraska State Journal* described Green as “one of the brightest men in his class” and a witty toastmaster, but reservation Indian agents and boarding school superintendents were not enchanted with Green’s proposition. As he put it, “The government officers, under whose control they lived, were not enthusiastic in their support of the enterprise.”<sup>3</sup>

In fact, the agents were probably right to worry that Green’s venture might be aborted and strand the Indian players far from home. And the Indian school athletic directors would not have been eager to have Green sign their best players and to compete with their teams for box office profits.

Surprisingly, Green was able to cobble together most of a twelve-man team by June 20, 1897. The *Nebraska State Journal* reported that Green “gathered the team together from Santee and Genoa, and from South Dakota and Kansas.” Thus, Green may have traveled as far as Haskell Institute in Lawrence, Kansas, in search of players. Green advertised the club as the “All Nebraska” Indian Baseball Team—

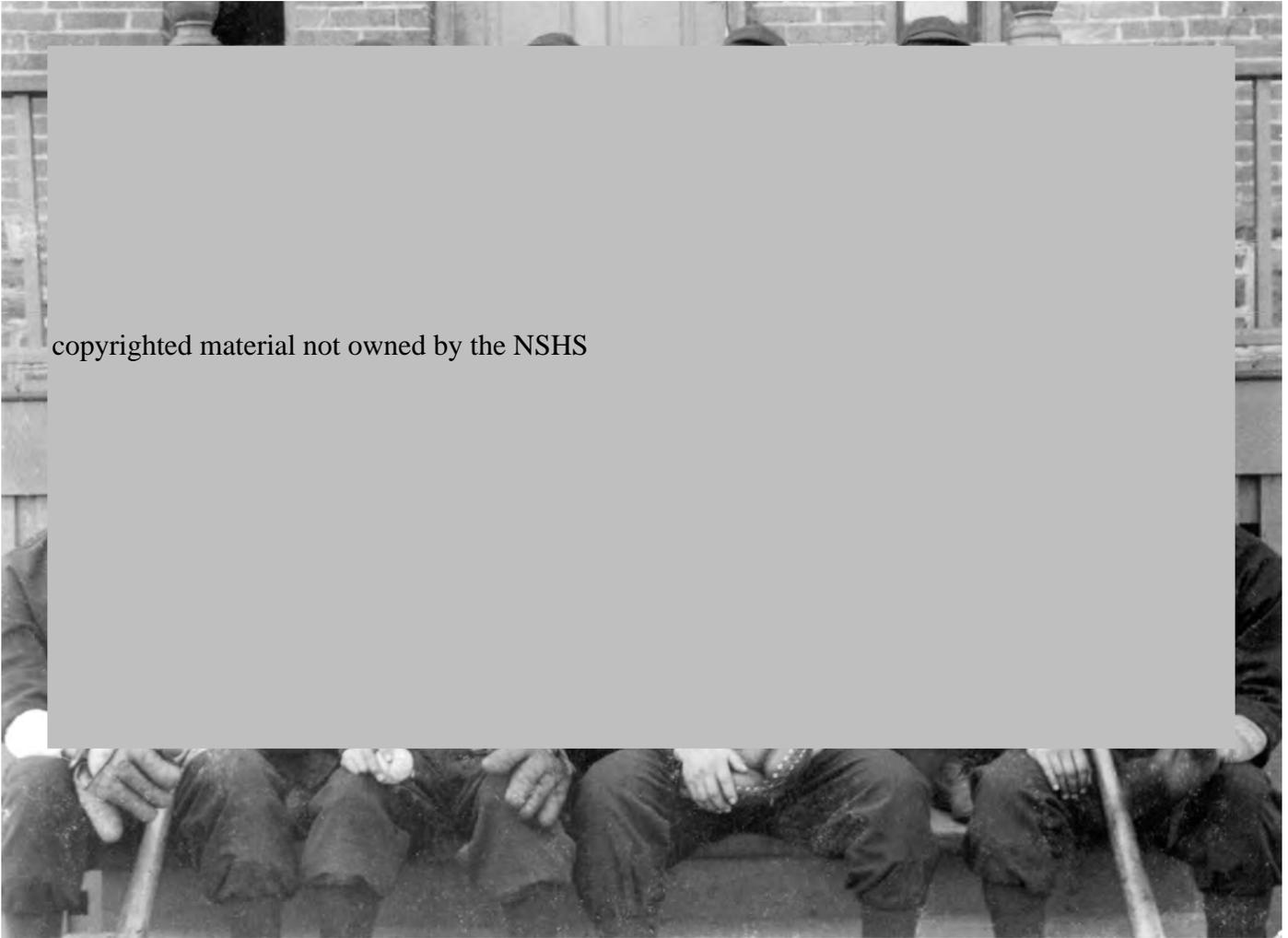
a talented nine that would “no doubt put up a stiff game” against the best semi-pro competition.<sup>4</sup> Eventually, Green would recruit players from across the nation, especially those with experience on federal boarding-school teams. He sometimes picked up talented players (both Indian and non-Indian) while touring from town to town.

Green’s original club consisted of nine Indian players and three non-Indian players. The idea of supplementing Indian players with local non-Indian talent, especially pitching talent, was one that Green and his successor, Oran Beltzer, resorted to in every season the team played. Curiously, it was also a strategy used by Indian school teams early in the twentieth century. The Haskell Institute baseball team, for example, coached by W. B. Charles, a former Carlisle star, employed a University of Kansas pitcher named Parnell and another white player named Headers throughout its 1909 tour of Nebraska. Charles eventually chose to “let Headers go, as he is not playing good enough for the money he is getting.” Like the Nebraska Indians, Indian school baseball teams at the turn of the century were pan-Indian and integrated moneymaking ventures, professional in everything but name.<sup>5</sup>

Inauspiciously for Green, the Nebraska Indians began their first season with two losses to Wahoo, Nebraska, 12-0 and 10-5, on June 20 and 21. In a wagon procession driven by the team’s luggage man, Sandy Leach, the Indians pushed on to nearby Fremont on June 22 and 23, and split a pair of afternoon games, winning the first 4-3, but losing the second 10-7.<sup>8</sup> Green excused the early losses thus: “Most of my players had come directly to the place of opening. They were stiff from travel, were out of condition and

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Several Indian school teams, including Flandreau Indian School Baseball Team of Flandreau, South Dakota, shown here about 1910, played in Nebraska around the turn of the twentieth century and served as Green's inspiration for his Indian ball team. South Dakota State Historical Society

lacking in practice." In addition, Wahoo had one of the best teams in the state, led by the future Hall of Famer Sam Crawford, and Fremont also featured a "crack team."<sup>6</sup>

It was not until the Nebraska Indians reached Lincoln on June 25 and 26 that they began to show their mettle. On June 25 they defeated the University of Nebraska in an 18-12 slugfest, helped a little by a friend from Wahoo—Sam Crawford, hired by Green to pitch the game for the Indians. Although Wahoo Sam pitched indifferently, he went 3-6

at the plate, helping the Indians to a six-run victory. Perhaps more important than the victory, however, was the carnival atmosphere that the Indian players established on the Lincoln diamond, a vital factor in the team's economic success.

As the title of Green's second dime pamphlet, *Fun and Frolick*, suggested, the Nebraska Indians aimed to entertain spectators, both on and off the field. Before the House of David put on its "pepper ball" exhibitions, or the Kansas City Monarchs played "shadowball,"

or Lloyd Bassett caught pitches while sitting in a rocking chair behind the plate, the Nebraska Indians were devising their own baseball gags to draw big crowds.

