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STORIES OF

KEWANEE

PAST & PRESENT



Dean Karau

July 2023

National Anthem Ends Baseball Brawl

The 1949 Kewanee A's "Duked It Out" With the Cedar Rapids Rockets

It was a late Sunday night in the middle of a hot July 1949 road trip. The Kewanee Athletics' Class C Central Association team had lost the night before to the league-leading Burlington Indians, who maintained a 12-game lead over the third-place Athletics.

Batting in the top of the seventh inning, the visiting A's were already trailing the Cedar Rapids Rockets 16 – 1 at the Cedar Rapids' Memorial Stadium. But even though the game was a laughter, Rockets' catcher Del Marquardt continued needling the A's hit-



1949 Kewanee Athletics Class C Central Association Ball Club

Front (l to r): Elton Jackson, Johnny Miller, Chuck Kaiser, Johnny Addison, Bob Tweedie, Ray Chapman and Micky Graham (bat boy). Back: Don Whitmore, Manager Hal Hoffman, Parker Swan, Jim Miller, Walt Wenclewicz, Gene Armbruster, Rudy Halabuk, Tommy Ippolite, Matt Zelinsky, and Dick Sawyer.

ters, telling them, among other things, to beware of bean balls.

As A's second baseman Chuck Kaiser stepped to the plate, Marquardt warned him that Rockets' pitcher Gene Schorer would "*dust him off.*" A high, inside pitch sent Kaiser to the dirt, barely missing him. But Kaiser jumped to his feet and came up swinging at Marquardt. He didn't seem to mind taking swings at the catcher's masked head. Suddenly, the infield around home plate was full of wrestling and swinging players.

Cedar Rapids' manager Packy Rogers blindsided the A's Johnny Castiglia with a fist to the mouth, and blood flowed, which later required stitches. Kewanee's Johnny Miller then took Rogers to the ground, and when Rogers stood up, Castiglia smashed him down, and the blow would also require stitches.

Policemen, the two umpires, and others tried to break up the fights. For a minute or so, their efforts appeared successful. But then the fighting started anew. Some spectators joined the scrum while others watched from the field.

Perhaps the fighting would have stopped on its own. But public address announcer Bob Hahn had the presence of mind to reach for the recording of the Star-Spangled Banner he had played before the start

of the game. He cranked the volume as loud as he could and the National Anthem blasted out over the field's loudspeakers. The bloodied and battered players came to attention, as ramrod straight as they could after the bruising slugfest, and stayed that way through the entire rendition. When it ended, the players began making their way to their respective dugouts.

The umpires then meted out the penalties. The Rockets' Rogers and Marquardt and the A's Castiglia and Kaiser were thrown out of the game. After that, Rogers and Castiglia were taken to the hospital for their stitches.

Cedar Rapids won the game 16 - 3. After the ninth inning ended, fans streamed to the box office for tickets to Monday night's hoped-for rematch. While Cedar Rapids fans left Monday's game happy with a 6 - 1 win over Kewanee, they likely were disappointed by the lack of pugilistics in the rematch.

The A's, however, eventually got their revenge against the Rockets for the poor treatment they received in Cedar Rapids. The A's finished third in the league with a 68 - 60 regular season record, 12½ games behind the first-place Burlington Indians but six games ahead of the Rockets.

Then the A's shined in the playoffs. They beat the Keokuk Pirates 3 - 0 in the scheduled five-game



The Baseball Brawl In Progress.

To the left with his back to the photographer is the A's Ray Chapman (No. 19). Standing in the middle behind a kneeling Cedar Rapids player (No. 19) and facing a Cedar Rapids police officer is Kewanee manager Hal Hoffman. Right center with his back to the photographer is the A's Rudy "Dynamite" Halabuk (No. 15).

semi-final series. In the championship series, the A's faced the Rockets, which had thrashed the Burlington Indians 3 - 0. In a best-of-seven match, the A's defeated the Rockets 4 - 2 in six games.



On Friday, August 11, at noon, I'll be at Northeast Park to talk about my new book of Kewanee baseball stories, including more details about the Kewanee A's. The event is sponsored by the Kewanee Park District. The book is available for \$15.00 from the

However, Kewanee, through no fault of its own, lost its minor league team when the Central Association folded at the end of the 1949 season. Kewanee never had another team in organized baseball.

Kewanee Historical Society or on Amazon.com. I'm sure there will be copies of the book available on the 11th. And I'll be happy to sign any of my books at the park. Hope to see you there!

Kewanee Baseball Stories

A TALK BY **DEAN KARAU**
BASED ON HIS NEW BOOK

SPONSORED BY & LUNCH PROVIDED BY
THE KEWANEE PARK DISTRICT

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KEWANEE BASEBALL
DEAN R. KARAU
WITH A BALLHAWNS STORY BY LARRY LOCK

NORTHEAST PARK SHELTER HOUSE
FRIDAY
AUGUST 11, 2023
LUNCH AT NOON
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Call the Kewanee Park District's office (309-852-2872) to reserve a lunch.