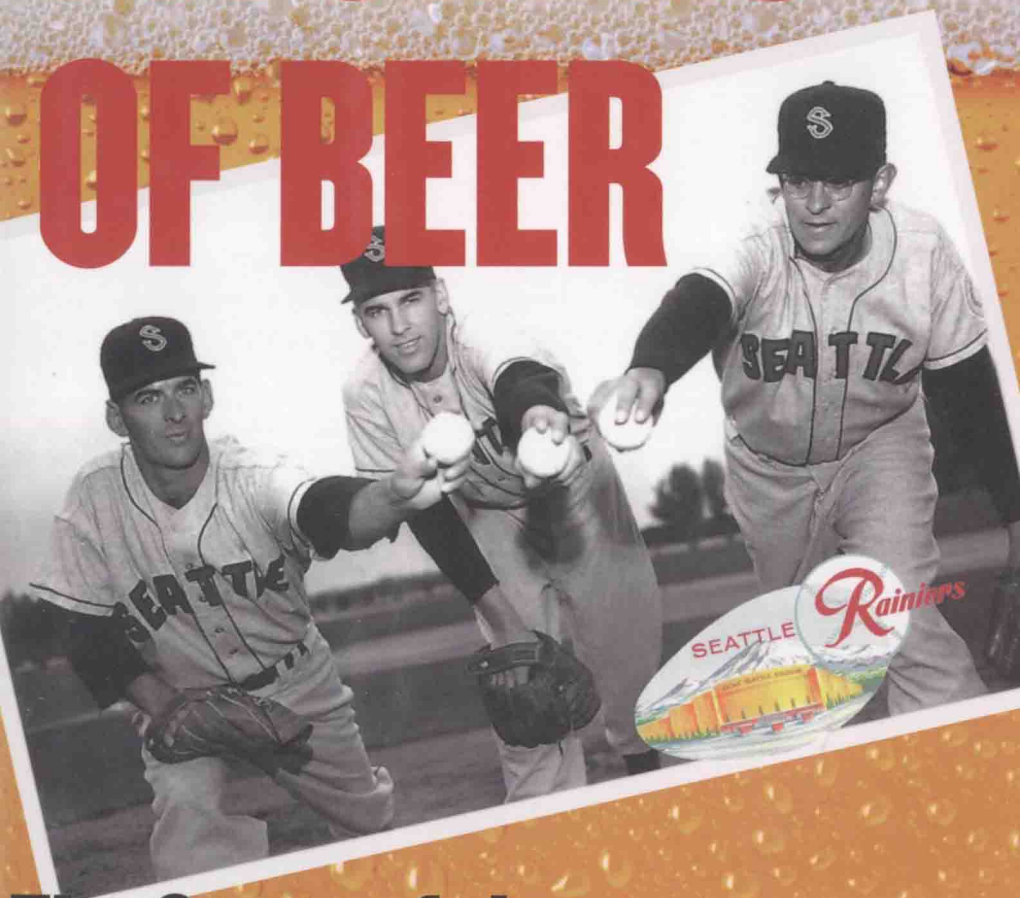


PITCHERS OF BEER



The Story of the

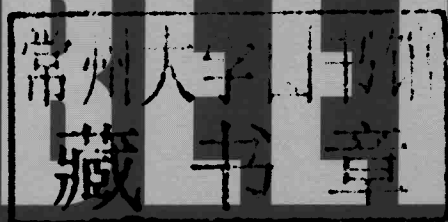
Seattle Rainiers

Dan Raley

PITCHERS

THE STORY OF THE SEATTLE RAINIERS

OF BEER



Dan Raley | PHOTOGRAPHS FROM THE DAVID ESKENAZI COLLECTION

UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA PRESS | LINCOLN AND LONDON

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Library of Congress
Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Raley, Dan.
Pitchers of beer : the story of the Seattle
Rainiers / Dan Raley, photographs from
the David Eskenazi Collection.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 978-0-8032-2847-4 (cloth: alk. paper)

1. Seattle Rainiers (Baseball team)—History.

2. Pacific Coast League—History. I. Title.

GV875.S39R35 2011

796.357'6409797772—dc22

2010027932

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Pitchers of Beer



Rainiers

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Preface

Dave Eskenazi and I were kids, five years apart, when we were drawn to Sicks' Stadium from opposing directions in Seattle. He resided in the south end; I lived in the northern part of the city. Independently, we both stepped inside this magical stadium for the first time in 1964, the final season for Emil Sick's Seattle Rainiers.