For the 1897 season Green had hired the Indian twins J. Keeler and H. Keeler to play second base and third base, respectively, and the possibility of mistaking the two inspired some ludicrous base-running antics. The *Nebraska State Journal* reported: "They seldom caught a ball or made a base without making some elaborate

gesticulations intended solely for the spectators. . . . Their favorite amusement was to have the baserunner and the man coaching so nearly alike in appearance that the catcher mixed them up and often tried to put out the wrong man.”<sup>7</sup> The *Lincoln Evening News* elaborated upon the gag:

Much amusement was created by the Keelers, who are twin brothers. Several times, when one of them was on third base, the other would stand on the coaching line and for the life of him Conley could not tell which was which. The coacher would start for home at every opportunity and if the ball was thrown wild to catch him, the brother on the base would then come in and score. Umpire Scott finally made the boys stop the imitation business, much to the regret of the spectators. . . . It was also suggested that the university team would shortly begin suit for false impersonation.<sup>8</sup>

As Green’s pamphlets make clear, the Keeler brothers’ impersonations merely commenced the team’s barnstorming antics. Green sometimes staged races between his fleetest base runners and the local track stars in the towns they visited, knowing the contests would excite gambling interest. On other occasions he asked each of his nine starting players to pitch an inning of the game. He also promoted his team whenever possible, not only through newspaper notices, posters, and handbills, but by also dressing his players in buckskin and feathered headdresses. His longtime player-manager Dan Tobey appeared in a “clown costume” and “in company with the Indians in savage dress, announces the game upon the streets.” Green called this circus-style street promotion “a good ballyho.”<sup>9</sup>

One of Green’s most colorful anecdotes involves Tobey and the clown costume. During the team’s 1904 tour of Illinois, Green badly wanted revenge upon the small-town team of Illiopolis, which, in spite of its size, had defeated the Indians twice in 1903. Tobey, a talented semi-pro baseball player and an enthusiastic showman, concocted a clever ruse with the clown outfit. Dressed as a hobo and



The Nebraska Indians consistently out-played opponents and entertained spectators with baseball gags. This photographic postcard from about 1910, depicts Dan Tobey in a clown costume, and two unidentified teammates wearing native regalia. Tobey, a non-Indian, was a long-time player manager for the team. NSHS RG3064:PA-22

carrying the costume in a satchel, Tobey approached both Green and the Illiopolis manager. In a tale of fabricated woe, he claimed to have been a clown in a small traveling circus that had closed down and stranded him in Decatur, and that he was also a good pitcher, and would like to pitch against the Nebraska Indians. The Illiopolis manager curtly replied that he “did not want to monkey with any tramps,” but Green took mock pity on the unemployed clown. The stands were packed the next day in Illiopolis, as the town had heard that a hobo clown would be pitching for the Indians. Green relates:

The game finally started and Tobey went into the box for me. For five innings he shut out the Illiopolis team. Then he shed his clown blouse, exposed the Indian shirt, which he was wearing underneath it, rid himself of his clown hat and put on his Indian cap and the secret was out. A roar went up from the spectators when they realized the clever ruse that had been worked. We won the game eleven to two.<sup>10</sup>

Green later sold postcards of Tobey in the clown suit and added the tale of the Illiopolis ruse to the fourth edition of *Fun and Frolick*. The victory had been sweet for Green, but it was even sweeter when he could profit from it.

In addition to the clowning and the team’s exciting play, the team relied on the American Indian identities of its players to draw large crowds, in a way quite similar to the Wild West shows then in their heyday. Baseball historian Harold Seymour noted that the team was sometimes called “a traveling baseball ‘circus’” and traded on picturesque Wild West stereotypes.<sup>11</sup>

Green took his team on eastern tours, where, as he put it, Indians were “novelties,” playing many games in Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Ohio, Pennsylvania, New York, and New Jersey, and he appealed to audiences “interested in the Indians as a disappearing race.” Like the Wild West shows, the team traveled by train. Green often called games so his players could catch their train to the next tour stop, and they set up an

encampment or “Indian village” on the local baseball grounds. Green explained:

We traveled by rail and lived in tents and found this the most desirable mode of travel and existence while on the road. The Indians were nervous and ill-at-ease while cooped up in hotels. But the minute they were furnished with tents they felt at home and gave me their best efforts.<sup>12</sup>



**Raw Meat Caused Him Intense Delight**

Players were routinely subject to racial clichés in the press and race baiting from fans. Green was sympathetic, but sometimes resorted to stereotypes himself in promoting the team. This cartoon from Green’s pamphlet, *Fun and Frolick with an Indian Ball Team*, is a caricature of Juzicania, the Yaqui center fielder on the 1906 team. Jeffrey Powers-Beck

While it was true that the Indian players were often barred from hotels by local hoteliers, ordinances, and constables, the modest canvas tents they lived in for months were hardly “desirable,” and Green’s explanation sounds like a rationalization by a cost-conscious owner using all means to promote his team.

One cartoon in *The Nebraska Indians: A Complete History* shows an Indian ballplayer in the foreground and a circle of tepees in the background. The *Stromsburg Headlight* commented: “The team is composed of genuine Indians. . . . Then, too, they camp right on the grounds where they play and live in true savage style.”<sup>13</sup> Other cartoons show Indians in buckskin and feathers, dancing and performing other feats popular in the Wild West Shows—one walks a tightrope, while another acrobatically balances a barrel on his foot, and yet another balances a wagon wheel on his chin.

Green’s Indian encampments on ball fields not only allowed his players to escape the prejudices of local hoteliers, but also fanned local interest in his team. Like Buffalo Bill Cody and Gordon “Pawnee Bill” Lillie, Green hoped to parlay his Indian entertainments into a small fortune. Or as the *Tecumseh Chieftain* put it in 1901: “They are under the management of a man named Green, who is in the baseball business strictly for the money he can get out of it.”<sup>14</sup>

Typically, Green scheduled most of the Nebraska Indians’ games in small towns, in part to appeal to fans with little opportunity to experience a Wild West show atmosphere. On one occasion, in Alliance, Ohio, in 1900, the Nebraska Indians happened to arrive in town at the same time as Gordon Lillie’s Wild West show, and Green was noticeably perturbed:

Pawnee Bill’s Show was in town the same afternoon and we were afraid we should have no crowd at all. The factory shut down work, however, and the hands came to the game in preference to going to the show. We had about as many people as Pawnee Bill drew and we won the game by a score of 11 to 1.<sup>15</sup>

Ironically, Wild West shows, which usually performed on fairgrounds or circus grounds, sometimes were forced to play on town baseball grounds. For example, the fences at St. George grounds, where the New York Metro-



politans played in 1889, were poked with bullet holes from the trick shooting of Wild Bill Cody's show.<sup>16</sup> Lillie's show advertised itself as "Too Large for the Largest Tent," as it prepared to perform at the "Base Ball Park," in Decatur, Illinois, in June of the same year.

Green's Nebraska Indians could not offer the assortment of circus animals, trick shooting, and Western melodrama presented by the shows, but they did have the advantage of appealing to local athletic pride. Town papers promoted their games enthusiastically, usually cheering for the home team: "The Nebraska Indians will be in town next Tuesday, April 17. Come and see our fellows do 'em up. Eh?" In most cases, however, it was the Nebraska Indians who "did up" the local team.<sup>17</sup>

Inasmuch as Green and his successors, the Beltzer brothers, exploited their players' Native identities to draw large crowds, they also, inadvertently, subjected them to summertime regimes of racial harassment. Like other American Indians who played baseball professionally early in the twentieth century, the Nebraska Indians were greeted on almost every diamond with a chorus of mock war whoops. The racial and cultural mockery was so predictable an event that one newspaper promoting an Indians game encouraged fans: "Don't fail to be on hand when the first war-whoop sounds."

Similarly, newspaper coverage of the team featured a predictable series of anti-Indian clichés. The outcome of almost every contest was reported as a scalp being taken, either by the "savages" or their white opponents. The *Omaha Bee*, for example, reported: "The Nebraska Indians arrived in the city last night. . . . Today they will give their war

George Howard Johnson of Walthill, Nebraska, pitching for the Vernon Tigers of the Pacific Coast League, in 1917. Johnson starred for the Nebraska Indians in 1907, played on Western League teams from 1908–1912, and for the Cincinnati Reds in 1913. Jeffrey Powers-Beck

dance and raise their supplications to the great Manitou to be propitious to them. . . . The Aborigines . . . come to Omaha laden with the scalps captured from baseball aggregations in Nebraska, South Dakota, Iowa, Missouri, and Kansas."<sup>18</sup>

The Indian names of the players were also often the subjects of tasteless jokes, as when the *Knoxville Sentinel* reported: "Moffett [the Knoxville manager] says he will make Green's bunch of red-skins all look like Rain-in-the-Face."<sup>19</sup> Other accounts indulged in even more lurid anti-Indian stereotypes, as did the *Lincoln Evening News*:

With wild yells and flourishing tomahawk, with unsheathed knives and poisoned arrows, with plenty of war paint but no fire water, a band of Indians from western Nebraska and Kansas swooped down upon a small encampment of Lincoln baseball players yesterday afternoon, and in less time than it takes to enunciate John Robinson's cognomen, nine bloody scalps were dangling from the belts of the savages.<sup>20</sup>

While the race baiting of fans and newspapers was characteristically jocular, it must have been offensive to the men who suffered from it.

