

# History of Baseball in Lynn

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**By: Bob Keaney**

From Babe Ruth to Frank Carey, the city of Lynn has had a colorful and rich history in baseball.

Babe, wearing his Boston Red Sox uniform for the final time, hit a thrilling home run at West Lynn's Barry Park in 1919, and Carey, a Lynner, became the most winning high school baseball coach in New England history in 2014.

Few communities on the planet earth can match the baseball tradition of Lynn, the home of more than 24 Major Leaguers, including former Cleveland Indians pitcher Ken Hill from Lynn Classical, as well as Mike Pazik, Jim Hegan and Bump Hadley from English, and Chris Howard from St. Mary's. In one World Series, two Lynners faced each other with Hadley of English with the Yankees and Blondy Ryan of Classical sparking the Giants.

Anti-Yankees fans will be happy to know that Chris Howard was the first Major League hurler to strike out the controversial Alex Rodriguez. And did you know that Ty Cobb got his final career base hit off a Lynner? Yup, Bump Hadley again.

Ben Bowden and Mike Pazik, both of English fame, are the only two to pitch perfect games at Fraser Field. Prior to that Larry Lessard chalked up 44-6 pitching for old St. Jean's High School. He also fanned 20 batters in a state tourney game at Fraser.

Even before cigar-smokin' Babe Ruth rode into Lynn before 15,000 fans, baseball (and shoes) were a Lynn trademark.

Early Base-Ball (then with a hyphen) was played on the Lynn Commons in the 1860s.

The catcher's mask was first worn at the Lynn Ocean Park near Lynn Shore Drive in 1877.

Bud Fowler actually broke pro baseball's early color barrier first in 1878, playing for the all-white Lynn Live Oaks.

"Let There Be Light" said North Shore baseball fans in the Roaring 20s. They had no TV, no cell phones, and no night games until 1927 when Lynn's General Electric hosted the area's first "lighted game" under GE lamps at GE Field on Summer Street. The semi-pro Lynn nine beat Salem in the experimental game. Soon, night ball caught on. Ol' Casey Stengel was an onlooker.



When Fraser Field was built while World War Two raged overseas in 1940, a team calling themselves the "Fraser All-Stars" (named after Lynn politician Gene B. Fraser) took the field first on Opening Day June 18, 1940, against, of all clubs, the National League Pittsburgh Pirates. Arky Vaughan, now a Hall of Famer in Cooperstown, got the park's first hit, and Vince DiMaggio (Joe's brother) walloped Fraser's first round-tripper, running it out since there was no fence up yet.



Young Ted Williams, fresh off his .406 season, swung into Fraser Field on Western Avenue in 1942 with the Boston Red Sox. He and his shadow Johnny Pesky actually lost 4-3 to a Lynn squad. War took away Ted and Pesky for the next three years, but they returned to Lynn in 1947. Teddy Ballgame hit .750 with three hits in four trips during his stints in Lynn. Ted even tipped his cap!

The New England League's Lynn Red Sox (Boston's farm club) and the Nashua Dodgers (Brooklyn's entry) made national baseball history here in 1946 when two black players from the

Dodgers became the first black minor leaguers.

They were future Hall of Fame catcher Roy Campanella and future NL Rookie of the Year pitcher Don Newcombe. In a book, Campy fondly recalled Fraser Field: "I hit my first professional home run there on that historic opening day. We lost to Lynn though." The Major League color barrier was broken one year later by Brooklyn's Jackie Robinson.

Lynn's Minor League Red Sox spent two more seasons at Fraser (they even had TV's Rifleman -- Chuck Connors -- play first base) before the arrival of the Detroit Tigers farm-hands. Later, Fraser became home sweet home for Seattle's Lynn Sailors, Pittsburgh's Lynn Pirates, George Scott's Massachusetts Mad Dogs, Nick Lopardo's North Shore Spirit, and owner Patrick Salvi's North Shore Navigators, filled with college stars. The Mike Agganis-owned Lynn Pirates almost won their league championship but were mowed down in the championship showdown by a Bristol Red Sox rookie named Roger Clemens.

In 1964, Tony Conigliaro of Lynn's St. Mary's High School became a Boston Red Sox slugger under Sox Manager Johnny Pesky. Later, Tony, just 22, became the youngest ever to win a Major League home run championship. Teen idol Tony clouted 100 home runs in his first four seasons. The day after his 100th, he brought the historic bat which hit the 100th to Fraser Field, and, wearing his Boston Red Sox uniform, played in a fund-raising game against Lynn's Connery Post 6 coached by Nipper Clancy. Fans recall that

Tony Nicosia (owner of Tony's Pub) was a vacuum cleaner at short-stop that day, robbing Conigliaro of base hits.

Girls were finally allowed to play Little League baseball in 1975 and they excelled. Local female pioneers in Lynn baseball included Grace Rogato, Donna Mills, Lynda Lipson, Lori Cipoletti, Kristine Mageary, Denise Beane, Karen Worth, Noreen Cahalane, Maura Cahalane, Janet Mullen, Maureen Mullen, and Joanne Dooley. In the 15 year history of Lynn's Little League Home Run Derby, one amazing girl -- Katie Burt -- drubbed the boys with her power and grace to win the trophy.

Lynn Little League opened up its inaugural season in 1951 on the huge diamond at Fraser Field, with bases set 60 feet apart. The players were promised 10 dollars if they hit a home run. None did. "Later that summer, our Lynn Little League all-star team captured the State Title in our first try," recalled Ron Leary who became a star athlete at St. Mary's High.

While Mr. Baseball, Frank Carey, is king of victories, his close friend Jim Tgettis set records of his own while coaching the St. Mary's Spartans to back-to-back State Championships in the 1980s.

Lynn English won the city's first state title in 1937 with skipper Tom Whelan and catcher Jim Hegan, pitchers Ray Bessom and George Callas and golden-glover George Bontaites. In 1980, Coach Ron Bennett steered the tremendous Lynn English Bulldogs to the state crown behind the late mound ace Mark Ricker, who won more than 20 games in a row at one point.

Brilliant Bart Conlon coached Lynn Tech to a State Crown in 1973 when pitcher Rick Ford spun a 1-0 shutout in the nerve-wracking final game and Ford, now a City Councilor, was just a sophomore! That was the year Tech's Mike Wetmore fired four no-hitters in a row.

Lynn Classical captured the 1947 state flag behind hurler Johnny Rubinowski inside Fraser Field with stars such as George Bullard and a Golden Greek named Harry Agganis.

Wyoma Little League with tall Paul Cavanagh copped a state flag in 1958.

Lynn's 13-year old Babe Ruth all-stars made it to the World Series in Niles Michigan, where Manager Gene Tetrault's 1983 lads conquered the world.

Derek Dana, who was a player on the 1980 St. Mary's State Championship Teams, returned to glory this past spring as he coached St. Mary's to the Division 3 State Championship.

Babe would have been proud.