Eskenazi's interest in the local baseball team was given to him by his grandfather, Albert Alhadeff, and uncle, Leon Alhadeff. Albert Alhadeff operated a shoe repair business across the street from Seattle's Ambassador Hotel, a place frequented by Rainiers and visiting ballplayers, many of whom he befriended. Leon Alhadeff was simply a huge fan. Memories were handed down, generation to generation.

A young Eskenazi soaked up the lore and shared in his family's love for this team. In time, Eskenazi established his own Seattle business, providing financial services not all that far

from where his grandfather had cobbled shoes. On the side, Dave built a unique collection of sporting memorabilia, artifacts, and heirlooms.

He filled his home with uniforms, photos, championship rings, and various keepsakes derived from all sorts of West Coast teams from all kinds of sports, with a notable emphasis on the Rainiers and Northwest baseball. His collection would spill into his office, ballpark museums, Web sites and publications.

Years after the fact, Eskenazi became acquainted with the very same men his grandfather and uncle had discussed over dinner or in a moment of reflection, now personally hearing these players describe their swings and the way they used to throw a baseball.

The Rainiers entered my life at the same time my father left it. In 1963 I was nine when Bill Raley, who was commissioner of the Olympic National Park, an appointed judge, took me and the rest of my family to a Cheney Studs–Rainiers exhibition game in Port Angeles, my home at the time. My dad died the next day in a spectacular car accident. My last memories of him are at an Olympic Peninsula ballpark.

We moved back to Seattle, and one of my ways of coping with the loss of the most important man in my life was to head for Sicks' Stadium. I was never sad there. After the Rainiers had long disappeared, I played a high school game there. After it was torn down, I would become a *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* sports-writer and find myself seated at the ballparks that came next, the Kingdome and Safeco Field, covering the Seattle Mariners and some of the game's greatest players, in a sense getting called up to the big leagues. My dad would have been proud.

The book that follows is a five-year, collaborative effort

between Dave Eskenazi and myself. It has taken us to restaurants, taverns, and funerals. It sent my friend digging deep into his collection for valuable resource materials. It kept me prowling through newspaper archives and put me on the phone with dozens of former players as old as ninety-five.

We delighted over each new story that was uncovered and the manner in which it emerged, such as when the late Buddy Hancken bravely supplied details of the 1938 Fred Hutchinson trade that involved him while Hurricane Katrina bore down on his Texas home; relatives were on the way to evacuate him. We suffered together over the death of each Rainiers figure that took place during the process; when we called to request interviews with club executive Ralph Allen and pitcher Art Fowler, for example, their relatives tearfully informed us that they were in grave condition. Sadly, a dozen former players who were interviewed for this book have passed away without seeing the end result.

Telling the story of the Rainiers is our way of preserving an athletic civic treasure, something that meant as much to thousands of people in Seattle as it did to us. The words are mine. The photos are Eskenazi's. The team is yours to adopt or reclaim.

Contents

Preface	vii
1. Civic Duty	i
2. Sick and the Needy	15
3. Hutch, a Teen Idol	34
4. Turning Tigers Loose	58
5. The Babe	78
6. Balls and (Air) Strikes	90
7. Kewpie Dick	120
8. Tv, Rajah, and Jungle Jim	135
9. Hutch Returns	167
10. The Secret Stairs	190
11. Man behind the Microphone	204
12. Major Intrusion	219
13. Joltin' Joe	245
14. Last At-Bat	270
Acknowledgments	293
Appendix: All-Time Roster	295
Bibliographical Essay	321

1. Civic Duty

On a Sunday afternoon in the middle of Seattle, a half-dozen federal agents piled out of cars and conducted a raid. Banking on the element of surprise, these men had told no other government agency what they were doing. That would explain why these dour, serious-minded law-enforcement types came face to face with a squadron of uniformed Washington State Patrolmen riding up on motorcycles, sirens blaring, moments later at the same address.

Both groups, unbeknownst to each other, had shown up with a similar purpose in mind: administer justice as swiftly and efficiently as possible. The ensuing scene was hectic, if not hilarious, with so many badge-carrying people scrambling around and aimlessly bumping into each other they could have held a cop convention. Certainly a dangerous criminal ring had to be the target of these competing operations: Counterfeiters? Gun runners? With the world turning more anxious each day, with war approaching, maybe it was foreign spies?

It was September 19, 1937, on an overcast day in the Northwest, when federal treasury agents briskly strode through the gates of the dilapidated Civic Stadium at the foot of Queen Anne Hill. They entered a well-worn baseball stadium, having determined that the Seattle Indians minor-league team was the one threatening the peace, putting everyone on high alert, and necessitating the swift police action.