To his credit, Green himself recognized that his players were burdened by the racial harassment they confronted. As team owner of the Lincoln Western League team in 1908 and early 1909, Green had transferred his best Indian player, George Howard Johnson, from the Nebraska Indians to the Lincoln Greenbackers. In an interview with the *Sioux City Journal* in 1909, Green reflected upon Johnson's experience as an Indian pitcher with both teams. A meticulous and sympathetic observer, Green commented on the racist epithets that Johnson endured wherever he pitched:

Johnson, my Indian twirler . . . pitched for my Nebraska Indian team three seasons. During that time we played an average of 150 towns annually in the United States and Canada. That makes 450 towns. Johnson is now pitching his second season in this league. He has never yet stepped to the mound to pitch a game

anywhere on earth that three things have not happened. Numerous local humorists have started what they imagine to be Indian war cries; others have yelled 'Back to the reservation,' and the third variety of town pump jester has shrieked 'Dog soup! Dog soup!' If you were at the game Tuesday you heard this. If you see him pitch in Pueblo or Sitka or Kamchatka you will hear the same thing. You would think people would get all that kind of patent inside stuff out of their systems after awhile, wouldn't you? But they never do.<sup>21</sup>

Of course, mock war-chants, "Back to the reservation," and "Dog soup!" were not the only racist barbs hurled at Johnson and the Nebraska Indians. The newspapers themselves contributed their share: "Injuns," "Savages," "Poor Lo," (an allusion to English poet Alexander Pope's "Essay on Man" meaning a god-forsaken Indian), "Blanket Indians," "Redskins," and many more.

From the time they started touring in the 1890s, Indian ball teams were regarded with both popular fascination and racist fears. An article entitled, "Ponca Indians Organize a Team to Go on the Warpath," in the *Chicago Daily Tribune* on June 8, 1896, is a good example. The writer first praised a team of Ponca players: "All are exceptionally fleet-footed and can equal in speed almost any man in the National League," then went on to warn his readers pointedly: "But like all Indians, education has little effect on their habits and mode of life . . . and [they] have to be carefully watched to be kept from getting drunk."

As might be expected, the racist treatment of the Nebraska Indians did not stop at name-calling and mockery by ignorant fans. In his two dime books, Green records a catalog of incidents, in which his Native players were harassed and threatened by local police and citizens:

- Indianola, Iowa: "A prominent taxpayer missed a slab of bacon from his smoke house," and called for a marshal in Lucas, Iowa, to search the pantry of the Nebraska Indians.

- Murphysboro, Illinois: A "frantic mother" called police to investigate whether "the savage red men had kidnapped her 'che-ild [*sic*].'"

- Center Point, Iowa, "The mayor appointed a large force of special police before we arrived in the town . . . [who] guarded the sleeping citizens through the . . . night, while an occasional voter put in the lone hours with a trusty gun across his knee waiting for an uprising."

- Collinsville, Illinois: One of Green's players stopped to ask directions and was taken by gunpoint to the local jail, where he spent the night.

- Kokomo, Indiana: Newspapers carried a fabricated story that the Nebraska Indians players attempted a holdup, and while the superintendent of police had in sufficient evidence against the men, he opined, "your red Men should be called down, and called down proper."

- Plymouth, Indiana: A drunken fan ran down the first base line and assaulted Green's left fielder Hopkinah, who promptly "knocked his tormentor down."

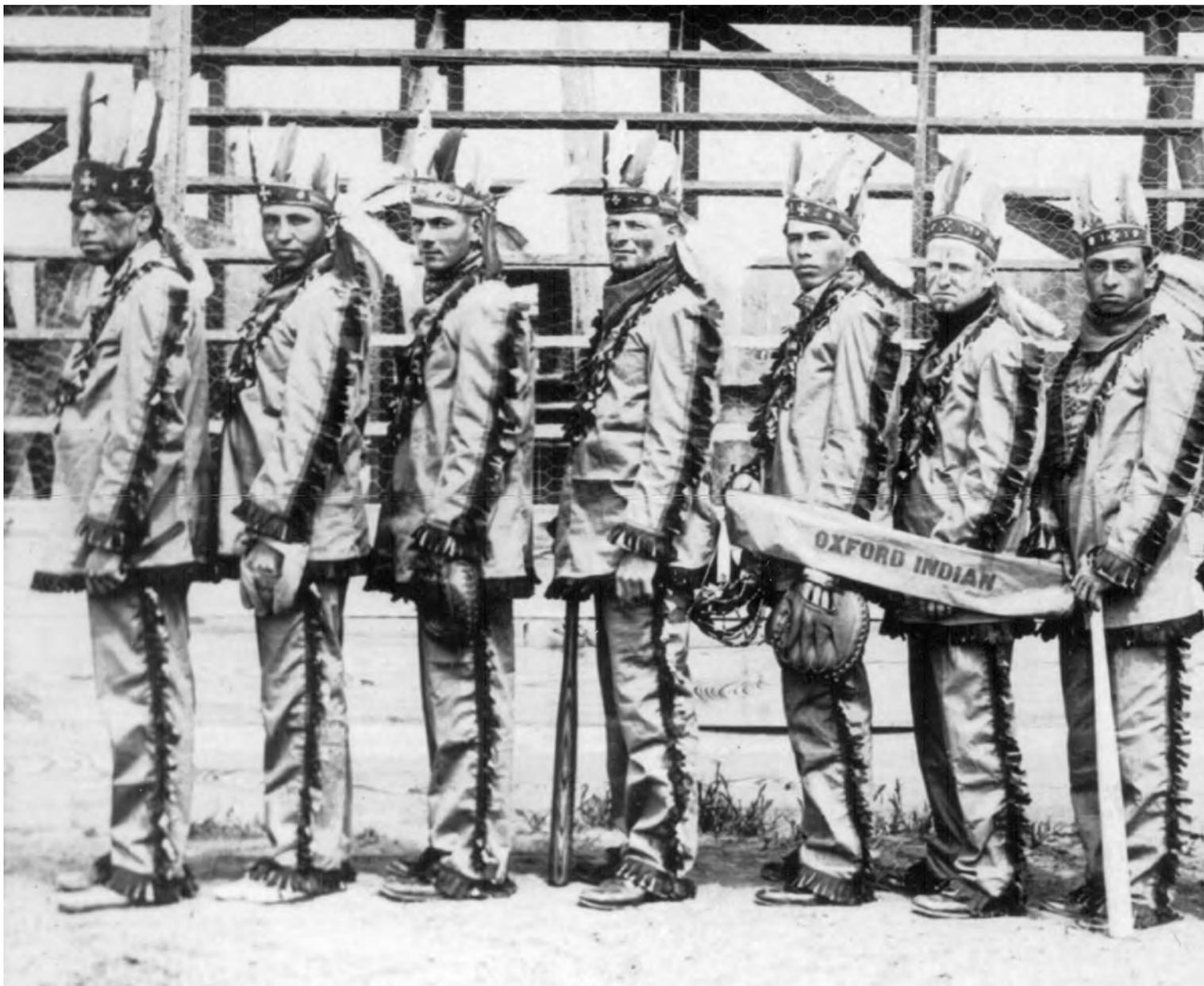
- Lancaster, Pennsylvania: The manager of the Lancaster Actives swore a false affidavit that Green's left fielder had stolen his 75-cent glove.

- White Bear Lake, Minnesota: A man missing a suit of clothes telegraphed authorities, asking them to "arrest the whole team."

While Green recounts repeated instances of racism with wry exasperation as "the treatment a stranger sometimes receives in a strange land," it is

A Green's Nebraska Indians postcard from about 1905. Green recruited several non-Indian players besides Daniel Tobey, the clowning player-manager. Other pan-Indian teams—and some Indian school teams—also used non-Indian players. Jeffrey Powers-Beck





doubtful whether his players would have shared his amusement.<sup>22</sup>

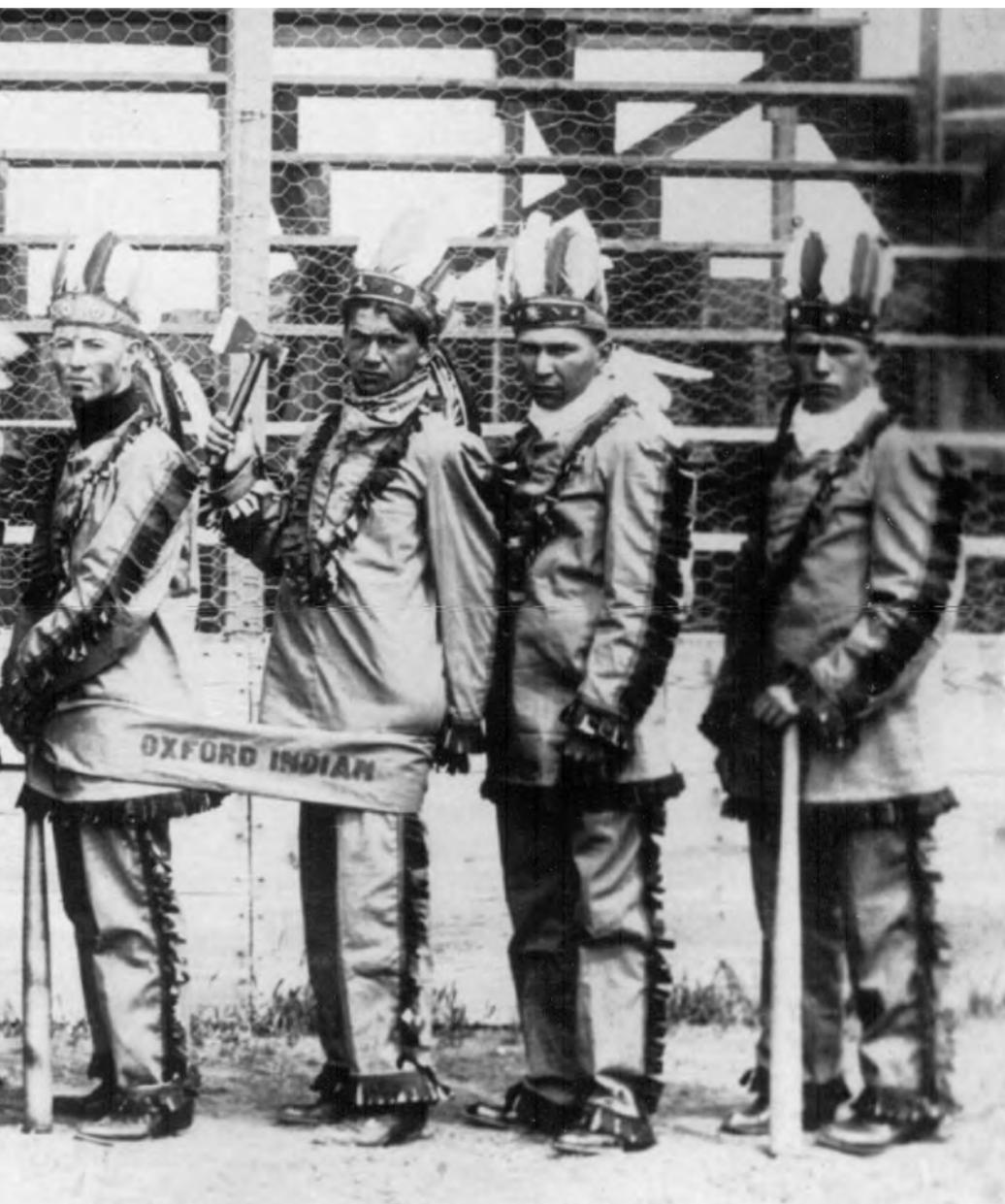
There is little funny about being accused of robbery because of one's skin color, Native clothing, or tribal identity.

Of course, some townspeople did look upon the Nebraska Indians favorably. *The Boone County Recorder*, a

Kentucky weekly, noted in 1907: "The team sustained its past record for gentlemanly conduct."<sup>23</sup> But even such compliments contained a note of condescension. It was the kind of patronizing statement that would not need to be made about most visiting ball clubs.

In addition to the name-calling and

police harassment, the Nebraska Indians constantly faced the judgments of hostile umpires. Green discovered from his first days with the club that he could not rely solely upon the judgment of local umpires, and so he bargained with local teams to allow two umpires to officiate each game. The bargaining enabled Green to hire his own umpire, a man



Following Green's success, Buck Beltzer founded the Oxford Indians of Oxford, Nebraska, in 1908. He later bought the Nebraska Indians from Green and continued touring into the 1920s. NSHS RG3371-F986-02E1

named Olson from Wahoo, Nebraska, and, when necessary, to trade bum calls with the opposition. The practice was unusual but not unheard of among Indian teams. Baseball historian Harold Seymour noted that the fine Passamaquoddy baseball teams of the 1920s and '30s, of Pleasant Point, Maine, often "took the further precaution of

using a native umpire and scorer."<sup>24</sup>

In a few cases, the issue of umpiring came up in game stories about Nebraska Indians, as in this one from Syracuse, Nebraska: "There was a little bit of misunderstanding about who was umpire and who was not, but it ended amicably."<sup>25</sup> Yet the team's issues with umpires went well beyond baseball

game scores. On one occasion, Green's team captain Roberts objected to the call of an umpire in Hopkinsville, Kentucky. The confrontation suddenly turned violent, when "the umpire produced a knife about a foot long and threatened to cut somebody's 'innards' out while the crowd yelled 'Stick 'im, Stick 'im. We'll stand by you.'" In a similar case, in Ripley, Tennessee, Green's umpire Olson called a ball fair and was threatened by men in the stands waving "long, keen, shiny knives." Olson wisely changed his call to "foul ball."<sup>26</sup>

Why then did players from Genoa, Haskell, Carlisle, and from reservations throughout the Midwest join the Nebraska Indians? How long did they play with the team and what were the playing conditions? They were promised daily food and lodging, although they spent much of the summer camping out on baseball fields or sleeping in Pullman cars. The schedule was grueling, usually over 150 games in almost as many towns, from Nebraska to New Jersey, and the players constantly had to put up and pull down the team's tent city, and hustle from game to railway station to make it to the next town. In the team's first season, the schedule was even more exhausting, though abbreviated, since the team traveled by wagon, and suffered predictably from the travel:

The boys were literally worn out. It was often necessary to ride all day and all night and then play a game of ball as soon as the end of the drive was reached. This was more than human flesh and blood could stand and the season was curtailed as a result.<sup>27</sup>

For all the ensuing seasons, whenever possible, the Nebraska Indians traveled by train, resorting to hired wagons only for travel to and from towns without a railway station. Occasionally the manager was forced to call a game for time and send the

players bustling in their baseball uniforms to catch a departing train at the railroad station: In its “Amateur Notes” column of August 21, 1898, the *Chicago Daily News* reported, “The Nebraska Indians and the Auburn Parks will play baseball today. . . . The Indians leave for the West directly after this game. [Umpire] Tindill will call play at 3:30 o’clock.”

The travel and playing conditions for the other nationally touring pan-Indian exhibition team of the era, John Olson’s Cherokee All-Stars of Watervliet, Michigan (c. 1904–1912), appear to have been similar. In her essay, “John Olson and His Barnstorming Baseball Teams,” historian Barbara Gregorich described the team’s travel by Pullman car:

For decades ballplayers—major leaguers, minor leaguers and barnstormers—all traveled by rail. But while major leaguers traveled in three Pullmans, barnstormers

could afford only one. No sooner had Olson arrived in Watervliet than the *Record* described the Pullman coach. When the Pullman, christened Clementine, pulled out of town on May 1 for a tour of Michigan and Canada, it carried eleven baseball players, four canvasmen, the two owners and their wives. The under-compartment, which he had specifically added to the coach, carried a 1,200-foot-long, 12-foot-high canvas fence; a portable grandstand that would seat 1,000; and a complete lighting plant for night games.<sup>36</sup>

More than coincidentally, Harold Seymour reported that the Nebraska Indians “traveled in a private railway car that sidetracked in towns where they stopped to play” and “enclosed the Bemidji field [Minnesota, 1904] with a canvas fence supported by tall poles on which they hung lights, powered by the local electric system, for a night game.” Since, according to Green’s *Fun and Frolick*, the Nebraska Indians did not play a single game in Minnesota in the

summer of 1904, Seymour apparently confused Olson’s team with Green’s.<sup>29</sup>

Still, the traveling conditions of the Indian teams were similar, and the same profit incentive that motivated Olson to use electric lights also induced Green to schedule two games per day whenever possible. The profit motive worked very powerfully around the lucrative July 4 holiday, when large crowds turned out to see the Nebraska Indians play. In 1901, Green reported that he “enjoyed the novel experience of celebrating the nation’s birthday on three different dates” when celebrations were rained out and games rescheduled for July 4, July 5, and July 13.<sup>30</sup>

The standard player’s salary in addition to food and lodging is uncertain, but it was probably no more than the fifty-five dollars per month that the Pawhuska, Oklahoma, Indian team offered to Theodore Brunt, a fine



Another of the many Indian teams that sprang up in the wake of the Nebraska Indians’ success was John Olson’s Cherokee Indian Baseball Team of Watervliet, Michigan. Jeffrey Powers-Beck

Haskell ballplayer, in the summer of 1908,<sup>31</sup> and much less than the one- to two-hundred-dollars-per-month salary of a Western League player during the period. In fact, Green quite deliberately avoided competition for players with minor league managers. The *Nebraska State Journal* reported:

“In past years, Mr. Green was careful to keep his Indians away from towns supporting minor league teams. This was wise management, as it prevented the professional managers from hiring his best performers away from his team and signing them to national agreement contracts.”<sup>32</sup>

This was not an idle threat. When Green toured Chicago with a fine club in 1904, the *Chicago Daily Tribune* reported on October 16 that three of a his players—a shortstop named O’Leary, a pitcher named Snow, and an outfielder named Ketchum—received offers from professional teams.