The Indians were an unhappy, cash-strapped outfit, which, in compiling an 81-96 record and a fifth-place finish in the Pacific Coast League, hadn't seen this many eager and excited people together in the grandstands all season. Employees working the ticket windows were confronted between games of a season-ending doubleheader against the visiting Sacramento Solons. The feds demanded that outstanding admission taxes be handed over from the accumulated game receipts. They barely had time to identify themselves when the uniformed state patrol officers rode up in more pronounced fashion on behalf of the state tax commission. It seems the Indians were in arrears in paying all of their bills, and people representing different entities were trying to confiscate what they could.

"The feds beat us to it," one patrolman was overheard saying after rifling through an empty till. "Let's grab the bleacher gates." Ticket sellers at the Republican Street windows were approached next, and all of their cash was seized. It might have been the first legalized holdup staged in the city.

Sensing that the quest for available finances was quickly turning into a free-for-all, a member of a third public agency got involved. William "Wee" Coyle, a Civic Stadium administrator and a former University of Washington football quarterback, stuck his hand in a drawer and pulled out \$190 for the city. This

would pay off most of the team's outstanding stadium lighting tab. "Now you fellows can fight for the rest," Coyle teased the deputized bill collectors.

While much of the crowd of five thousand fans was oblivious to this frantic money grab, others wanted their designated cut. "Hey, what's going on here?" Sacramento manager Bill Killefer yelled from the field. "How about the 40 percent that belongs to us?" Getting no response, Killefer climbed into the stands in search of a lawyer to help the visiting team obtain its rightful portion of the suddenly dwindling gate intake, but his efforts were futile.

The three agencies retrieved what they thought were all of the available funds, but an Indians official had stuffed several bills into the uniform pockets of the team's first-base coach, hiding money in a place the others would never think to look for it—on the field. While all this haggling was going on over the stadium cash, there also was a heated attempt in the home clubhouse to cut team expenses.

Seattle pitcher Dick Barrett was in line for a \$250 bonus if he won twenty games. The round-faced player had entered the season-ending doubleheader with eighteen victories, a commendable total that had brought him an earlier \$250 stipend. In this time of rubber-armed pitchers, Barrett was set to throw both games, the second contest scheduled for seven innings following a regulation nine, in an attempt to achieve the maximum performance bonus.

Beleaguered Indians owner Bill Klepper, the man having all of the trouble settling up with his various creditors, ordered field manager Johnny Bassler not to use Barrett again after a 4-1 victory over the Solons in the first game. Money was the



Owner Bill Klepper's mismanagement of the Seattle Indians led to the creation of the Seattle Rainiers.

only reason for this decision, and the club officials came close to blows before Bassler shoved the angry Klepper out the door and proceeded to get his team ready for the second contest. The Indians' starting pitcher for the next game would remain the same, as would the outcome.

Winning 11–2 in the nightcap, Barrett had his twenty victories and collected his incentive money, which he eventually handed over to the supportive Bassler out of gratitude. Bassler was fired that night over the incident, but was likely out of a baseball job even if he had submitted and used different pitchers. Klepper emerged the next day with a black eye, compliments of an unnamed baseball player away from the park.

Rugger Ardizoia, a San Francisco Mission Reds pitcher who would play for Seattle more than a decade later, wasn't surprised when he heard about Klepper's last-day shiner. The Indians owner was known for reneging on his financial commitments to players or for paying them late. On an earlier trip to Seattle during that 1937 season, Ardizoia had seen irrefutable proof of this: "We went into the Gowman Hotel on Stewart Street, where we were staying, and a guy named [Bill] Thomas, a pitcher, was chasing Klepper around," he recounted. "Klepper was hanging onto a light fixture, yelling, 'Thomas is trying to kill me!' All Thomas wanted was his paycheck."