Indeed, the Nebraska Indians’ only Indian star to make the major leagues, was George Howard Johnson, a Winnebago, who signed a minor league contract with Green himself, when he bought the Lincoln Western League team in 1907 and swapped players between his two teams.

The Indian players’ primary motivations to join the team would seem to have been other than financial, as few of the Indian players remained on the roster for more than two seasons. Some, like Johnson, John Bull Williams, or Haskell’s Walter Nevitt undoubtedly were seeking an initiation into high-level semi-professional baseball before trying out for a spot on a minor league team. Others were proud to play for the team, with its reputation as a perennial all-star squad, and saw the long season as an opportunity to travel the United States doing something they enjoyed.

Now, almost one hundred years later, it is unlikely that any former players of the Nebraska Indians or of Olson’s Cherokee All-Stars remain to tell of the living and playing conditions that the Indian teams faced. However, in the spring of 2001, Alan J. Caldwell, director

### Nebraska Indians Team Records

Year	Won	Lost	Tied	Percent
1897	21	26		.447
1898	81	22		.786
1899	108	35		.755
1900	90	53	1	.629
1901	135	26	1	.839
1902	136	15	1	.901
1903	123	24	1	.837
1904	149	25	1	.856
1905	163	27	1	.858
1906	151	31	2	.830
1912	101*	27		.789 (?)
1914	101	25	3	.802

\*Won or Tied

of the Menominee Culture Institute in Keshena, Wisconsin, and the son of Menominee baseball player James J. Caldwell, a third baseman for Olson’s Cherokee All-Stars in 1912, reflected upon his father’s baseball career:

My father was not the type of person to talk much about his past. What little he told us about his baseball playing days was about the part of the country he traveled to such as the southeastern region. He didn’t say anything that I recall about how they were treated or received in the towns that they played in. I think my father played for the pleasure of playing baseball and as a source of income. I think he may have also joined the team as a way to satisfy his sense of adventure. I envied my father. Though he only played semi-pro baseball he was a terrific player based on stories I heard from his peers.<sup>33</sup>

While James J. Caldwell might well have made the same income through manual labor as playing baseball, the Indian barnstorming teams certainly appealed to the young men’s wanderlust and love of baseball.

From 1898, its first winning season, to at least 1914, the last season for which a record is available, the Nebraska Indians established an impressive reputation as one of the most formidable exhibition teams in the country. The team records listed in Green’s *Fun and Frolick* and on the 1912 and 1914 postcards sold by the Beltzer brothers are remarkable; the

cumulative total for those years is 1,237 wins, 336 losses, and 11 ties, for a redoubtable .786 winning percentage.<sup>34</sup> While the Indians usually avoided embarrassing small-town teams, they trounced Fort Madison, Iowa, in 1898 by a score of 40-4, and Mystic, Iowa, in 1905 by 34-0.

As impressive as the cumulative record is the roster of teams that the Nebraska Indians defeated or played competitively against. Annually, through at least 1906, they played the University of Nebraska. They faced other state university squads in Iowa, Indiana, and Kentucky, and they challenged colleges and normal school squads throughout the country. Occasionally they confronted Lincoln’s Western League team, and in 1908 the Nebraska Indians played eight exhibition games against the six teams in Kentucky’s Class D Blue Grass League (Frankfort, Lexington, Richmond, Lawrenceburg, Shelbyville, and Winchester), going 7-1, including a 1-0 victory against second-place Lexington. On August 22, 1909, the *Nebraska State Journal* reported that the Indians had lost only one game in their previous thirty-nine contests.<sup>35</sup>

While many local teams offered meager challenges to the Nebraska Indians, other amateur teams, such as the Lawndales and the Gunthers of Chicago, the Cincinnati Shamrocks, the Brooklyn Brightons, and the Baltimore All Stars, presented top-flight competition. Local teams with all-star players, such as Wahoo, Nebraska, in 1898, with future Hall-of-Famer Sam Crawford, and Burwell, Nebraska in 1906 with future Hall-of-Famer Grover Cleveland Alexander, also made formidable opponents.<sup>36</sup>

The toughest competition the Nebraska Indians faced were Negro League teams including the Cuban X-Giants, the Algona (Iowa) Brownies, the Indianapolis ABCs, the Columbia Giants, and the Philadelphia Giants. Green himself lamented his team’s inability to win against the Negro

League clubs: “The Columbian [*sic*] Giants were a little bit the fastest lot of ball players we ever encountered. . . . We were mighty glad when we finally severed the ties that bound us to the colored boys. We had nothing but kindly feeling for them, but they played too good a game to suit us.” The Negro League teams enjoyed the competition, however, and the Philadelphia Giants even planned a new ballpark in 1909 with the intention of arranging games with the Nebraska Indians.<sup>37</sup>

Green’s admission of Negro League superiority is hardly surprising, given that the African-American teams were among the best professional teams of their day—often better than their white major league rivals. Against those teams, the Indians routinely faced Hall-of-Fame players such as John Henry “Pop” Lloyd and Rube Foster, and players of high major-league ability, such as Pete Hill, Bruce Petway, George “Chappie” Johnson, Charlie Grant, and Bill Monroe. The Indians also found that Negro League teams excelled at the same slap-hitting, base-stealing brand of baseball they themselves played, so the Indians had neither athletic nor strategic advantages. While the Nebraska Indians could not match up with the best professional teams, they merit recognition, at the least, as “a semipro team that cut a wide swath in the state” and “one of the best semi-pro teams in the Midwest” of the era.<sup>38</sup>

What was the cultural significance of the Nebraska Indians exhibition baseball team from 1897 into the 1920s? Clearly, the team was an athletic and financial success, playing hundreds of games throughout the Midwest, East, and South, and proving itself against both amateur and professional competition. The most successful of the exhibition teams with Indian players, it paved the way for many others including John Olson’s “Cherokee All-Stars” (c. 1904–1912); Gus Whitewings’ “All Indian Baseball Team” (1907)<sup>39</sup>; Kate J. Becker’s “Carlisle Indian Base Ball Club,” a pan-Indian team unaffiliated

with Carlisle Indian school (1916)<sup>40</sup>; T.H. Schimfessel’s “Arizona Indian Ball Team” (1926)<sup>41</sup>; William Mzhickteno’s “Potawatomi Indian Ball Team” (c. 1925); “the Dakota Eagles,” an All-Sioux team based in Flandreau, South Dakota (1933); and Ben Harjo’s “Oklahoma Indians” (1933), a pan-Indian team that included, albeit very briefly, 46-year-old Jim Thorpe. The list of touring teams, if it were extended to tribal teams with strong baseball traditions, such as the Chippewa of White Earth, Minnesota, or the Winnebago of Walthill, Nebraska, could be continued for many pages.

These teams were remarkable for confronting discrimination and triumphing over it through skilled play on the diamond. Though social historians have produced an extensive literature concerning the portrayal of American Indians in Wild West shows like Buffalo Bill Cody’s Wild West or the Miller Brothers’ 101 Ranch Real Wild West, it seems that they have largely neglected baseball “circuses” and exhibition teams like Green’s Nebraska Indians.<sup>42</sup>

Like the Wild West showmen, Guy Green considered the Indians he traveled with to be representatives of “a disappearing race,” but he also admired and promoted their considerable talents as ballplayers. They out-hit, out-ran, and out-played their opposition consistently, and even more consistently triumphed over the hecklers whooping and shouting insults from the grandstand. In this sense, the thousands of spectators who witnessed the Nebraska Indians play often came “to see the Indians in a role new to the race.” That new role—skilled professional athlete—did not suddenly, and of itself, dispel anti-Indian prejudice. Yet it did raise American Indians such as Jim Thorpe and Charles Bender to new pinnacles of publicity and admiration, while urging a new, pan-Indian pride that contributed to political actions on behalf of many Native peoples, such as the Indian Citizenship Act of 1924.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> “Creightons Against Indians,” *Omaha Bee*, May 3, 1902: 2.

<sup>2</sup> Guy W. Green, *The Nebraska Indians: A Complete History of the Nebraska Indian Base Ball Team* (Lincoln, Neb.: Woodruff-Collins, 1903), 5.

<sup>3</sup> “Law School Banquet,” *Nebraska State Journal*, June 10, 1897: 8; Green, *The Nebraska Indians*, 6.

<sup>4</sup> “University Team Sadly Scalped,” *Nebraska State Journal*, June 27, 1897: 4; “Ten Gauge,” “Sporting Resume,” *Fremont [Neb.] Weekly Herald*, June 22, 1897: 4.

<sup>5</sup> W. B. Charles to Superintendent H. B. Peairs, Aug 7, 1909, Haskell Institute Athletic Correspondence, Record Group 75, National Archives and Record Administration, Central Plains Region, Kansas City, Mo. See also Charles to Peairs, Aug. 11, 1909.

<sup>6</sup> Green, *The Nebraska Indians*, 6–7.

<sup>7</sup> “University Team Sadly Scalped,” *Nebraska State Journal*, June 26, 1897: 8.

<sup>8</sup> “In a Bloodless Battle,” *Lincoln Evening Journal*, June 26, 1897: 1.

<sup>9</sup> Guy W. Green, *Fun and Frolick With an Indian Ball Team* (Lincoln, Neb.: Woodruff-Collins, 1907), 65.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>11</sup> Harold Seymour, *Baseball: The People’s Game* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1990), 392.

<sup>12</sup> Green, *The Nebraska Indians*, 3, 19.

<sup>13</sup> “Other Locals,” *The Headlight* (Stromsburg, Neb.), Apr. 25, 1901, 4.

<sup>14</sup> “Tecumseh vs Indians,” *Tecumseh [Neb.] Chieftain*, May 4, 1901, 1.

<sup>15</sup> Green, *The Nebraska Indians*, 41.

<sup>16</sup> Curt Smith, *Storied Stadiums: Baseball History Through Its Ballparks* (New York: Carroll & Graff, 2001), 16.

<sup>17</sup> “Local News,” *Hickman [Neb.] Enterprise*, Apr. 13, 1906: 5.

<sup>18</sup> “Nebraska Indians Vs Pawnee City,” *Pawnee Chief* (Pawnee City, Neb.): 1; “Creightons Against the Indians,” *Omaha Bee*, May 3, 1902: 2.

<sup>19</sup> “Indian Names are Baseball Puzzles,” *Knoxville News Sentinel*, June 12, 1906: 12.

<sup>20</sup> “In a Bloodless Battle,” *Lincoln Evening News*, June 28, 1897: 1.

<sup>21</sup> Guy W. Green, quoted in “Raps Bleacher Jokesters,” *Sioux City Journal*, June 3, 1909: 9.

<sup>22</sup> Green, *The Nebraska Indians* 25, 43, 61, 74–76; *Fun and Frolick*, 20–25.

<sup>23</sup> “Green’s Nebraska Indian base ball team,” *Boone County Recorder* (Burlington, Ken.), July 10, 1907: 1.

<sup>24</sup> Green, *The Nebraska Indians*, 69; Seymour, *The People's Game*, 393.

<sup>25</sup> "Syracuse and Vicinity," *Syracuse Democrat* (Syracuse, Neb.), Apr. 26, 1906: 6.

<sup>26</sup> Green, *The Nebraska Indians*, 69, 70.

<sup>27</sup> Green, *The Nebraska Indians*, 10.

<sup>28</sup> Barbara Gregorich, "John Olson and His Barnstorming Baseball Teams," *Michigan History Magazine*, May/June 1995: 29.

<sup>29</sup> Seymour, *The People's Game*, 392; Green, *Fun and Frolick*, 88-90.

<sup>30</sup> Green, *The Nebraska Indians*, 61.

<sup>31</sup> A.W. Hurley to H. B. Peairs, July 2, 1908, Haskell Institute Correspondence, Theodore Brunt Student Case File, Record Group 75, National Archives and Records Administration-Central Plains, Kansas City,.

<sup>32</sup> "Youngsters Galore for Lincoln Club," *Nebraska State Journal*, Feb. 9, 1908: Sec. II: 11.

<sup>33</sup> Alan J. Caldwell to Jeffrey Powers-Beck, personal correspondence, May 16, 2001.

<sup>34</sup> Green, *Fun and Frolick*, 79-93; "Green's Nebraska Indians" (postcard), 1912 and "Beltzer's Nebraska Indians" (postcard), 1914, Curt Teich Postcard Archives, Lake County Museum, Wauconda, Illinois.

<sup>35</sup> "Indians Make Good Record," *Nebraska State Journal*, June 15, 1908, 3; "Indians Keep Winning," *Ibid.*, Aug. 22, 1909: A3.

<sup>36</sup> Andrea I. Paul, "His Own Worst Enemy: The Rise and Fall of Grover Cleveland Alexander," *Nebraska History*, Vol. 71, No. 1 (Spring 1990): 3.

<sup>37</sup> Green, *The Nebraska Indians*, 88; "New Semi-Pro Club Here," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, Feb. 8, 1909: 14.

<sup>38</sup> "Some Real Old Timers," *Lincoln Sunday Journal and Star*, Apr. 3, 1951: 4B; Paul, "His Own Worst Enemy," 3.

<sup>39</sup> "Real Indians," *Sporting Life*, August 10, 1906: 10.

<sup>40</sup> "Indians in Harlem," Luce's Press Clipping Bureau, July 16, 1915, Carlisle Indian School Correspondence, 1915, Record Group 75, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C.

<sup>41</sup> T. H. Schimfessel to U.S. Indian School, Carlisle, Pennsylvania, Apr. 20, 1926; Carlisle Correspondence File, post-1918 correspondence, Record Group 75, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C.

<sup>42</sup> See L. G. Moses, *Wild West Shows and the Images of American Indians, 1883-1933* (Albuquerque: Univ. of New Mexico Press, 1996), 1-9.

# Nebraska Indians Profiles

BY JEFFREY POWERS-BECK

Literally hundreds of players donned Nebraska Indians jerseys and most of them have faded into obscurity. Nevertheless it is possible to profile several of the most remarkable players and owners.

**Oran A. “Buck” Beltzer** – Captain of the University of Nebraska football and baseball teams in 1909. Buck Beltzer Field, the long-time baseball diamond on the Lincoln campus was named for him. Inspired by Green’s example, Beltzer founded the Oxford Indians team in 1908, recruiting nearby Sioux players along with local white talent, and selling postcards of the team in war paint with tomahawks and headdresses.

Playing third base and shortstop, Beltzer tried out with Philadelphia Athletics in 1910. Failing to make the team, he joined the Nebraska Indians, and in 1911 or 1912, with his brother James, he bought the team, which continued to compile its impressive record. Although he hired some talented Indian players such as Thomas Reed from Haskell Institute, he increasingly relied on local white players. Under the Beltzers, during difficult wartime conditions, press coverage of the Nebraska Indians diminished, attendance dwindled, and he apparently sold the team in 1917. Beltzer went on to become President of the Grand Island Trust Company in Grand Island, Nebraska, and a contributor to University of Nebraska athletic programs.<sup>1</sup> The Nebraska Indians continued to play throughout the country in the early 1920s, traveling as far as Keene, New Hampshire, in 1923.<sup>2</sup>

**Jacob Buckheart** (or Buckhardt) – A Shawnee, from Shawnee, Oklahoma, he caught for Carlisle in 1897. In June of that year *The Boston Globe* reported: “There is another Indian [besides Louis Sockalexis] in the business [of professional baseball]. His name is Buck Heart.”<sup>3</sup>

Over six feet tall and weighing 195 pounds, he was a formidable athlete. He played first base for the Nebraska Indians in 1899 and 1900, before returning to his farmstead in Oklahoma. Green named Buckheart the star of a game in Ohio, in 1899: “With three men on the bases Buckheart came to bat. Buck is over six feet tall and has the strength of an ox. He let one strike go by and then lifted the ball squarely over the center field fence.”<sup>4</sup>

In 1913, Buckheart wrote a note to friends at Carlisle that typified his attitude as a ballplayer: “I am fighting the battles of life as hard as I can at all times. Good regards to all. Hit [the] ball hard and run hard.”<sup>5</sup>

**Burnham** – A speedy Native-American catcher with “a wonderful whip” from California who played on the 1909 team. During a work-out in Wahoo, Nebraska, the fleet-footed Burnham “caught up with a jack rabbit which he booted one and informed the hare to get out of the way and let someone run that could run.”<sup>6</sup>

**Ed Davis** – A full-blooded American Indian (Green does not mention his tribal affiliation), he played left field for the 1901 team, and decided a game in Momence, Illinois, with a grand slam in the eighth inning. Green wrote, “He lost the ball in the next county somewhere.”<sup>7</sup>