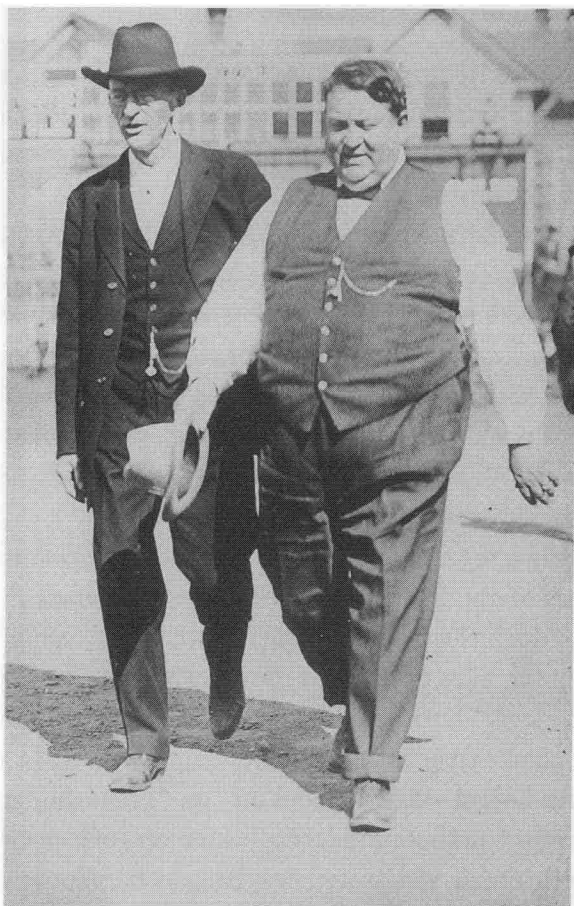
The law-enforcement raids at the ballpark were preceded by warrants filed by the state tax commission a week earlier for the collection of \$5,395 in unpaid business and admission taxes, and were reported the following morning in a bold, banner headline stripped across the top of the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* that declared: "G-Men Seize Ball Game Cash." Momentarily overshadowed was front-page news of a planned visit to Seattle, Bremerton Naval

Shipyards, and Bonneville Dam by President Franklin Roosevelt, who was on a speech-making crusade, pushing for his social reform, or what was described in wire-service stories as “his fight for liberal interpretation of the constitution.” What was happening here was a baseball team going on welfare while the nation’s leader was trying to pull the rest of the country off it.

As the authorities filed out of the ballpark with whatever loot they could find, bringing the 1937 season to a comical close, professional baseball in Seattle was listing badly. The local team was bankrupt, facing threatened eviction from Civic Stadium. The makeshift ballpark was a grassless field more suited for football, if not mud wrestling, and hardly something to fight over. Baseball was on life support.

The process by which Seattle reached this depressing stage, in which professional baseball had to fight for its survival, was predictable. The game had existed in the Puget Sound port for a half-century, surviving Washington’s progress to statehood, a skyline-altering fire, World War I, Prohibition, and the Depression to field teams and stake an athletic foothold. There were several different versions of the team, among them the Chinooks, Giants, Purple Sox, Seattles, Siwashes, and Turks. These clubs won championships and built loyal followings, only to stumble financially and then disappear.

On May 24, 1890, the city’s first pro baseball game was held in a newly assembled ballpark in Madison Park overlooking Lake Washington. A midafternoon encounter attracted 1,200 curious fans, with the hometown Seattles defeating Spokane 11–8. Many of the uniformed participants once had been big-league players, brought in from Chicago and other cities to provide high-level



Dan Dugdale, right, franchise owner and stadium builder, was an early proponent of pro baseball in Seattle.

competition for Seattle's pro sporting debut. However, the team, and the Pacific Northwest League it played in, folded within two years, providing nothing more than a starting point.

There were a few more aborted attempts to establish the game in the city before Daniel E. Dugdale arrived in 1898. A huge man, he was a former big-league player and a turn-of-the-century

opportunist. He rearranged the Seattle baseball landscape to his liking. His teams had success, winning minor-league pennants in 1898, 1909, 1912, 1915, and 1918, yet his departure was as abrupt as anyone's.

His crowning moment was building Dugdale Park on Rainier Avenue. His most agonizing moment was having Dugdale Park, which he no longer owned at the time, disappear in flames. The handsome wooden stadium had opened in 1913 and catered to Seattle's baseball needs for more than two decades. With its double-decker grandstand, Dugdale Park was unique; nothing on the West Coast resembled it. And in the fire, nothing vanished quite as quickly as this place, either.

On July 4, 1932, the south Seattle baseball facility was reduced to ashes overnight. Dugdale Park went up in flames after the holiday doubleheader, and the plumes of its destruction could be seen for miles throughout the city. Fireworks hadn't done this damage. Three years later, serial arsonist Robert Driscoll would admit that he had torched the stadium, counting it among 115 fires he had set throughout the city. "I came home on an old streetcar and noticed all these black pieces of paper wafting around in the air, and it was the old ballpark burning down, just over the hill," said Vince O'Keefe, a Beacon Hill resident and later a sportswriter for Seattle's two largest newspapers.

Dugdale wasn't around to hear Driscoll's confession. On March 9, 1934, the baseball executive stepped off a curb in Seattle while heading to his parked car, hesitated for some reason, and was struck by a Seattle City Light truck. He was knocked to the ground at the intersection of Atlantic Street and Fourth Avenue South. He was sixty-nine when he died three hours later at Providence Hospital.