**Harold Emerson** – An Ojibwe (Chippewa) pitcher from the White Earth reservation, Emerson, one of the longest serving members of the team joined the team in 1905 and played until 1919. He allegedly won 60 games for the Nebraska Indians in 1905 and attracted the interest of major league owners Connie Mack, John McGraw, and Charlie Comiskey. He refused a major league tryout, but his pitching was praised highly by his teammate Charles Guyon: “He was a lefthander with a submarine pitching motion. He had more stuff and stamina than Carl Mays, who had the same style with the Yankees in the 1920s.”<sup>8</sup>

**George Green** – A Sac-and-Fox player who did double duty, from 1899 to 1902, alternating between the pitching mound and infield positions. Green’s most outstanding athletic ability was his speed. Guy Green reports, “After a game there [Clifton Springs, N.Y.], George Green, who had pitched the contest for me, was persuaded to run 100 yards with a professional foot racer who was spoiling for a heat. George lost his man before the finish line was reached.”<sup>9</sup> The *Lincoln Evening Journal* described Green as the “crack twirler” on the 1902 staff that included Tobey and White Boy.<sup>10</sup>

**Guy Wilder Green** – The founder of the Nebraska Indians in 1897, Green was an energetic baseball promoter until he sold the team to the Beltzer brothers in 1911. Green said, “I cannot remember a time, when I was not interested in base ball.” He played first base on the Stromsburg, Nebraska, town team, then for Doane College in Crete, Nebraska. In the spring of 1891, at

age 17, he received his B.S. from Doane, played outfield briefly for the University of Iowa, but returned to Stromsburg to work at the post office and play amateur ball.<sup>11</sup>

Taking his law degree from the University of Nebraska in 1897, he organized the Nebraska Indians hurriedly just after graduation in June. He apparently received some assistance in the team's early years from "my handsome and accomplished pardner," John DeYoung Smith, a Lincoln lawyer and salesman.<sup>12</sup>

Green traveled with the team through 1907. He recruited, coached, and managed players, kept the books, recorded game scores and notable events in the team's travels, and profited from the sale of Nebraska Indians pamphlets and postcards, as well as from gate receipts. Soon Green's name appeared on the team postcards as "Sole Owner and Manager" of the team, though he was employed by the Lincoln Machinery Company through 1904, and then as an Attorney from 1905 through 1906.<sup>13</sup>

As the Nebraska Indians succeeded, Green attempted to repeat the success of his novelty team by founding an exhibition team of Japanese ballplayers in 1906, after the visit of Japan's Waseda University to California had excited public interest in Asian baseball. The Japanese team quickly folded, but Green attempted an even greater challenge, purchasing the Lincoln Western Association Club in the fall of 1907, and acting as president and general manager of the club in 1908 and early 1909, while Billy Fox acted as field manager and coach. Green's Lincoln team played mediocre ball, inspiring verses such as,

The Greenbackers  
There was a "Guy," he came to town—  
We guess he came to win—  
But for a while it looked as if  
His chances were "durned" slim,  
When "Jack" and "Bill" and "Gag" and "Fen"  
Who always had been it,  
Right up till thirty days ago  
Could seldom make a hit.  
The fans were sad as every day  
They rooted all in vain,  
While ciphers on the big black-board  
Told how each hope was slain. . .<sup>14</sup>

In July of 1909, in the middle of his second season, Green sold the Lincoln franchise to Don C. Despain and Lowell Stoner, actually profiting from the sale.<sup>15</sup> Following his marriage to Minnie A. Ericson in 1910, Green gave up traveling with the Nebraska Indians, and sold the team in late 1911 or early 1912 to Oran and James Beltzer.<sup>16</sup>

As a Lincoln attorney, Green maintained an interest in Western League baseball, and in 1912 served as an attorney for parties

suing Western League Commissioner Norris O'Neil and the National Association.<sup>17</sup> In the early 1920s, Green moved his family to Kansas City.<sup>18</sup>

Beyond his formation of the Nebraska Indians, Green's greatest contribution to American Indian baseball was his recording of anecdotes and the playing history of the team in two pamphlets, *The Nebraska Indians: A Complete History* and *Fun and Frolick With an Indian Ball Team*.

**Charles Guyon** – A friend and teammate of Howard Emerson, Guyon (also from White Earth) was the elder brother of All-American football star and minor-league baseball star Joe Guyon. A fine catcher, he played minor league baseball for five seasons, starting as a catcher in Canton before finding a position as a salesman for the Spalding Company in New York. Emerson said that Guyon used to tell batters what pitch Emerson would be throwing—but "in the ancient Chippewa tongue." He also praised Guyon as "the fastest catcher I ever saw." Guyon won recognition as an umpire, perhaps the first American Indian umpire in the minor leagues, for the Appalachian League in 1912.<sup>19</sup>

**George Howard Johnson** – The greatest American Indian player to travel with the Nebraska Indians was George Howard "Chief" Johnson, a Winnebago from Walthill, Nebraska. Johnson pitched two minor league no-hitters (one in the Western League and one in Pacific Coast League), and played for three years in the major leagues, one with the Cincinnati Reds and two with the Kansas City Packers of the Federal League. He pitched a shutout in his first major league start, stymieing hitters with his spitball and intimidating them with his massive frame.

Johnson played for the Nebraska Indians in 1907, pitching in thirty-eight games and winning thirty-two. *Sporting Life* described him in 1908 as "a husky lad of 22 years" with "terrific speed and lots of curves, [Johnson] will have a chance to climb the ladder."<sup>20</sup> Were it not for alcoholism and anti-Indian prejudice, he might have won even greater fame as a major league player.

**Juzicania** – A Yaqui centerfielder from Arizona on the 1906 squad. Green indulged in "Western blanket Indian" stereotypes when writing of Juzicania, "I hesitated a long time before I added Juzicanea [*sic*] to my Team. He was the meanest looking Indian I have ever seen. He wore his hair long, surveyed everything suspiciously with piercing black eyes, and when he came down the street people moved to the edge of the sidewalk and apprehensively watched him pass."<sup>21</sup>

**George Long** – A full-blooded Winnebago player who was stationed at second base on the 1897 and 1898 squads. Green said that Long made "the longest hit ever on the Manchester [Iowa] grounds. He drove the ball clear into the river, which surrounded the Manchester park on two sides."<sup>22</sup>

**Nakomas** – A Wyandotte player from Oklahoma who anchored second base for the 1906 squad. Guy Green embroidered several fantastic yarns about him in *Fun and Frolick with an Indian Ball Team*, including the following:

“When he was with me in 1906, he was fifty-five years old, but played first class ball. Nakomas was the scrappiest player I ever had; he had been a fighter all his life, and when he came to me he was a mass of scars of various shapes, ages and variety.”<sup>23</sup>

**Henry A. Negake** – An Ottawa player from Michigan, Negake played for Green between 1900 and 1906. He was later recruited to play for the famous All-Nations Team, a multi-ethnic barnstorming team that included stars Jose Mendez and John Donaldson, by owner J. L. Wilkinson.<sup>24</sup>

**Walter M. Nevitt** – A Delaware Indian who played third base for part of the 1909 season, soon after graduating from Haskell Institute, where he starred as a pitcher. At five feet, nine inches and 156 pounds, he was probably too small to be a major league pitcher, but he pitched three no-hitters at Haskell, and signed with the Des Moines Boosters, a Class A Western League team, in 1912. The *Nebraska State Journal* reported: “Captain Nevitt, on third base, is in a class by himself.”<sup>25</sup>

**Thomas Reed** – An Ojibwe (Chippewa) player from Cass Lake, Minnesota, Reed was Haskell Institute’s second baseman in 1909 and also played on the school’s highly touted football team. His baseball manager, Wilson B. Charles, wrote of him, “Reid [*sic*] could not see the ball very well when at bat, but he made some grand-stand catches at second base.” He contributed his speed and defensive skills to the Nebraska Indians for the 1912 season.<sup>26</sup>

**Bud Taylor** – One of Green’s non-Indian players, Taylor played semi-pro ball for several years in the Midwest and East. In 1900, at age 22, he briefly played third base for the Nebraska Indians before leaving for a semi-pro team in the East. He made national headlines in 1901 for the murder of Ruth Nollard, his former fiancée, in Kansas City. He attempted an insanity defense based on his epilepsy, but he was convicted and sentenced to death.<sup>27</sup>

**Daniel Tobey** – One of the most colorful sports personalities associated with Nebraska Indians, Dan Tobey, a non-Indian, achieved greater fame after he stopped dressing in his clown suit for the Nebraska Indians and became a boxing and wrestling announcer and promoter in California. A native of Ulysses, Nebraska, Tobey was described in local papers as “the Adonis of unorganized ball” and “the only tow-headed Injun in captivity.”<sup>28</sup>

Starting in 1902, Tobey alternated between the outfield and the pitching mound for the Indians: “Tobey is really the only

white man on the Indian team this year. . . . But Tobey is no fake. Everyone knows on sight that he is a natural born white man, for he has the tow head and florid complexion that can never be mistaken.”<sup>29</sup>

He was player-manager of Green’s Japanese team in 1906, and of the Nebraska Indians through 1909. Tobey said of himself that he had “excellent control and savvy and nothing else. The only curve he had was in his legs.”<sup>30</sup> Game accounts also suggested he had a lively fast ball, and in a game at Colon, Michigan, in July 1909, he shut out the opposition 24-0, “with one scratch hit,” striking out 16 batters.<sup>31</sup>

During World War I, Tobey ventured to California and became an emcee, selling war bonds on tours with Douglas Fairbanks and Mary Pickford. He was best known as a ringside announcer, working at the Vernon arena and the Olympic Auditorium, calling fights featuring such champions as Jim Jeffries, Jack Dempsey, and Gene Tunney.<sup>32</sup>

**White Boy** – A diminutive Winnebago player with a strong arm, White Boy was a star pitcher for the Genoa Indian School in 1900 and pitched impressively against the Nebraska Indians. Green signed White Boy for the 1902 season, and he joined Tobey and George Green on one of team’s strongest pitching staffs. Behind the three, the Nebraska Indians enjoyed an incredible .902 winning percentage.<sup>33</sup>

**John Bull “Edward” Williams** – An Oneida player from Greenbay, Wisconsin, Williams was a sturdy six-foot outfielder for the 1907 Nebraska Indians. Having begun his professional career late, at the age of twenty-four, he went on to play for Hannibal in the Illinois-Missouri League in 1908, and Marion in the Ohio State League in 1909. He tried out with the New York Giants in 1910, but was released to New Bedford of the New England League. A left-handed hitter and right-handed thrower, he was described by William Phelon in *Baseball Magazine* as “an outfielder of good repute in the minor leagues.”<sup>34</sup>

**Jesse Youngdeer** – A full-blooded Cherokee from Cherokee, North Carolina, he was a centerfielder for the Carlisle Indian baseball team from 1902 to 1909. A pint-sized player, at five feet, six inches and 140 pounds, Youngdeer played outfield for the Nebraska Indians in 1911 before returning home to work as an assistant farmer at the Cherokee School in North Carolina.<sup>35</sup>

Youngdeer was best known for traveling with fellow Carlisle players Joseph Libby, Stencil “Possum” Powell, and Jim Thorpe to join the Rocky Mount Railroaders in the Eastern Carolina League in 1909. It was Thorpe’s “professional” play in the Eastern Carolina League that ultimately cost him the medals he had won in the 1912 Olympics.<sup>36</sup>



## Notes

<sup>1</sup> "Beltzer, Oren Allen," *Who's Who in Nebraska*. (Lincoln, Neb.: Nebraska Press Association, 1940) 510; Don Bryant, "Buck Beltzer, '09 Gridder, Dead at 71," *Lincoln Star*, Sept. 24, 1959: 21.

<sup>2</sup> "Keene White Sox Defeat Nebraska Indians, 5-4," *Keene Evening Sentinel*, 7 Aug. 1923: 7. My thanks to Thomas R. Hanna of Keene for this information.

<sup>3</sup> "Sporting Notes," *Boston Globe*, June 9, 1897.

<sup>4</sup> Guy W. Green, *The Nebraska Indians: A Complete History of the Nebraska Indian Base Ball Team*, (Lincoln, Neb.: Woodruff-Collins, 1903), 26.

<sup>5</sup> Buckheart to Superintendent Moses Friedman, 1913, Jacob Buckheart, Carlisle Student File 1327, No. 1705, Record Group 75, National Archives and Records Administration-Washington D.C.

<sup>6</sup> "Training at Wahoo," *Nebraska State Journal*, Apr. 14, 1909: 3; "Snow Storm Stopped Game," *Ibid.*, April 17, 1909: 6.

<sup>7</sup> Green, *The Nebraska Indians*, 54.

<sup>8</sup> Herb Heft, "Former Indian Batterymates in Heap Big Pow-Wow Here," *Washington Post*, March 17, 1949: 17.

<sup>9</sup> Green, *The Nebraska Indians*, 44.

<sup>10</sup> "Win Out," *Lincoln Evening Journal*, Apr. 19, 1902: 1.

<sup>11</sup> Green, *The Nebraska Indians*, 4; *Bulletin of the University of Nebraska: Directory of Alumni*, Series XXVIII, No. 21 (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska, 1923), 175; Karen Morris, Doane College, (Crete, Neb.) to Jeffrey Powers-Beck, personal correspondence, Sept. 27, 2002.

<sup>12</sup> Green, *The Nebraska Indians*, 60.

<sup>13</sup> *Hoye's City Directory of Lincoln*, 1901 (Lincoln, Neb.: Kizer & Sons, 1901), 225; *Hoye's City Directory of Lincoln*, 1904 (Kansas City, Mo.: Hoye Directory Company, 1904), 319; *Polk-McAvoy Directory Company's Lincoln City Directory*, 1906 (Lincoln, Neb.: Polk-McAvoy Directory Co., 1906), 196.

<sup>14</sup> G.H.N., "The Greenbackers," "Gossip of the Western League," *Nebraska State Journal*, June 7, 1908: sec. II, 11.

<sup>15</sup> "Franchise Has Been Sold," *Nebraska State Journal*, July 8, 1909: 3.

<sup>16</sup> "Beltzer, Oren Allen," *Who's Who in Nebraska*, 510. This article gives 1911 as the year of purchase by the Beltzers, but 1912 postcards, though featuring the Beltzers prominently, still refer to the team as Green's Nebraska Indians.

<sup>17</sup> "Lincoln News," *St. Joseph News-Press*, Apr. 12, 1912: 7.

<sup>18</sup> *Bulletin of the University of Nebraska: Directory of Alumni* 175.

<sup>19</sup> Herb Heft, "Former Indian Batterymates in Heap Big Pow-Wow Here," *Washington Post*, March 17, 1949: 17.

<sup>20</sup> "The Western League," *Sporting Life*, Jan. 18, 1908: 10.

<sup>21</sup> Guy W. Green, *Fun and Frolick with an Indian Ball Team*, (Lincoln, Neb.: Woodruff-Collins, 1907), 28.

<sup>22</sup> Green, *The Nebraska Indians*, 10.

<sup>23</sup> Green, *Fun and Frolick*, 5-6.

<sup>24</sup> Forest Krauss to Jeffrey Powers-Beck, personal correspondence, Jan. 18, 2005.

<sup>25</sup> "Walter Nevitt," *St. Joe Gazette*, Mar. 11, 1912; "Training at Wahoo," *Nebraska State Journal*, Apr. 14, 1909: 3.

<sup>26</sup> W.B. Charles, "Baseball," *The Indian Leader* (Haskell Institute, Lawrence, Kansas), Vol. 13, Nos. 25-26 (June 11, 1909): 2; Thomas Reed, Haskell Student Case File, Record Group 75, National Archives and Records Administration-Central Plains, Kansas City, Mo.

<sup>27</sup> "Tragic Love Quarrel," *Washington Post*, 3 Mar. 1901: 9; "Ruth Nollard's Slayer to Die," *Washington Post*, 6 Oct. 1901: 1.

<sup>28</sup> "Indians Play a Good Game," *Nebraska State Journal*, April 24, 1909: 6; "Some Real Old Timers," *Lincoln Sunday Journal*, April 8, 1951: section B, 4.

<sup>29</sup> "War Dance on a Ball Field," *Omaha Daily Bee*, May 4, 1902: 2.

<sup>30</sup> Norris Anderson, "The Firing Line," *Lincoln Star*, August 25, 1955: 13.

<sup>31</sup> "24 to 0 for Indians," *Nebraska State Journal*, July 15, 1909.

<sup>32</sup> Anderson, "The Firing Line," 13.

<sup>33</sup> Green, *Fun and Frolick*, 84-85.

<sup>34</sup> John Bull "Edward" Williams, *Sporting News Contract*, *Sporting News Archive*, St. Louis, Mo.; William A. Phelon, "The Indian Players," Vol. 9, No. 6 (October 1912), 20-23.

<sup>35</sup> Jesse Youngdeer, Carlisle Student File 1327, No. 286, Record Group 75, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C.

<sup>36</sup> Robert W. Wheeler, Jim Thorpe: World's Greatest Athlete, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1975), 78.